

## **ONLINE NEWSPAPERS USE AND HOMELAND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION POTENTIALS OF THE NIGERIAN STUDENTS IN MALAYSIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The election time in any nation is a period for anxieties and expectations. It is also a period of heightened tripartite relationships between the candidates, the electorate and the media. While the citizens within the country rely mainly on the traditional media for information about election issues and candidates' attributes, nations' foreign residents bank on online versions of the homeland traditional media, particularly online newspapers. Although the impacts of traditional and new media on political participation within nations' polity have received tremendous attention of scholars, little consideration has been accorded media use and political behaviour of foreign resident citizens whose transnational influence is becoming awesome in the contemporary time. Using cross-sectional survey design, this study samples Nigerian students in Malaysia higher learning institutions (N=312) with a view to examine the influence of online newspapers use on their political participation potentials in their homeland politics. Findings reveal weak but positive and significant correlations between online newspapers use and political interest on the one hand and online newspapers use and political participation on the other. The results thus show that reading online newspapers could be one of many factors cuing diasporic citizens to their homeland political development.

**Keywords:** Online newspapers, foreign residents, political participation, political interest, homeland politics, Nigerian students in Malaysia

### **INTRODUCTION**

As it is the ritual in developing democracies, the election time is a season that befuddles the populace with anxieties and heightened expectations. The reason for this is not far-fetched. Voters are often interested in the programmes and personalities of candidates aspiring to high offices with a view to assessing their fitness for the job. This in turns helps them in deciding whom to cast their ballots for. Candidates, on their part, also cash in on the momentum to market themselves and their programmes aggressively so as to win the hearts of the electorate. Whenever a political transition is in progress, even the country's citizens who reside abroad do not hesitate to join or reach out to their compatriots back home. Thus, the nations' foreign residents contribute in shaping the direction of things, believing that their contribution may redirect the destiny of the country. The inability of the entire citizenry to meet all the candidates for electoral offices, however, confers the mediating role of linking the candidates to the electorate on the mass media. While citizens within the country rely predominantly on the traditional media such as newspapers, radio and television, those beyond the country's frontiers

mainly depend on the online versions of homeland traditional media, particularly online newspapers.

The mass media system, due to its capacity to reach large and diverse audience, has become the bridge that links the candidates to the electorate; a gap hitherto occupied by the political parties whose role is to organize door-to-door contact with eligible voters (Tolbert & McNeal, 2001). The reduction of electioneering campaigns to horserace by mediatization of politics, with much emphasis on glamour rather than substantive issues, has been linked to the conspicuous disinterest which the public continually exhibits in the political process. Television, for instance, was blamed for reduction in critical coverage of substantive issues and candidates' qualification (Tolbert & McNeal, 2001; Norris, 2001). While the importance of communication to political participation has been axiomatically held among scholars, the mode and effects of media technologies in achieving appropriate diffusion of political information have also attracted a deluge of research. The entrant of Internet and its online media offerings has been considered to be critical to political participation (Iyengar & Jackman, 2004; Christensen, 2011; Scheufele & Nisbet, 2002).

Although the Internet has been fingered as a giant in the contemporary information sphere, results from its democratic mobilization and participation potential are far from being conclusive. While those who are optimistic hinge their arguments on its information resource power, which is antecedent to political participation (Wang, 2007; Borge & Cardenal, 2010; Tolbert & McNeal, 2001), others view the Internet as capable of enhancing digital divide, causing atomization of the masses, erosion of social capital and promotion of feel-good usage, derogatively referred to as *Slacktivism* (Christensen, 2011; Anduiza, Cantijoch & Gallego, 2010; Vitak, Zube; Smock, Carr, Ellison & Lampe, 2010; Norris, 2001; Bimber, 2001). Being a descent of the Internet, online news media in general and online newspapers in particular have received the same polemical treatment with regards to their roles in bringing political issues to public awareness.

The ability of online newspapers to raise the salience of issues in the public domain was, for example, doubted at the outset of the Internet. Althaus and Tewksbury (2002) associated this 'deficiency' to reduced attention directing cues of online newspapers. Today, however, findings on the power of online newspapers to prime political issues and candidates' attributes into public salience have emerged (Roberts, Wanta & Dzwo, 2002; Scharrow & Vogelgesang, 2009; Schonbach, de Waal & Lauf, 2005). In effect, these findings show that the contribution of online newspapers to political process like that of the Internet remains contestable.

One lacuna noticeable in all these studies is the effect of emerging media technologies on political knowledge, orientations, and interests of foreign residents of a nation. Given the transnational mobility and availability of information offered by the ubiquitous new media technologies, it is a fact that a nation's citizens abroad - be they economic or knowledge diasporas - do keep abreast of events in their home country and oftentimes participate, albeit indirectly, in their homeland politics. In view of the role played by Nigerian foreign citizens in her political transition, a contribution aided by available media technologies, this study explores the political participation potential of online newspapers use among Nigerian students in Malaysia.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Online Newspapers**

Online newspapers are serial, machine-readable news-oriented publications that are accessible via the Internet (Hasting Tribune Online, 2002). These publications are replicas of local and national daily press, containing news and current events of various genres (Ihlstrom & Akesson, 2004). Online newspapers are equally referred to as digital newspaper, electronic newspapers, e-news, e-newspapers, among others (Hasting Tribune Online, 2002; Santonen, 2004). Literature shows that early analysis of online journalism predicted a change in practice and form of news (Barnhurst, 2002). However, it has been found that the web version of newspapers only replicates the print edition as at present (Dimitrova, 2003; Chyi & Lewis, 2009; Lundberg, 2001). But this is not to say that online newspapers and their printed versions are not without peculiar features.

Like their printed versions, the front page (home page) of online newspapers captures audience attention with the layout consisting of serious political, business and popular appeal stories (Gatemby, 2010). Besides displaying important matters on the front page, readers can navigate as if they are flipping through the pages of printed papers (Ihlstrom & Lundberg, 2003, cited in Ihlstrom & Akesson, 2004). In addition to possessing the features of printed newspapers, the online versions also have other qualities that make them attractive. Gatemby (2010), for instance, says that online newspapers (1) use new web technologies to present the content in dynamic ways; (2) update the content regularly and (3) can be very large in term of file size. Other areas of difference include multimedia characteristics (Flavian & Gurrea, 2009; Ihlstrom & Akesson, 2004); the use of hyperlinks (Lundberg, 2001; Eriksen, 2006; Dimitrova, 2003); ease of access and interactivity (Rosenbery, 2005; Flavian & Gurrea, 2009; Alshehri & Gunter, 2002). All these make online newspapers appealing and perhaps explain why they have become attractive to news readers. The fact that they are hosted on a global medium also accounts for their popularity.

Thousands of online newspapers are available on the web today. With availability of Internet in major cities of the world, online newspapers serve many audiences who can access and read them at home, office, library or cybercafé (Ihlstrom, Lundberg & Perdrix, 2003). In fact, research has shown that online newspapers reading is on the increase, as many people prefer to read current news on the Internet rather than through the traditional source. While DailyBreeze.com (2008) said online newspapers readers turn to the Internet every day for national and world news, Ihlstrom, Lundberg and Perdrix (2003) found that an average of 67.1% and 52.8% read recent and local news, respectively, on the net. In 2005, a study by Pew Research Center for People and the Press also reported that 62% of Internet news consumers said they read the websites of local and national newspapers (Rosenbery, 2005). Online newspapers command high readership among highly educated and affluent groups (DailyBreeze.com, 2008), and those who are tech-savvy (Kanaujia and Strivastava, 1999). They are also common and foremost sources of news to diasporas in the contemporary world (Thussu, 2007; Alshehri & Gunter, 2002).

## **Online News and Foreign Residents**

Globalization and spread of information and communication technologies have deepened interdependence among nations of the world, thus facilitating extensive migration of people. Technologies reconnect people living outside their countries of birth with their contemporaries back home and elsewhere in the diaspora. The possibility of hostland-homeland connection has given the diasporas influential power in their nations' affairs. Unlike in the pre-Internet age, when people living outside their countries had a feel of what was happening back home through consumption of stale news inside old newspapers and magazines or recorded media, contemporary foreign residents are instantaneously connected to happenings in their countries through new media technologies (Thussu, 2007; Thurman, 2007; Hiller & Franz, 2004). The *Internetization* of news has thus resulted into the melding of hitherto information difference between people of different geographical and time zones into synchronous mode.

Because the Internet facilitates global audience reach, Dimitrova (2003) describes it as a great equalizer that erases the distribution concern of newspapers and exposes them to the same pool of online news readers globally. Since they also transcend borders and time zones, online newspapers take local experiences into all corners of the globe. This unique feature affords immigrants the opportunity to be in the know of happenings in their home countries. Hence, Binaisa (2006) concludes that reliance on the web versions of local newspapers for up-to-date information about public affairs is one of the major preoccupations of migrants.

Foreign residents use online newspapers to monitor happenings at local, national and global levels (Hashim, Hasan & Sinnapan, 2007). Online newspapers dominate their information sources in their quest to keep abreast of socio-political and economic goings-on in their countries (Alshehri & Gunter, 2002; Thussu, 2007). Beyond serving as news platforms, online newspapers represent an enlarged political public sphere that accommodates local and foreign residents (Karim, 2010). "New technology has also facilitated the extension of the aims of participation, broadening their territorial scope and enabling coordination of political influence on a transnational scale to occur with an ease, which was virtually unknown until a decade ago" (Anduiza et al., 2009). By knowing about and commenting on political and public affairs issues on the bulletin boards of online newspapers, foreign residents would be contributing in no small measure to political development of their countries.

## **Online New and Political Participation**

Brady (1999) defines political participation as "action by ordinary citizens directed towards influencing some political outcomes" (Christensen, 2011). The ability of citizens to achieve influential power has, however, been linked to information at their disposal (McNair, 2009). Information has been described as a sine qua non for enlightened citizenry that gives democracy the edge over other forms of government (Baran & Davis, 2010; McQuails, 2005; Severin & Tankard, 2010). The centrality of information to political participation thus explains the importance of news media of all types to politics and democracy. The impact of new media technologies brought about by the evolution of the Internet has, however, attracted attention of scholars over decades (Christensen, 2011; Anduiza et al., 2009; Golde & Nie, 2010; Wang, 2007).

For a start, one model of political participation emphasizes that affordability or cost is instrumental to citizens' participatory interests. Therefore, it has been held in some quarters that access to online news reduces the cost of participation and thus affords people with necessary information (Anduiza et al., 2009; Tolbert & McNeal, 2001). Hence, Wang (2007) offers that "online media use increases information about political issues and candidates during elections, thus leading to political participation". The availability or abundance information and interactivity of Internet-based news reduces the cost of participation (Borge & Cardenal, 2010). For example, it is possible to post letters to the editor and connect with as many people as possible by mere clicking a button. Christensen (2011) also offers virtual political participation option such as online voting and online petition signing, among others. In effect, one of the existing theses on new media technology and political participation is that they provide low cost information which precipitates political interest and eventual participation among their users (Tolbert & McNeal, 2001; Golde & Nie, 2010; Scheufele & Nisbet, 2002; Wang, 2007; Borge & Cardenal, 2010).

Much as there are viewpoints that Internet and new media stimulate participatory instinct among the people, there is also a sea of opinions offering contrary views. Bimber (2001), for instance, contends that online information does not increase the likelihood of off-line participation since access to online news does not increase voters' turnout. Some scholars even theorize that online news and new technologies only provide new tools for the already active citizens while leaving out those who are previously passive (Christensen, 2011). This state of affairs is termed normalization/reinforcement thesis (Borge & Cradenal, 2010). The argument of digital divide also attenuates the political participation power of the Internet and the new media (Norris, 2001). A uses and gratifications perspective was, however, introduced by Anduiza et al. (2009). These scholars contend that the impact of media technology on levels of participation is a function of the motive and extent of use. An 8-year study of online news readership by Golde and Nie (2010), however, revealed that increased reading positively affects political interest. Boulianne (2009) meta-analytical studies of ten years of research (1995-2005) also confirm the positive impact of Internet use on political participation. In view of the above, two hypotheses will be tested in this study:

- H<sub>1</sub>: There is a significant positive relationship between online newspapers use and interest in politics and public affairs.
- H<sub>2</sub>: There is a significant positive relationship between online newspaper use and political participation potential.

## **INDICATORS OF INDIRECT POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AMONG NIGERIANS LIVING ABROAD**

It is an open secret that the Nigerian independence was won via *war of words* with nationalist newspapers being the theatres. Newspapers established by nationalists were used as platforms for mobilization of the public against colonial rule culminating into independence in 1960. This feat has become the defining characteristic of the Nigerian mass media earning them the epithet of the most vibrant, robust and free on the continent of Africa (Adesoji, 2010; KAS Democracy Report, 2002; Nwagbara, 2010). Noteworthy, however, is that the nationalist movement and its

media were incubated in the universities of Western nations where some of the nationalists studied. In *Mass Media, People and Politics in Nigeria*, Uche (1989) incisively discussed how the like of Herbert Macaulay, Nnamdi Azikiwe and Obafemi Awolowo organized students of Nigerian descent from various European and American universities and established newspaper chains to champion struggle for independence.

When the country slipped into military rule, it was the same feat that Nigerians abroad reenacted to chase away the khaki boys. Using the Internet platform, this group collaborated with domestic activists and civil society organizations to raise attention to the ills of military rule at a time the wind of democracy was blowing in most parts of the world. In recognition of their contribution towards the return of democracy in 1999, the civilian government formalized relationships with Nigerians residing and studying abroad by creating Nigerian in Diaspora Organization (NIDO), with branches in all Nigerian embassies and high commission across the world (Igbanoi, 2007 cited in Kperogi, 2008). In 2002, President Obasanjo also commenced an initiative “presidential dialogue with Nigerians abroad,” aimed at incorporating foreign resident Nigerians in national development policies (de Hass, 2006).

Recognizing the financial and social capital of foreign-based Nigerians, a bill for the establishment of Diaspora Commission was passed by the National Assembly. The commission’s main focus is aggregation and utilization of human ‘foreign reserve’ for national development (Ohia, 2009). It is also charged with the responsibility of harmonizing the contributions of Nigerians in Diaspora. One of the agitations of Nigerians living abroad is the issue of voting rights (da Hass, 2006). This has been vigorously championed by Nigerians in Diaspora Organization. In 2008, for example, Nigerian foreign residents were granted voting rights through an injunction by an Abuja Federal High Court (House Committee on Diaspora Affairs, 2009). Moves are still being made by the authorities to amend the constitution so as to accommodate this request. The government has also demonstrated respect for Nigerians abroad by inviting some of them to take up political appointment.

It is true that millions of Nigerians living outside the country are willing to participate in politics and play crucial roles in their country’s development (Soyode, 2010). With about 22 independent newspapers that offer online editions of their print versions (KAS Democracy Report, 2008), Nigerians in Malaysia, like others across the world, are in a position to be abreast of political developments in their country. The willingness of Nigerians to participate in their country’s political development assumes greater dimension during the election period. Hence, this study cashed in on the recently concluded presidential election to feel the pulse of Nigerian students in Malaysia.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Data Collection**

Cross-sectional method of data collection was used in this study. The data were collected for 2011 Nigerian presidential election study between April 1 and April 20, 2011. We served self-administered survey questionnaires on randomly selected Nigerian students studying in Malaysian universities and university colleges in the Klang Valley areas. Out of a population of 2, 228 Nigerian students in the selected universities (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia,

2011), three hundred and seventy (370) Nigerians were sampled. However, out of the 370 administered questionnaires, three hundred and thirty seven (337) were returned. Of the returned questionnaires, only three hundred and twenty one (321), representing 87% of total questionnaires, were valid for analysis.

Of the items in the questionnaire, the following are germane to the current study: 1) respondents' demographic characteristics - age, gender, religion, geo-political zone, level of education completed and classification of universities/colleges; 2) Patterns of online newspaper use consisting of online newspapers read most, number of day(s) respondents read newspapers in a week, content of newspapers read most and attention given to online news read; 3) Most important problem facing Nigeria and needing urgent attention of whoever is elected president; 4) interest in politics and public affairs, consisting of twelve items measures on a five-point Likert scale where 1= strongly disagree; 2= disagree; 3= neither agree nor disagree; 4= agree and 5= strongly disagree.

Interest in politics and public affairs was a self-developed scale resulting from extensive literature review (see for example Golde & Nie, 2010; Tolbert & McNeal, 2001; Wang, 2007) and validated through experts' opinions. The items crossed the reliability threshold at both pilot study ( $\alpha=0.78$ ) and final ( $\alpha=0.95$ ) stage of analysis. These items were used to measure respondents' political behaviour (political interest and political participation).

## RESULTS

We began our analysis by describing the demographic characteristics of the respondents in this study (Table 1). Using data gathered on online newspapers use, we also analyzed patterns of online newspapers use (Table 2). A rank-order of the most important issues warranting the attention of elected president as gleaned from online newspapers use was also presented (Table 3). We also factor analyzed responses to the construct *Interest in Politics and Political Affairs* to come up with respondents' political behaviour. This was then used to develop two variables - political interest and political participation (Table 4). Finally, we analyzed the relationships between two variables in online newspapers use (number of day(s) respondents read online newspapers in a week and attention given to online newspapers news) and political interest on one hand, and political participation on the other.

### *Respondents' Demographic Characteristics*

Table 1 depicts the demographic characteristics of sampled Nigerians studying in selected Malaysian universities and colleges in the Klang Valley area of Selangor.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

<b>Demographic Characteristics</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Age Group</b>		
Less than 21 years old	37	11.6
21-30 years old	166	52.2
31-40 years old	80	25.2
Above 40 years old	35	11.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>318</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	226	72.9
Female	84	27.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>310</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Religion</b>		
Islam	168	55.4
Christianity	135	44.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>303</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Geo-political Zone</b>		
North Central	69	22.5
North East	47	15.4
North West	45	14.7
South East	31	10.1
South South	57	18.6
South West	57	18.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>306</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Level of Education Completed</b>		
Secondary education	65	20.4
HND/Bachelor	144	45.3
Masters	94	29.6
Others	15	4.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>318</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>University Classification</b>		
Public	115	36.3
Private	202	63.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>317</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Respondents in 21-30 years old group accounted for more than half (52.2%) of the age groups in this study. Those in the lowest and highest age group category were a little above one-tenth (11%) while those within 31 and 40 years old shared a quarter (25.2%) of total respondents. About two-third (72.9%) are male and those with Islamic religion affiliation (55.4%) slightly outnumbered their Christian counterparts. Nigerians from North-central geo-political zone dominated with a little above one fifth (22.5%). While South-south and South-west respondents tallied with 18%, those from North-east and North-west hovered around 15%. Holders of Higher National Diploma (HND) and bachelor degrees hinged towards half figure (45.3%). Close to two-third (63.7%) belonged to private universities and colleges.



*Patterns of Online Newspapers Use*

Table 2 revealed the patterns of the use of online newspapers for homeland political information by the Nigerian students in Malaysia. Of the three most preferred online newspapers, *Daily Trust* commands the highest readership (40.4%). While 15.3% of the respondents preferred online news only papers, *Vanguard* newspaper was the least preferred (14.7%). Close to a half (45.8%) of the respondents read online newspapers for five days up to seven days a week; about almost a third (29%) read for between three and four days while a quarter of the respondents didn't read or only read for not more than two days a week. Exactly half (50%) of the respondents preferred political news content, while over one-tenth (12.5% and 13.2%) read lifestyle and sport content respectively. Other contents (finance, crime, and foreign news) had less than 10% patrons among the respondents in this study. With regards to attention paid to the news, a little over one-third (35.6%) reported giving moderate attention while slightly above a quarter accounted for much attention. Those who gave no attention are in the least with 15.5%.

Table 2: Patterns of Online Newspapers Use

<b>Online Newspapers Use</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Online Newspaper Read Most</b>		
Daily Trust	124	40.4
Punch	91	29.6
Vanguard	45	14.7
Others	47	15.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>307</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>No of Day(s) Read Newspapers</b>		
0-2days	77	25.1
3-4days	89	29.1
5-7days	140	45.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>306</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>M=4.19, SD=2.42</b>		
<b>Min=0, Max=7</b>		
<b>Content Read Most</b>		
Finance	14	4.6
Crime	23	7.6
Politics	152	50.0
Lifestyle	38	12.5
Sport	40	13.2
Foreign News	21	6.9
Others	16	5.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>304</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Attention Given to News</b>		
No Attention	49	15.5
Some Attention	70	22.1
Moderate attention	113	35.6
Much Attention	85	26.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>317</b>	<b>100.0</b>

*Perceived Most Important Problems*

Nigerian students in Malaysia sampled in this study provided an agenda of eight issues to the aspiring presidential candidates (Table 3). The issues, in descending order of importance are power (electricity generation and distribution), tackling corruption, provision of adequate security, economic development, provision of social welfare (healthcare, education and housing), tackling unemployment and eradicating poverty, credible electoral system and provision of infrastructure.

Table 3: Rank Order of Most Important Problem

Issues	Frequency	Rank
Power	78	1
Corruption	67	2
Security	37	3
Social welfare	28	4.5
Economy	28	4.5
Unemployment & poverty alleviation	23	6
Credible election	15	7
Infrastructure	6	8

*Political Behaviour of Foreign Residents Nigerians*

To tap political interest and participation, twelve items 5-point Likert scale was used. Respondents were requested to indicate their agreement or disagreement to the questions. Using principal component analysis (factors must exceed eigenvalues greater than 1 with varimax rotation), their responses were factor-analyzed as shown in table 4 below:

Table 4: Respondents' Political Behaviour Factor

Political Behaviour	Factors	
	1	2
<b>Factor 1: Political Participation</b>		
I will register to vote	0.85	0.22
I will encourage people to register to vote and vote	0.88	0.18
I will contact public officials on public issues	0.76	0.46
I will write letter to editor or opinion article on public issues	0.73	0.47
I will participate in political protest	0.53	0.49
I will discuss politics with friends and family-oriented members	0.87	0.23
I will follows activities in governmental and the parliament	0.86	0.29
<b>Factor 2: Political Interest</b>		
I will belong to political party	0.19	0.87
I will volunteer for political organization	0.26	0.88
I will volunteer for political candidate	0.30	0.86
I will attend political rally	0.29	0.84
I will canvass for political party and candidate	0.36	0.79
<b>Variance Explained</b>	<b>63.04</b>	<b>14.44</b>
<b>Eigenvalue</b>	<b>7.56</b>	<b>1.73</b>
<b>Reliability</b>	<b>0.93</b>	<b>0.94</b>

The items load on two dimensions and named political participation and political interest. Only factor loadings exceeding the conservative threshold of +.50 or -.50 were considered meaningful (Kiousis, 2004, citing Hair, Anderson & Latham, 1987). Factors 1 and 2 explained 60.04 and 14.44 of the variance respectively. Reliability scores of the emerged variables were equally computed. For the seven items that loaded on factor 1 (political participation) the alpha score was  $\alpha = +.93$ . Political interest variable consisting of five items had a reliability score of  $\alpha = +.94$ . Future research of this nature can thus benefit from these indicators.

To test the hypotheses in this study, items making factors 1 and 2 were computed to create political participation and political interest variables. These variables were thus correlated with numbers of days respondents read online newspapers a week (using Pearson correlation) and amount of attention given to online newspapers (using Spearman correlation). The results are summarized in the table below:

Table 5: Correlations between Online Newspapers Use and Political Behaviour

Online Newspapers Use		Political Interest	Political Participation
No. of day(s) read online newspaper	<i>r</i>	.320	.315
	p	0.01	0.01
	N	290	299
Attention paid to online newspaper news	<i>r<sub>s</sub></i>	.350	.382
	P	0.01	0.01
	N	297	301

The relationship between number of day(s) read online newspapers and political interest was investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. There was a low but positive and significant correlation between the two variables,  $r = .32$ ,  $n = 290$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . The relationship between number of day(s) read online newspapers and political participation follow the same pattern  $r = .31$ ,  $n = 299$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . Using Spearman correlation coefficient, attention paid to online newspapers news also correlate with political interest  $r_s = .35$ ,  $n = 297$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . It equally correlate positively with political participation  $r_s = .38$ ,  $n = 301$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . These findings show that hypotheses 1 and 2 of this study were supported.

Although there are weak correlations between reading/paying attentions to news in the online newspapers and political interest/political participation, results nonetheless evidenced mild contribution of homeland online newspapers to homeland political behaviour of Nigerians students in Malaysia. This shows that media information is just a part of many antecedents of political behaviour. Other variables that might account for enhance political behaviour of these foreign resident citizens include interest in politics, political socialization, political ideology, level of political education among others (see for example Kiousis & McDevitt, 2008). While these variables were not explored in the current study, future research could approach examination of migrants' homeland political behaviours from holistic perspectives by incorporating other extra-media variables.

## **DISCUSSION**

This study set out to examine the influence of online newspapers use on indirect political participation potential of Nigerian students in Malaysian higher learning institutions. The study was precipitated by lack of consideration for audiences of this nature in the new media and political participation literature. This group constitutes captive audiences of online media having being temporarily dislocated from their countries of origin.

With patterns of online newspapers use showing that many of the respondents in this study read homeland newspapers and considered political information as the most read news, the study demonstrates the centrality of online newspapers to homeland political cognitions and interest of Nigerian students in Malaysia. Besides, good number of the respondents claimed they paid between moderate and much attention to news on the homeland newspapers. Respondents also offered issues that must concern Nigerian political actors, demonstrated interest in homeland political affairs and are willing to participate in the same.

In view of the previous contributions of Nigerian immigrants to their nation's political development in the pre-Internet era and in the contemporary time, this study predicted that online newspapers use will enhance their political interest as well as political participation potential. Based on two hypotheses that online newspaper use (in term of frequency and attention) will be positively correlated with political interest and political participation among Nigerians students in Malaysia, the dataset showed weak but significant and positive correlations between online newspapers use and political interest on one hand, and online newspaper use and political participation on the other hand.

Although weak associations were recorded in this study, the positive direction of the relationships offers support for at least minimal contribution of online news to readers' political behaviours. This supports earlier findings that Internet and online media use, to certain extent, increases political participation (Boulianne, 2009; Golde & Nie, 2010; Wang, 2007). Other factors such as political interest, ideology and socialization might have minimized the variance accruable from online newspapers use as seen in this study. Kiouisis and McDevitt (2008), for example, offered that media set agenda for political cognition and participation among citizens by interacting with other elements of political socialization.

## **CONCLUSION**

During nations' political transition, citizens within and outside the country's frontiers depend on the societal communication and information infrastructure to make meaning of myriad of political symbols, events and activities. This study explore how Nigerian students in Malaysia use of homeland online newspapers to fulfill this inherent political behaviour. At a time when print newspaper readership is on the decline, this study showed how migration to the Web enhances readership of newspapers even among audience residing outside their countries of origin. This shows increasing political relevance of the press to their nations' politics and political affairs.

Although respondents in this study are not directly participating in Nigerian political process, we deduce that their interests as shown by this dataset could precipitate the use of their

positions to influence their kith and kin on who to vote for in the election. Using social remittance such as political ideas, best practices, technologies and expertise, foreign resident Nigerians (workers and students) have been identified as major resources for socio-economic and political development (Adebayo, 2010). This has been demonstrated by their contributions to decolonization and demilitarization struggles that gained political independence for Nigeria and returned her back to civilian rule after years of military interregnums. Since information seeking is an important element of political participation, the pattern of online newspaper uses among respondents in this study is reassuring. Majority of the respondents in this are not only following events in Nigeria via online newspapers, politics remains their most read content.

Identification of audience whose main sources of information are Internet and online media is of major significance in this study. Little if any study has given attention to media and political behaviours of foreign residents who are major stakeholders of their homeland politics. Study along this path will not only assist in harnessing human resources potentials of these critical stakeholders but orientate media professionals on the need to evolve new model in catering for their nations' foreign residents. The possibility of direct participation as afforded by Diasporas' voting in foreign lands raises the need for understanding their dominant political information avenues. No time could be more auspicious to know this in the case of Nigerian other than now that a demand for direct political participation by way of foreign resident voting rights is on the increase.

Due to its exploratory nature, this study uses minimal analyses that constrain outright conclusion on our findings; it provides a baseline for future research of this nature. Besides, limiting homeland Information Avenue of foreign residents to online newspapers alone is a great limitation in this era where a plethora of media sources serve homeland information needs of diasporic citizens. Incorporating other sources of homeland information as well as other contingencies of political behaviour of foreign resident citizens would no doubt provide a clearer picture of homeland political interest among diasporic citizens. Replication of this study, with more respondents, including expatriates, and in many countries would equally contribute to scholarship in new media, politics and transnational studies. However, we raise a caveat that subsequent studies should be more rigorous and explore further variables that might explain media and political behaviours of foreign residents of many nations in order to generate enough data that can help advance theoretical proposals and create enduring models.

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