



## EXPOSURE, ENGAGEMENT AND GRATIFICATIONS OF *FIDES* COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER AMONG CATHOLIC READERSHIP IN AWKA METROPOLIS

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### ABSTRACT

This study examined the exposure, engagement, and gratifications derived from the faith-based *Fides Newspaper* among Catholic readership in Awka metropolis. Anchored on the Uses and Gratifications theory, the survey research design was adopted for the study with questionnaire as instrument of measurement. Also, a sample size of 278 was selected and the copies of the questionnaire administered to the respondents. The findings of the study revealed that all the respondents were well exposed to the *Fides Newspaper* and read it often; information was the major gratification that Catholic readers derived from their exposure to the faith-based *Fides newspaper* and this information-need assuaged, further boosted an awareness to their catholic faith. The study concluded that Catholic readership in Awka metropolis had a high level of exposure to the *Fides newspaper* and received information gratification that enhanced an understanding and practice of their catholic faith. The researchers recommend that the editorial board of *Fides newspaper* should strive to broaden the diversity of their contents; establish robust channels for readers' feedback, so as to ensure the newspaper remains responsive to the community's secular information needs; and further enhance the digital presence of *Fides newspaper* to reach a broader audience, especially younger readers who may prefer online contents.

**Keywords:** Exposure, Engagement and Gratification, *Fides Newspaper*, Community newspaper, Catholic readership, faith-based.

### Introduction

Knowledge of the terms community and community newspaper is necessary to aid this discourse. Community newspaper otherwise known as rural newspapers are newspapers which are produced and published in a specific locality, which editorials reflect the news interest of the environment and the circulation is also limited to the environment (Asemah et al., 2017).

A community, according to James, Nadarajah, Haive & Stead, (2012) is a “social unit (a group of people) with a shared socially-significant characteristic, such as place, set of norms, culture, religion, values, customs, or identity. Communities may share a sense of place situated in a given geographical area (e.g. a country, village, town, or neighborhood) or in virtual space through communication platforms. Durable good relations that extend beyond immediate genealogical ties also define a sense of community, important to people's identity, practice, and roles in social institutions such as family, home, work, government, society, or humanity at large”.

A community could be said to be a self-organized network of people with common interest. They collaborate with one another by sharing information, ideas and other resources (Asemah et al., 2017). The people who associate as a community are usually brought together by a common cause; hence, they organize themselves as one and interact with one another towards achieving their interests.

Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition (2017) identifies three communities. Geographic community is one in which members share physical space; hence, they come into contact with each other by virtue of nearness. The second is virtual community, as group of people who interact through communication media; this is also known as online community. The third is the community of interest in which members choose to associate with one another based on the common interest they share. Each of the communities design its unique modes, channels of communication and use same among the members.

Communities are usually small relative to personal social ties, "community". This may also refer to large-group affiliations such as national communities, international communities, and virtual communities (James, 2006). In this 21st century, the concept of community was rediscovered and redefined by academics, politicians, and activists. Hence, political office seekers started to identify and realign with community interests (Stephen, 2018).

The Catholic Diocese of Awka could be said to be a community of interest. The members or parishioners associate with one another based on shared interest in their catholic faith. Those of them who are into this faith-based association could be said to be catholic faithful. This also includes other Catholics residents in Awka.

The church has various means of communication among the members. The *Fides newspaper* is one of its communication media. It is a specific community newspaper published by and for the Catholic community in Awka Urban, covering topics relevant to the Catholic faithful. Faith-based community newspapers like *Fides* hold particular importance in areas where mainstream media may not adequately cover the community issues by focusing on local stories that might not receive attention from larger media outlets, they ensure that a range of perspectives and experiences are represented (Ali, 2017). This may explain why the community members may be more exposed to it than the mainstream media.

The assertion that Awka catholic readership exposed themselves to the *Fides*, their community newspaper more than the mainstream media is a mere hypothesis as there is no empirical evidence yet to back up the claim. Their level of exposure to the *Fides* newspaper as well as their engagement and gratification of the newspaper are not known yet. Hence, this study sets out to unravel exposure, engagement and gratification of *Fides* community newspaper among the Awka Metropolis Catholic readership.

## Objectives of the Study

The study had the following objectives:

1. To find out the level of exposure of Awka metropolis Catholic readership to the *Fides Newspaper*.
2. To ascertain the content preference of Awka Catholic readership on *Fides* community newspaper.

3. To assess the gratifications derived by Awka Catholic readership from the *Fides Newspaper*.
4. To find out Awka Catholic readership engagement of *Fides* community newspaper.

## Literature Review

### Community Newspaper

A community newspaper is a local publication on news, events, and issues within a specific geographic area, serving as a crucial link for information and development in the community. Their emphasis is on local content, and play a significant role in fostering a sense of community and social awareness (Community newspaper,). They contribute to fostering social cohesion by promoting community values, interests, and solidarity. They also play a crucial role in building communities where members share common values that support the community's wellbeing (Yamamoto, 2011).

They provide timely updates on local governance, school affairs, public health issues, and community initiatives, offering readers essential information that directly impacts their daily lives (Abernathy, 2018).

*Community paper*, another name for community newspaper, is a term used by publishers, advertisers and readers to describe publications that share a common service to their local community (Community Paper, 2010). Community newspapers serve as specialized channels of local communication, offering insights into the social and cultural dimensions of community life that residents might not otherwise access due to time and resource constraints (Yamamoto, 2011).

Moreover, community newspapers contribute to the diversity of media voices (Harte, Turner, & Williams, 2017). By focusing on local stories that might not receive attention from larger media outlets, they ensure that a range of perspectives and experiences are represented (Ali, 2017). This diversity enriches public discourse and provides a more comprehensive view of the community.

It could be summed that community newspapers are vital for delivering localized news, fostering community identity, and providing a platform for diverse local voices. They focus on specific geographic areas and issues; this helps them to address the unique needs and interests of their readers, thereby strengthening community ties and enhancing civic engagement (Howley, 2010).

### Fides Newspaper

The *Fides Newspaper* is an arm of Fides Media, the social communication department of the catholic Diocese of Awka (Fides, 2025). The office is located in Awka. It was founded in 1993 with the primary aim of serving the Catholic community in Awka, the capital city of Anambra State in southeastern Nigeria. Its inception was driven by the need to provide a dedicated platform for news, religious education, and community engagement specifically tailored to the Catholic faithful in the region. The newspaper was established under the auspices of the Catholic Diocese of Awka, which has been instrumental in its development and operations (Ezeanyika and Okafor, 2018).

In its early years, *Fides Newspaper* began as a modest publication, primarily focused on church-related news, events, and announcements. It served as a vital communication link between the diocesan authorities and the local parishes, ensuring that the Catholic faithful were informed about diocesan activities, pastoral letters, and other important church matters (Fides, 2025).

The initial editions of the newspaper was a pamphlet characterized by their simple layout and content structure, with contributions coming mainly from clergy and lay members of the diocese. The

newspaper quickly gained popularity among the Catholic community, appreciated for its dedication to promoting Catholic values, teachings, and community spirit (Ezeanyika & Okafor, 2018).

As the readership of *Fides* newspaper grew, so did its exposure, content, and scope. The newspaper expanded its coverage to include a broader range of topics, such as religious education, community news, youth and family sections, and opinion pieces. This growth was in line with community newspapers in Nigeria diversification in their contents to cater to a broader audience (Fides, 2025).

In response to the global shift towards digital media, *Fides* Community Newspaper in 2013 embraced technological advancements to enhance its reach and engagement. The newspaper launched an online edition, allowing readers to access content digitally. It is visible on its Facebook page on *Fides* Media and *Fides newspaper* and also on twitter. Likewise, it has various online sites on Google, LinkedIn. This move was particularly significant in reaching younger audiences and those living outside Awka but interested in staying connected with the Catholic community there (Ezeanyika & Okafor, 2018).

*Fides* Newspaper has played a significant role in fostering a sense of community among the Catholic faithful in Awka. Its contributions can be seen in various areas. By providing religious education and moral teachings, the newspaper has helped in the spiritual growth and development of its readers. It has acted as a unifying force, bringing together different segments of the Catholic community and providing a common platform for communication and collaboration.

## Media Exposure

Media exposure encompasses the frequency and manner in which individuals engage with various media channels and its influence on public perception and behaviour is profound (Laughey, 2007). The concept of media exposure involves not only the amount of time people spend consuming media but also the types of media they engage with, including television, radio, print, digital platforms, and social media (McQuail, 2005). This exposure shapes individuals' understanding of the world, influences their opinions, and affects their behaviour through a complex interplay of information dissemination, entertainment and social interaction (Iheanacho et al., 2021).

In the digital age, media exposure has become increasingly fragmented, with audiences having access to a vast array of sources and platforms (Pew Research Center, 2019). This diversification allows individuals to curate their media consumption based on personal preferences and interests, which can lead to selective exposure, where people choose media that aligns with their pre-existing beliefs and values.

Media exposure plays a critical role in shaping individual and collective consciousness (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). This could affect how people process information, form opinions, and interact with the world around them. Understanding media exposure requires an analysis of not only the quantity of engagement but also the quality and content of the media consumed, as well as the broader social and psychological contexts within which this exposure occurs.

## Review of Related Empirical Studies

Empirical studies that examined the exposure, engagement, and gratifications associated with faith-based community media among Christian readers are limited. Meanwhile, related studies on religious media consumption and community newspaper readership offers valuable insights into the present study and the gaps to be filled.

A study by Badiru and Alabi, (2016), entitled, 'Readership of Oriwu Sun community newspaper in Ikorodu, Lagos State, Nigeria', that focused on community newspapers provided context for understanding

engagement with localized faith-based publications. Multistage sampling was used to select 240 respondents from three Local Government/Council Development Areas. A structured questionnaire was administered to elicit information on demographic characteristics, awareness, and readership status and readership scores from the sampled respondents.

The study's findings revealed that 76% of respondents were aware of the newspaper, with 65% citing local content as the main attraction. Even with a low overall readership base, those who did engage with the newspaper demonstrated high readership scores. Such factors as education level and perceived community size significantly influenced readership, indicating that localized content and community identity play crucial roles in the readership engagement of faith-based newspapers.

Animashaun (2023) did study similar to that of Badiru and Alabi, (2016), "Role of Community Newspaper in Community Development. A Study of *Oriwu Sun Newspaper* in Ikorodu" He used survey design method with three hundred copies of questionnaire. The result of the data analyzed proved that Ikorodu dwellers were exposed to community newspaper. Also, the community Newspapers report relevant local and development news which serve as for rural development. Finally, the data analyzed proved that Community Newspapers promote literacy.

Another study conducted by Olumuji (2021), studied, 'Preference for print and electronic newspapers among residents of Lagos State'. The study highlighted a relationship between newspaper readership and the preferred medium (print or electronic) and revealed through its results that content availability and accessibility are key determinants of readership patterns. This brought to the front burner the relevance of considering distribution methods and platform accessibility when evaluating engagement with faith-based community newspapers.

Furthermore, Brubaker and Haigh (2017) studied why Christians engage with faith-based content on Facebook. Taking a Survey of 335 respondents, the research identified four primary motivations: ministering, spiritual enlightenment, seeking religious information, and entertainment. The study's findings revealed that frequent engagement with faith-based content and higher levels of religiosity predicted a greater likelihood of using Facebook for ministering and seeking religious information.

This suggests that Christian readers are motivated by both personal spiritual growth and the desire to connect with and support others within their faith community. These related findings suggest that Christian readers engage with religious media for spiritual growth, community connection, and access to localized content. Faith-based community newspapers could serve as vital platforms to meet these needs, offering tailored content that resonates with the values and interests of their readership.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) was initially developed in the 1940s and 1950s, with significant contributions from Harold Lasswell and Paul Lazarsfeld. According to Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1974), who played vital roles in enhancing the theory, UGT assumes that audiences are active participants in the media consumption process, making conscious choices about what media they engage with based on their needs and desires.

Media use is seen as goal-oriented and purposive, meaning that individuals use media to fulfill specific needs and achieve particular gratifications. This perspective was further expanded by McQuail (1987), who emphasized the active role of the audience in media consumption. Media are viewed as tools or means for individuals to achieve various ends, rather than as ends in themselves. Hence, different individuals can use the same media for different purposes and obtain different gratifications from it.

Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) is a prominent theoretical framework in media studies and communication research that explores how and why people actively seek out specific media to satisfy specific needs. According to Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1974), who were pivotal in refining the theory, UGT assumes that audiences are active participants in the media consumption process, making conscious choices about what media they engage with based on their needs and desires.

Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) is relevant to this study based on its theoretical underpinnings and postulations affecting the readership of community newspapers and the engagement of the community members. *The Fides Community Newspaper* can be analyzed through the lens of Uses and Gratification Theory to understand why its readers choose it over other media outlets. By understanding and applying the principles of Uses and Gratification Theory, *Fides Community Newspaper* can better serve its readers, ensuring it remains a vital and valued source of information and connection within the community.

## Methodology

The study is derived from a survey research design, with questionnaire as instrument of measurement that focused on all Awka metropolis Catholic readership. The attempt is to describe what exists at the moment in the area of study (Wimmer & Dominick, 2014). A sample size of 278 respondents, considered based on Comrey and Lee (1992) as good.

The copies of the questionnaire were shared on different WhatsApp group platforms from the population of Catholic readership in Awka. These sampled respondents filled out the questionnaire administered online from October 1, to December 31, 2024. The validity of the instrument was ascertained from two mass communication scholars certified them valid. Also, the reliability of the instrument was tested through the Cronbach's alpha to ascertain the internal consistency in the use. The retrieved data were analyzed using frequency tables and simple percentages.

## Results

**Table 1: Exposure of Respondents to Fides Community Newspaper.**

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
I read Fides newspaper weekly	120	43%
I read Fides newspaper monthly	46	17%
I read Fides newspaper occasionally	68	24%
I read Fides newspaper rarely	44	16%
I never read Fides newspaper	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>278</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 1 presents the exposure of respondents to *Fides* community newspaper. This indicates that all the respondents read the newspaper at different degrees of exposure.

**Table 2: Content Preference by respondents on Fides Community Newspaper**

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
It is for spiritual guidance	21	8%
It is for community news	89	32%
It is for Catholic Church updates	42	15%
It is for educational content	61	22%
It is for entertainment	53	19%
I don't know	12	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>278</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 2 represents the perception of respondents to *Fides* community newspaper. These findings suggest that while *Fides* serves various functions, its primary appeal lies in its information dissemination and educational value.

**Table 3: Gratification derived from using Fides Community Newspaper by Respondents**

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Information	143	51%
Education	71	26%
Entertainment	46	17%
Social Interaction	18	6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>278</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 3 represents the gratifications derived from *Fides* community newspaper by respondents. By implication of this finding, it means greater number of the respondents used the newspaper to get information.

**Table 4: Respondents' Usage of Fides Community Newspaper.**

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
To practice the catholic faith.	222	80%
Evangelism	49	18%
Social Interaction	7	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>278</b>	<b>100%</b>

The data in Table 4 highlights the uses levels of the *Fides Community Newspaper* among respondents. The implication of this finding is that overwhelming majority of the respondents used what they read in the newspaper to practice their catholic faith.

### Discussion of Findings

The study raised four research objectives of which findings are based on them

The first was the level of exposure of Awka metropolis Catholic readership to the *Fides Newspaper*. Finding in table one shows that all the respondents were exposed to the *Fides* community newspaper. Also, the majority of the respondents were often exposed to it at different levels. The findings of this study are equally corroborated earlier studies that rural community dwellers were exposed to community newspaper (Animashaun, 2023 and Olumuji, 2021).

It also supports Badiru and Alabi (2016) study, 'Readership of Oriwu Sun community newspaper in Ikorodu, Lagos State, Nigeria'. The study's findings revealed that majority of the respondents read the newspaper as 76% of respondents were aware and exposed to it. Those who did engage with the newspaper demonstrated high readership scores. Hence, by such exposure to the newspaper, the readers can relay their feedback to the editors and may be influenced easily by the editorial contents of the medium with both the practice of their faith and other informational needs.

The second research question is on content preference of the respondent of the newspaper. *Fides* serves various functions, its primary appeal lies in its information dissemination and educational value. Badiru and Ajao, (2016), study entitled, 'Readership of Oriwu Sun community newspaper in Ikorodu, Lagos State, Nigeria', majority of the respondents 65% cited local content as the main attraction.

The reason for the difference in the preference of this and the previous study respondents may come from the fact that this current study is a faith-based newspaper with community of interest while the other is a geographical community (Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition, 2017). Secondly the current study area is in Awka, an Igbo town while the other is Ikorodu town in Yoruba land in Lagos state with different cultural values.

Also, Olumuji (2021) studied 'Preference for print and electronic newspapers among residents of Lagos State'. The study highlighted a relationship between newspaper readership and the preferred medium

(print or electronic) and revealed that content availability and accessibility are key determinants of readership patterns. This brought to the fore the relevance of considering platform accessibility and newspaper contents that are tailored toward the journalistic needs and aspirations of the newspaper readership when evaluating engagement with faith-based community newspapers.

The third research objective is the gratification derived from using *Fides* Community Newspaper by respondents. The finding is that greater majority of the respondents used the newspaper to get information.

Badiru and Ajao, (2016) in their study “Readership of Oriwu Sun community newspaper in Ikorodu, Lagos State, Nigeria ” found education as more gratifying and significantly related to the readership of the community newspaper. Meanwhile, the major need gratification that drove the Awka Catholic readership to exposure to *Fides* newspaper was information on their faith and other church events.

This finding is further corroborated by the research by Brubaker and Haigh (2017), who enquired why Christians engage with faith-based content on Facebook. The research identified four primary motivations: ministering, spiritual enlightenment, seeking religious information, and entertainment. The study’s findings revealed that frequent engagement with faith-based content and higher levels of religiosity predicted a greater likelihood of using Facebook for ministering and seeking religious information.

In effect, the findings gave credence to the tenets of the theoretical framework used, that is, Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974) which is a prominent theoretical framework in media studies and communication research in exploring how and why people actively seek out specific media to satisfy specific needs. The findings tend to suggest in clear terms why the readers get involved in exposure to faith-based newspapers and the specific needs that they crave for and satisfy by such exposure.

The fourth research objective is on the respondents’ usage of *Fides Newspaper*. The finding shows that an overwhelming majority of the respondents used what they read in the newspaper to practice their catholic faith. Animashaun (2023) in a study found out that community Newspapers report relevant local and development news serve for rural development. They also use the Community Newspapers promote literacy.

Also, Emke (2007) studied “Glue, Oil and Web: The Role of Community Newspapers”. The data for this paper is taken from two surveys of a sample of editors of community newspapers in Canada. The finding was that residents use communications to form beliefs and attitudes about the community and this affects their commitment to stay in an area or their desire to leave. The outcome of the earlier studies are relatively similar; but differ from the current study. The reason could be the fact that this study is faith-based while the earlier studies were on secular and business matters.

## Conclusion

The study concludes that Awka metropolis Catholic readership had a high level of exposure to the *Fides* community newspaper. Besides, the newspaper has readership beyond the catholic community as it covers different stories in Anambra state and beyond. The major need gratification that drove the exposure of the readership to *Fides* newspaper was the education and information that readers receive and utilized to practice their Christian faith and for their daily lives.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. The Catholic Diocese of Awka, Anambra state, Nigeria should engage its members and community into reading the *Fides* community newspaper. Also, the newspaper should continue to meet the

evolving needs of readers. Relentless diversity in its contents is advocated to include more interactive and multimedia elements.

2. The editorial board should consider establishing robust channels for reader feedback to ensure the newspaper remains responsive to the community's needs.
3. There should be an enhancement of the digital presence of *Fides* newspaper to reach a broader audience, especially younger readers who may prefer online content.
2. The editorial contents of the *Fides* newspaper should be broadened to accommodate the information contents from other religious denominations and secular stories so that the readers' yearnings for news from other sectors could be assuaged.

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