# Innovations

# Influence of Media Habits on Interpersonal Communication Among Family Members in South East Nigeria

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**Abstract**
*Among other objectives, the study tries to ascertain if media habits detracted from the number and quality interpersonal/face-to-face communication among family in the South-East zone of Nigeria. Drawing from the Uses and Gratification theory and theory of Technological Determinism, this research work surveyed a sample of 500 residents of the South-East who were selected through multi-stage sampling. The findings of this study suggest that majority of the respondents use the digital media, especially the social media. Majority of the respondents confirmed that the use of digital media detracts from the number and quality of interpersonal communication in the family. Among other recommendations, the study suggested the control of the use of the social media at home, especially among children and adolescents. The study recommended that further studies should be conducted to ascertain how the individual media habits of adults, adolescents and children, affect interpersonal communication amongst family.*
*Keywords: Media habits, interpersonal communication, new media, social media, family*

## Introduction

The media have become part of our daily routine. Hence, media habits refer to the subconscious use of media repeatedly under similar conditions. Media habits are as old as the media. The New World Encyclopedia traces the history of the media back to the days when dramas were performed in ancient cultures. The invention of the printing press in 1453 gave rise to the publication of books, newspapers and magazines (the print media) on a scale larger than was previously possible.

With the invention of electro-magnetic technology, the broadcast media debuted in the 1920's after the First WorldWar. The internet came towards the end of the twentieth century and increased the choices of media users. The internet facilitated the digitisation of the media. The digital media, also known as the new

media, haveall the attributes of the conventional mass media, namely, texts, videos, audio and graphics. In addition, they boast of an interactive experience, which the conventional media cannot replicate.

Further advances in information and communication technologies (ICT) have made mobile phones, tablets, laptops and other digital devicesessential in our everyday lives. Currently, our media habits cover a wide range of media consumption levels. Using these digital devices, people who used to listen to music on the radio, now stream audio, make use of music apps and mp3 amongst others.

Similarly, news and talk shows are no longer exclusive to the radio and television alone. They can be found in YouTube and numerous video websites on the internet. We can now read online editions of newspapers and magazines. There is a proliferation of news websites on the internet, ready to serve the readers with news on politics, entertainment, sports, health, foreign affairs, local and international conflicts, business and economy, amongst others. With internet connection, people equally communicate in the social media, using twitter, facebook, instagram, amongst others. The internet also renders photo sharing services, instant messages, and electronic mail. Media usersare now both consumers and creators of media content.

However, the proliferation of media appear to have affected human communication at different levels, whether intra personal, interpersonal, group or mass communication. For instance, the growing addiction of people to the new mediais widely seen as a threat to interpersonal communication in the family.

We will therefore attempt in this study to find out if media habits have been eroding face-to-face communication among family in the South East geo-political zone of Nigeria. This study is important for us to know how our media habits affectinter personal communication among family. We will look at family here within the context of the nuclear family, which comprises of the parents (father and mother) and their children as a family unit.

There are five states in the South East zone of Nigeria. They are Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. The zone has an estimated population of 40million people.  The people who live in the region are predominantly of Igbo ethnic group. The literacy rate is about 95.4 percent. Presently, the internet penetration in Nigeria is estimated at about 51 percent.

**Statement of the Problem**

Studies are still scanty on media habits and interpersonal communication among family in Nigeria and the South-East geo-political zone in particular. Nonetheless, some scholars have suggested that the numerous ICTs available to people today have created a gap in interpersonal communication at the family level. For example, Ngunan (2016) investigated how technology has affected the keenness of people to participate in interpersonal communication at the family level in Nigeria. The researcher discovered that most people have lost interest in interacting face-to-face with family members due to their constant engagement with the ICTs. However, Ngunan (2016) did not consider the effects of the conventional media on interpersonal communication amongst family. It is this gap that we intend to fill in this study. We will therefore look at how media habits affect interpersonal communication among family in the South East.

**Objectives of the Study**

The study will do the following:

1. To find out how frequently familymembers in the South-East share time together viewing the television and listening to the radio.
2. To ascertain how frequently family members in the South-East make use of the digital media.
3. To find out if sharing television time and radio listenership reduced the time spent on interpersonal/face-to-face communication among the family in the South East.
4. To determine if digital media has detracted from the quality and quantity of interpersonal communication among family members in the South East.

**Research Questions**

1. How frequently do family members in South East share time together watching television and listening to radio?
2. How frequently do family members in the South East use digital media?
3. Has television viewing and radio listenership reduced the time spent on interpersonal communication among family members in the South East?
4. Has the use of digital media detracted from the quality and quantity of interpersonal communication among family members in the South-East?

**Literature Review**

Psychologists say that most of the things that we do everyday are driven by habits. Habits are the things that we do repeatedly that our subconscious minds do not bother about them again and it becomes automatic behavioural response (Parvez, 2014; Ryan, 2020). As people continually gain froma given action in a given context, it develops in their memory and becomes abehaviour (Mazar&Wood, 2018).

Habits therefore play an important role inshaping media use behaviour (LaRose, 2010).LaRose therefore defined media habits as the automaticity in media consumption, formed through repeated behaviour in stable conditions. The communication scholar noted that media habitsare the determinants of both media attendance (audience) and media effects. According to Sirianni and Vishwanat (2015), media attendance standpointallows media critics to look at the needs that people seek to fulfill by using various media whileon the other hand, media effects explain how the media influence attitudes and perceptions of audience members.

The description of interpersonal communication as the communication involving two or a few people, points to the fact that there is obviously no identifiable source or receiver (Baran, 2009). According to Baran, because communication is an ongoing and reciprocal process, all the participants or 'interpreters' are working to create meaning by encoding and decoding messages. Didiugwu cited in Nworgu (2011) sees interpersonal communication as an effective mode of communication because it has such advantages as immediate feedback, warm, open and intimate interaction between people.

However, there is a growing concern that the usage of the new media distracts the youths from face-to-face contact with friends and family. As noted by Nie and Erbing (2010), the relationships that were initially

created and maintained through physical interaction have at the moment been complemented by the social media.

Villegas (2012) notes that research supports two opposing sides of the argument. One side sees the media as hindering on family relations. The other side sees the media as fostering it. To look at the likely influence of the media on family interaction, Villegas studied the effects of computers, the internet, mobile data and the television on the way people interact and arrived at the conclusion that the media cannot be placed in a particular grouping of positive or negative, given that various media devices serve different purposes in family living and within the individual families.

Villegas notesthat the development of mobile media has created limitless opportunities for the use of media anywhere or at whatever time making it that easier for children to spend time consuming the media. Interestingly, Villegas observes thattelevision viewing continues to be favourite media activity and the medium that the children spend a lot of time on, irrespective of the numerous new media technologies available.

Shnauber-Stockmmman and Wolf (2016) argue from two perspectives. Firstly, they believe thatvideo game play, MP3s, and TV viewing could encourage weaker family relationship, poor communication and expose the family to immorality, if unregulated. Secondly, they seeplaying of video game as an activity that will promote spending quality time together and a major contributor to children and family bonding in some homes.

Santhosh and Prashanth (2017) suggestthat the use ofnew media technologies within a family could result in growing privatization within family life, with each family memberincreasingly using technology individually than collectively. For this study, a surveywas conducted among 100 teenagers from different colleges in Bangalore, an urban set up in India. The sample chosen was in the age group of 18 to 30. The questions were structured based on how teenagers spend time with their family members.

The results of the study suggest that majority of the respondents (teenagers)used faceboook several times in a day to remain in contact with their friends and family. In spite of significant internet and social media use, majority of the respondents were doubtful that it decreased the time spent speaking with their friends and family. However, a small minority of the respondents believe that their use of social media does certainly detract from the number and quality of interpersonal communication. The results of the study furthersuggest that teenagers still find time to stay with their family and also utilised the new media.

Gapsiso and Wilson (2018) discovered that internet use have some impact on face-to face communication between teenagers and their friends and that it appears to weaken ties that bind the teenagers with their family and friends.The study was conducted among students of Comprehensive Secondary School, College of Education Hong in Adamawa State. A total of 132 students were purposively sampled.  According to the findings of Gapsiso and Wilson (2018), majority of the students agreed that the internet has reduced their desire to communicateface-to-face with their family. The students said they had access to the internet on their mobile phones and were therefore excited at the opportunity to interact with people outside their immediate environment. Most of the respondents strongly agreed that teenagers find communication through the internet appealing.

Based on the empirical studies cited, one can safely therefore assume that media consumption, especially the use of new media detracts from face-to-face communication, especially among the younger generation.

**Theoretical framework**

This study is anchored on two theories:

1. The Uses and Gratification Theory.
2. Technological Determinism Theory.

1. The Uses and Gratification theory:

The Uses and Gratification theory has a user/audience centered approach. As noted by Nwogu (2008), the theory deals with what the audiences use the media to do, and what gratifications/gains/satisfaction they derive from using the media. It contradicted earlier views that assumed that the audience was a passive group (Asemah et al, 2016).

There are different accounts of the origin of the Uses and Gratification theory. According to Ruggiero (2000), some mass communication scholars cited "moral panic" and the Payne fund studies as the progenitor of U&G theory, which is also known as Utility theory. The US Motion Picture Research Council carried out the Payne Fund studies in the early 1920s. Leading sociologists and psychologists including Herbert Blumer, Philip Hauser and L.L. Thurstine sought to understand how movie viewing was affecting the youth in America.

McQuail (2010) argues that the idea that media use depends on the perceived satisfaction, needs, wishes or motives of the prospective audience member, is as old as media research. McQuail enumerated the basic assumptions of the approach when it was rediscovered twenty years later (in the 1960s and 1970s):

"First, media and content choice is generally rational and directed towards certain specific goals and satisfactions (thus the audience formation can be logically explained). Secondly, audience members are conscious of the media related needs which arise in terms of motivations. Thirdly, cultural and aesthetic features of the content, play much less part in attracting audiences than the satisfaction of various personal and social needs (e.g for relaxation, shared experiences, past time e.t.c). Lastly, all or most of the relevant factors for audience formation (Motives, perceived or obtained satisfactions, media choices, background, variables) can in principle, be measured."

Elihu Katz used this theory in his article published in 1959 and it has two assumptions about media audience (Hassan, Latiff and Afek, 2015). One of these assumptions is that individuals are active in making choices about selecting media and message. The other assumption is that individuals are aware of their motives for information and entertainment; people use their motives as guides, as they actively seek out media messages to satisfy their needs.

Nonetheless, the early U&G research was criticised for profoundlyrelyingon the individual's own description of events, being rudimentary about the societal basis of the needs that audiences bring to the media and for not being too critical of the likely disruption both for self and society of certain kinds of satisfaction. The U&G fell out of favour with some mass communication scholars for several decades, but the advent of telecommunications technology may well have revived it from dormancy (Ruggiero, 2000).

Ruggiero posited that the increasing interest shown by communication scholars in online audiences may be particularly intense because of the make-up of these new media forms. He identified three attributes of data, not commonly associated with traditional media: interactivity, demassification and asynchroneity.

Ruggiero defined interactivity as the degree to which participants in the communication process have control over and can swap roles in their mental discourse. He defined demassification as the control of the individual

over the medium and his ability to select from a wide menu. According Ruggiero, asynchroneity simply put, means the ability of an individual to send, receive, save or retrieve messages at his or her own convenience.

In the light of the above argument and the nature of this current study, the perspectives of the Uses and Gratification theory becomes relevant as the theoretical framework for quantitative analysis of media consumption in Nigerian families and interaction with both the traditional and the new media forms and contents in Nigeria.

2. Technological Determinism:

Technological Determinism, propounded by American sociologist and economist, Thorstein Veblen who lived from 1857 to 1929, sees technology as the prime mover in history. It suggests that technology determines social change, thought patterns, social behaviour and human history. Social institutions, social interaction and individuals at all levels are shaped by technology.

McQail (2010) sees Canadian Historian, H.M. Innis as the first significant theorist in this tradition. Innis founded the Toronto School of Thinking about the media in the period after the Second World War. According to McQuail, Innis attributed the characteristic features of successive ancient civilizations to the prevailing and dominant modes of communication, each of which will have its own bias in terms of societal form. For instance, Innis regarded the change from stone to papyrus as causing a shift from royal to priestly power.

Marshall McLuhan offered new insights into this theory in the 1960s. McLuhan made a famous statement that "the medium is the message." This means that the medium used to communicate influences the mind of the receiver. The introduction of news print, television and the internet have all shown how technological advances have an impact on the society in which we live in. McQuail outlines the media technological determinism main propositions as follows:

i. Communication technology is fundamental to society.
ii. Each technology has a bias to particular communication forms, contents and uses.
iii. The sequence of invention and application of communication technology influences the direction and pace of social change.
iv. Communication revolutions lead to social revolutions.

These propositions underscore the importance of technological determinism as a framework for understanding how media habits influence interpersonal communication.

However, critics of technological determinism argue that technology never forces itself on members of the society. The choice of using technology and experiencing its effects therefore lies in the hand of a human being. Regardless of criticisms, it is a useful framework for an investigation of how media habits have affect interpersonal communication among family in South-East Nigeria.

**Methodology**

The descriptive survey method was used for this study. The main idea behind using this type of research is to describe or document current conditions or attitudes – that is, to explain what exists at the moment (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). The total population for this study is all the residents of South-East, estimated at about 22 million.A sample size of 500 was chosen, relying on the authority of *Comery and Lee, 1992*as cited by Wimmer and Dominick (2011). They suggested that multivariate studies require larger samples than do univariate studies because they involve analyzing multiple response data (several measurements on the same subject). One guideline they recommended for multivariate studies is as follows: 50=very poor; 100=poor; 200=fair; 300=good; 500=very good; 1,000=excellent.

The instrument for the study is the questionnaire. Face-to-face administration of questionnaire was adopted. The questionnaire had two sections. The first section comprising of questions 1 to 6

contains general demographic information such as gender, sex, age, educational qualification and marital status. The second section comprising of questions 7 to 10 contained key issues, such as media use and impact on interpersonal communication among families in the South East. Closed ended questions were used for questions 7 to 9 on media use while likert scale was adopted from questions 10 and 11 on impact of media habit on interpersonal communication.

In trying to improve the validity of the instrument, we sought the opinion of experts in the field of mass communication. Similarly, in order to make the instrument reliable, ambiguous words and double barreled questions were avoided. The reliability of the instrument was tested using the cronbach's alpha method and we got a co-efficient of 0.803, confirming the reliability of the instrument. We adopted the multi-stage sampling technique for the administration of the questionnaire.

## Results
### Demographic Information

Majority of our respondents, 51.8 % were males. On the other hand, females constitute 48.2 %. Majority of our respondents were between the ages of 25-29 (37.4%) and 25-29 (23.6%). Majority of the respondents, 56 % are single and 39 % are married. Majority, 76.4 % live in the urban area. Majority, 61.8 % acquired tertiary education and 35.8% received education to secondary school level. Only 2.4%attended primary schools. Majority have full time employment (29.8%), followed by self-employment (24%) percent who are self-employment. Students constitute 23.8 percent, while 16.4 percent have part-time employment, 2.4 percent unemployed and 1.8 percent retired.

*Table 1: **Media Habits of respondents***

| Media | Frequency | Percent | Valid percent | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| TV only | 3 | .6 | .6 | |
| Radio | 5 | 1.0 | 1.0 | |
| TV&Radio | 66 | 13.2 | 13.2 | |
| Digital media | 426 | 85.2 | 85.2 | |
| **Total** | **500** | **100** | **100** | |

A vast majority of the respondents, 85. 2 percent, use the digital media, while 13.2 percent use both radio and television.

**Table 2: *Most used digital devices***

| Devices | Frequency | Percent | Valid percent | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Laptop | 32 | 6.4 | 7.5 | |
| Tablet | 27 | 5.4 | 6.4 | |
| Mobile phone | 366 | 73.2 | 86.1 | |
| Digital media | 425 | 85.0 | 100 | |
| Missing | 75 | 15 | | |
| **Total** | **500** | **100** | **100** | |

The most used digital device is the mobile phone. Majority of respondents (85%) prefer social media to other digital media, such as video streaming, virtual reality and video games.

**Table 3:** *Sharing television reduces interpersonal communication within family*

| TV reduces interpersonal comm | Frequency | Percent | Valid percent | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly agree | 33 | 6.6 | 6.6 | |
| Agree | 66 | 13.2 | 13.2 | |
| Neutral | 18 | 3.6 | 3.6 | |
| Disagree | 277 | 55.4 | 55.4 | |
| Strongly disagree | 106 | 21.2 | 21.2 | |
| | | | | |
| **Total** | **500** | **100** | **100** | |

Majority of respondents (55.4%) disagree that sharing television reduces interpersonal communication within the family, 21.2% strongly disagree, 6.6% strongly agree and 13. 2% agree.

**Table 4:** *Sharing radio reduces interpersonal communication within family*

| Radio reduces interpersonal comm | Frequency | Percent | Valid percent | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly agree | 2 | .4 | .4 | |
| Agree | 61 | 12.2 | 12.2 | |
| Neutral | 14 | 2.8 | 2.8 | |
| Disagree | 342 | 68.4 | 68.4 | |
| Strongly disagree | 81 | 16.2 | 16.2 | |
| | | | | |
| **Total** | **500** | **100** | **100** | |

Majority of the respondents disagree that sharing radio time reduces interpersonal communication among family.

**Table 5:** *Use of digital media reduces interpersonal communication*

| New media reduces interpersonal comm | Frequency | Percent | Valid percent | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly agree | 170 | 34.0 | 34.0 | |
| Agree | 211 | 42.2 | 42.2 | |
| Neutral | 16 | 3.2 | 3.2 | |
| Disagree | 81 | 16.2 | 16.2 | |
| Strongly disagree | 22 | 4.4 | 4.4 | |
| | | | | |
| **Total** | **500** | **100** | **100** | |

Majority of respondents agree that the use of digital media reduces interpersonal communication in the family.

**Table 6:** *Use of digital media reduces interpersonal communication*

| New media detracts interpersonal comm | Frequency | Percent | Valid percent | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strongly agree | 121 | 24.2 | 24.2 | |
| Agree | 280 | 56.0 | 56.0 | |
| Neutral | 42 | 8.4 | 8.4 | |
| Disagree | 50 | 10.0 | 10.0 | |
| Strongly disagree | 7 | 1.4 | 1.4 | |
| | | | | |
| **Total** | **500** | **100** | **100** | |

More than half of the respondents, 56 percent, agree that the digital media have detracted from the number and quality of face-to-face- relationship.

**Research Question 1**

How frequently do family members in South East share time together watching television and listening to radio?

Our findings revealed that majority of respondents watch television occasionally. On the other hand, majority of the respondents rarely listen to the radio.

**Research Question 2**

How frequently do family members in the South East use digital media?

Our analysis shows that majority of the respondents use the digital media more frequently than the conventional media. We further discovered that majority of the respondents use mobile phone more than the other digital devices, such as laptops and tablets. The majority among the respondents use the social media more than the other digital media. The percentage of those who engage in video streaming, virtual reality, online broadcast and video games is insignificant when compared to those who use social media.

**Research Question 3**

Has television viewing and radio listenership reduced the time spent on interpersonal/face to-face communication among family members in the South East?

According to our findings, majority of the respondents disagreed that sharing television reduces the time spent on interpersonal communication within the family. Similarly, majority disagreed that radio listenership reduces interpersonal communication within the family.

**Research Question 4**

Has use of digital media detracted from the number and the quality of interpersonal/face-to-face communication among family members in the South East?

Majority of the respondents agreed that the use of digital media detracts from the number and quality of interpersonal communication in the family. However, a significant percentage of the respondents disagreed.

Majority of the respondents equally agreed that the digital media have detracted from the number and quality of face-to-face- communication within the family.

**Discussion of Findings**

With respect to Research Question 1 on how frequently do family members in South East share time together watching television and listening to radio, the findings of this study suggest that majority of the respondents watch television occasionally, although a substantial number watch frequently. Our findings equally suggest that majority of the respondents rarely listen to the radio. Majority of the respondents indicated that they use the digital media more than the conventional media. This is to some extent different from the conclusion of Villegas (2012), that regardless of numerous new media technologies, television consumption continues to be favourite media activity and the medium children spend much time on.

Regarding to question two on how frequently family members in the South East use digital media, our findings suggest that majority of the respondents use the digital media more frequently than the conventional media. We further discovered that majority of the respondents' use mobile phone more than the other digital devices, such as laptops and tablets. The majority among the respondents admitted that they use the social media more than the other digital media.

Our findings here are similar to that of Santhosh &Prashnath (2017) and Villegas (2013).In Santhosh &Prashnath, majority of their respondents indicated that they used faceboook several times a day to keep in touch with their friends and family. Similarly, Villegas suggests that children and adolescents spend considerable amount of time each day interacting with mobile devices, television, and online media due to the development of new ways to consume and access these media.

Although, we have similarities in findings, it is important to point out the methodological differences between our study and the studies cited in the paragraph above. Santhosh &Prashnath (2017), conducted survey among 100 teenagers from different colleges and the sample chosen was in the age group of 18 to 30, from Bangalore urban set up in India, while our study surveyed 500 residents of South-East Nigeria, cutting across all age groups.

In Santhosh &Prashnath, the survey questions were framed based on how teens spend time with family members and the study also tried to explore the space given for interpersonal communication among urban families. Villegas (2013) conducted a meta-study, using results of multiple scientific studies.

Coming to Research Question 3 on if television viewing and radio listenership reduced the time spent on interpersonal/face to-face communication among family members in the South East, our findings suggest that sharing television and radio listenership do not reduce the time spent on interpersonal communication within the family. Also, a considerable percentage strongly disagreed.

Regarding Research Question 4 on if the use of digital media detracted from the number and the quality of interpersonal/face-to-face communication among family members in the South East, our findings suggested in the affirmative. Our findings here also corroborate Santhosh &Prashnath (2017) that using new media technologies within a household can lead to growing privatization within family life, with individuals increasingly using technology individually than collectively.

The difference between our study and Santhosh &Prashnath is that in the latter, despite significant internet and social media use, majority of the respondents did not feel it reduced the amount of time spent speaking with their friends and family.

There is also a similarity between our findings in Question 4 and that of Gapsiso and Wilson (2018). Gapsiso and Wilsondiscovered that the use of the internet have some impact on face-to-face communication between teenagers and their friends and also appears to weaken ties that bind them with their family and friends.

Notwithstanding similarities in findings, there are methodological differences between our study and Gapsiso and Wilson (2018). Whereas Gapsiso and Wilson purposively sampled 132 senior secondary school students, we randomly selected 500 residents of South-East Nigeria, cutting across all age groups.

Lastly, our findings partly agree with Shnauber-Stockmmman and Wolf (2016) who believe that if unregulated, video game play, MP3s, and TV viewing could promote weaker family relationships, poor communication and subject the family to unwanted immoral influences.

**Conclusion and recommendations**

Our findings in this study reveal that the social media can create distance among family members. People invest less energy in face-to-face communication as they spend most of their attention in the virtual life. However, sharing television, radio and playing video games promote physical contact and hence, interpersonal communication in the family.

Based on the findings in this study, it is recommended that watching of television in the family should be encouraged as it could keep members (parents and children) on a spot, thereby facilitating interpersonal communication among them. It is also recommended that family should share time together listening to the radio at home as a means of fostering face-to-face communication amongst members.Parents should regulate the use of the social media at home, especially among children and adolescents.Family should equally engage themselves with TV, video and computer games and other digital media that foster physical contact in the family.Parents should control the use of mobile phones by children at home to ensure that they have enough time for face-to-face communication with other members of the family.Lastly, further studies should be conducted to ascertain how the media habits of adults, adolescents and children, affect interpersonal communication amongst family members.

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