

**SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMISATIONS INFLUENCE ON WEB
CONTENTS VISIBILITY IN MODERN DAY JOURNALISM: A CASE
STUDY OF GOOGLE AND YAHOO**

BY

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DECLARATION

This project is based on a study undertaken by Ekeopara Onyinyechi Daniella, ART1601446 in the Department of Mass Communication, Faculty of Art, under the supervision of Mrs. Grace Shalom Israel.

All ideas are the products of my personal research where the views of others were used, they were duly acknowledged.

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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this research work was written and submitted by me, Ekeopara Onyinyechi Daniella, ART1601446 to the department of Mass Communication, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Benin City, Edo State.

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DEDICATION

This research work is dedicated to God for his grace and strength throughout the period of this study and even beyond. He provided at all stages and phases of this project work. It is also dedicated to my amazing family and friends for their support in one way or the other throughout the course of this research work.

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ABSTRACT

Journalism as a whole has developed and moved into a more modernized form which is on various digital platforms. News stories, articles, editorials etc. have all moved online without the hardcopy dying off but there has been a drastic decrease in hardcopy readership. This further encouraged media houses to take their contents online, to also build online readership. There are various factors that come to play to ensure that these online readers being targeted actually see, hear or watch the contents and one of the most important is Search Engine Optimisation aka SEO. Search Engine Optimisation has become a deciding factor on who gets to see what and what gets seen by web users. It's a new media skill that has become important in the news room for web journalists but adequate research hasn't been conducted. It still remains a big mystery to many modern journalists. This work studies the level of impact and influence this SEO has on web contents visibility to their target web browser. This study uses two of the world's most popular search engines as case study. Google and Yahoo although different are both search engines that have algorithms that contribute to contents visibility.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

After the invention of the modern day computer, it was discovered that other things lacked in information sharing system. This need to share data arose between scientists that were computer literate; this led to the invention of a form of the internet by Vinton Cerf.

“However, in 1991 the internet changed again. That year, a computer programmer in Switzerland named Tim Berners-Lee introduced the World Wide Web: an internet that was not simply a way to send files from one place to another but was itself a “web” of information that anyone on the internet could retrieve. Berners- Lee created the internet we know” History.com (retrieved October 28, 2019).

Along the line people put their information online, organizations and modern day media houses all saw the need to get their contents and all saw the need to get their contents all online, so this lead to the transfer of information online. This lead to information clutter online and Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) was invented to declutter the contents online

and to arrange online contents according to Search Engine algorithms ranking.

Search engine optimization contain billions of pieces of contents on the internet (web pages) through a process known as ‘crawling’ and indexing then arranging it all by how well it matches the query in a process we refer to as ‘Ranking’. Search engine optimization over the years has helped build and give guidance to the visibility of web contents on the internet, there are various websites with similar content on a particular subject matter but what determines which website comes first after a search. Thus, SEO can be said to be the practice of increasing both the quality and quantity of website traffic, as well as exposure to ones brand, through non-paid (also known as “organic”). Search Engine Optimisation is a tool for enhancing the visibility and ranking of a website through improving of the contents and using keywords. According to Vignesh J. Deepa (2014 , P 2) “Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) is the process of editing a websites chances with one or more search engines, Some of these search engines are Google and Yahoo!.”

Search Engine Optimisation over the years as a part of ICT/New Media has developed and has left the stage of being an unknown phenomenon to the view in the tech world but has now become an added asset to the basic website content developer (writer) due to their need to use the knowledge of SEO to boost the visibility of their content on the internet.

Due to the fact that the Search Engine through the use of SEO figures out what each page is about, and how it may be useful for its users. Writers, most especially online writers have become conscious and have seen a need to learn this phenomenon. Search Engine Optimisation creates a solution to those issues or problem, Search Engine optimization has now become an essential part of writing. This knowledge of Search Engine Optimisation now affects how web content developers (writers) go about their writing, structuring and even during the upload step after writing for example word press, the plugins assist to help build the Search Engine Optimisation of the content (write-up) before it is uploaded. SEO is very dominant in the writing World most especially blogging. Due to the

turn of modern ICT / new media content writing is taking, there is a need for some if not all writers to explore this act of Search Engine Optimisation.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

There is a need for professional communications to makes it easier for audiences or readers to find their web content through search engines like Google and Yahoo!. The evident lack of writers knowledge on the concept and act SEO, limits the visibility of their contents. Due to the lack of this skill most contents are posted but are not visible to its right audience thereby creating room and waste of website space and poor readership.

To a very large extent Search Engine Optimisation has had a positive influence on the modern day writer through its use to help make their content more visible. It is one aspect of the visibility struggle but it plays a very prominent role. “Although there have been some interesting changes in journalism since the days of the old Daily Times Newspaper,

the aim have remained unchanged: to inform, educate and entertain” Ben Nwanne (2016: P 5). This has led to many modifications to the information sharing system, which eventually reaches Search Engine Optimisation (SEO).

Of a truth Search Engines are helped by Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) to rank and determine the importance of an article or any web content to a reader after a particular search. Most professional communication practitioners and researchers can point to some content on the web that they themselves have authored, such as on their employers or clients websites or onsite they maintain for personal, professional or community news. There is a need to determine how and to what extent this new media technology affects the everyday journalists who is now creating articles, news stories and etcetera for online platforms.

It is in this light that this study seeks to ascertain the influence of Search Engine Optimisation on the visibility of web developer’s everyday content on search engines like Google and Yahoo!, and how this phenomenon affects the modern day journalist or content developer.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) is believed to have immense influence on the visibility of web content on the internet. This study tends to achieve the following objectives:

1. To determine how Search Engine Optimisation has helped content visibility and to what extent.
- 2 To examine the extent to which Journalist/content developers' knowledge on the concept of Search Engine Optimisation will aid their contents visibility.
- 3 To determine the importance of Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) to web content in order to encourage further studies into the concept.
- 4 To determine what makes a web content more visible to its target audience in order to help media personnel's have their contents viewed.

1.4 Research Questions

1. Does Search Engine Optimisation help content visibility?

2. To what extent does journalist's knowledge on Search Engine Optimisation affect their web contents visibility?
3. What is the importance of Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) to web journalists?
4. What makes role does Google and Yahoo play in web content sharing?

1.5 Significance of the Study

As the internet has become a large playground for a large amount of different websites, it has become difficult for ones content to be visible to its target audience online without making the right measures.

In a virtual world where most individual are uploading content on a daily basis, it leaves room for the weak contents to be swallowed up by the more Search engine optimized contents.

There is a need to correct this phenomenon among writers in society, there is a need for writers to be more educated on how to make use

of Search Engine Optimisation knowledge to improve their contents ranking.

In the profession of writing and content development there is a need for them to perform exceedingly well and for their written work to reach its target audience. It is against this background that the study undertaken is aimed at determining the role of SEO on content visibility.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This study is limited to Google and Yahoo! Users. This research would be controlled on the influence or role of Search Engine Optimisation on the visibility of online web content.

Responses will be taken from an interview with Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) experts, as they are the individuals that can give viable answers on how websites plugins and good writing skills affect the visibility and ratings of web contents on these search engines.

1.7 Limitations of Study

The following limitations were encountered during the course of the study:

1. The researcher was involved in other academic activities and so was not able to give full attention to the research work but she strived to give out a good work.
2. There was difficulty in getting hard copy of books on Search Engine Optimisation.

1.8 Definition of Terms

Content: According to Heidi Cohen, “content is high quality useful information that conveys a story presented in a contextually relevant manner with the goal of soliciting an emotion or engagement delivered live or asynchronously content can be expressed using a variety of formats including text, images, video, audio or presentations”.

Web Content: According to Bryan Eisenberg “Think of web content as the public conversation that happens between you and the visitor, whether the conversation is one way (from you to the visitor), two-way (between the visitor and you) or conversation among visitors”. Web content simply is content that has been uploaded on the internet on websites.

Visibility: Visibility is the positioning of something someone in a way that it can be seen by majority of net readers. Visibility also can be defined as the degree to which something has attracted general attention, prominence. According to CMS website services “Visibility is the process of getting your website found on the internet when your prospects are searching for your related products and services”. Visibility is an important concept to web writers and content creators because it determines if their content/ work will be viewed as important or less valuable.

Content Developers: These are writer’s not just basic writers but professional writers who create content on a constant basis. Some are now specified as web content developers who create content that is posted online on a constant basis. Web content developers are specialized writers and can be referred to as bloggers.

Website: A site or website is a central location of web pages that are related and accessed by visiting the homepage of the website using a browser.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter examines the literature works related to this study which will be reviewed and evaluated. It will take us through the background of the concept of the web and Search Engine Optimisation to the impact Search Engine Optimisation has on modern journalism.

We will explore how modern day journalism has now become dependent on Search Engine Optimisation to a large extent due to the new shift towards new media. More so the need for journalists to obtain at least basic knowledge on Search Engine Optimisation will be discussed.

In this Chapter, the concept of our case study search engines will be fully explored and explicated. An analysis was conducted on Search Engine Optimisation and modern web journalism, and then a theoretical framework was used to finalize this chapter.

2.1 History and Concept of the Web

The web AKA World Wide Web is an important part of the new media; It is a system of Internet servers that support specifically formatted

documents. The documents are formatted in a markup language called HTML (Hyper Text Markup Language) that supports links to other documents as well as graphics, audio and video files. This means you can jump from one document (page) to another simply by clicking on hot spots.

The World Wide Web was invented in 1989 by Sir Tim Berners. He saw the need for a general accessibility to information stored in separate computers. He wanted to create a place where information on different individual's computers can be accessed by other people, thereby helping a general need for information dissemination. He created the web to fill a space that or rather, he created a space for information and content can be kept. The space was filled with the invention of the World Wide Web the coming demand by scientists for automated information sharing amongst themselves.

After the web was invented there was a need to spread the word about this new communication means. In August 1991, Berners-Lee released the www software on the Internet newsgroups and interest in the project spread all over the world. At this time the World Wide Web

was still limited to only NEXT machine but with time Sir Berners put out a plea to other developers to help come up with other additions to this program. Two conferences were held to further build the publicity of the web and they were all successful.

Now, in this modern day and time the World Wide Web has been crucial to the development of the information age, and is the Primary means for billions of people to interact via the internet. Due to the Hypertext markup language (HTML) used in creating web pages the URL permits users to navigate to other web resources. In addition to text, web pages contain references to images, video, audio and software components which are either displayed or internally executed in the user's web browser to showcase the requested pages or streams of multimedia content.

A website as we know today is made up of varied web pages which have a common theme and domain name. Now these websites are stored in a computer running on what we call web servers. A web server is placed to give a response or multiples of responses to requests made over the internet from web browsers running a system in use. Websites are created

for various reasons like information dissemination, entertainment, and governmental, commercial and self-expressive reasons. The most interesting part about website contents is that they can be provided or uploaded by anyone.

With the web being one of the most powerful new media's we have in Mass Communication through Internet websites, there has been a shift in information dissemination and storage. The web ensures that communication contents like news stories, written spoken or video etc. are stored. The creation of the web by Berners changed the accessibility of internet contents and has had a tremendous influence on how today's contents are ranked, displayed and even viewed. More will be said on this further into this Chapter.

2.2 History of Search Engine Optimisation

Search Engine Optimisation is the process of growing the quantity and quality of websites or contents views. SEO refers to the improvement of unpaid results and encourages direct traffic. A content developer at Search Engine Land defined it as “the process of improving your site to

increase its visibility to relevant /related searches”. The better visibility your pages have in search results the more likely you are to gather attention and attract prospective and existing readers or customers to your page.

Search engines like one of this project works case study Google andalso Bing use bots to crawl pages on the internet, going from site to site, collecting information about those pages and putting them in an index, NEXT, algorithms analyses pages in the index, taking into account hundreds of ranking factors or signals, to determine the order pages should appear in the search results of a given query.

Now how did this powerful part of Internet new media journalism came about. According to an article byDes Moines (2017):

“SEO is a millennial. It is believed that SEO was born in 1991. Aroundthis time, the world’s first website was launched, and one website grew into a very large amount of websites. The internet became crowded with both contents and websites. This created the need for an accessible way to access information. The first search engine was created”.

By 1993, how information was categorized was revolutionized and in 1994, search engines like Alta Vista, Yahoo! and others joined the scene. However, in 1996 SEO really took off when Sergey Brin and Larry page began building what would become the biggest, most recognized search engine till date “BackRub” which eventually becomes one of this project work’s case study “Google” in 1997.

Search Engine Optimisation evolved so much that search engine like Google created an algorithm that rewarded an online contents quality and relevance. Search engines like Google continue to improve and build better algorithms to ensure that the best content comes up when a relating keyword is browsed.

2.3 Impact of Search Engine Optimisation Knowledge on Online Journalism

Having looked at the concept and history of Search Engine Optimisation (SEO), there is a need to see through its relevance to modern day journalism. As we know and see in our modern time, the journalistic act of newswriting and reporting has moved from its hard copy original

state to new media by being read and available on various website pages on the internet and also being an all social media platforms.

Now with this fast and easily accessible news and reporting sources, there are so many sources and media houses trying to be the first and the most seen news source. Just as the offline media houses and news sources are competing for dominance and relevance, so are these online news sources and media houses. One of the most important tools happens to be SEO (Search Engine Optimisation). Since its inception and creation in 1987, SEO has affected the ranking of internet contents, during the last decades this has extremely affected media Organisation and challenged traditional journalism. It has changed basic journalistic work processes and brought about new modes of producing and consuming news content. As long as major search engines continues to drive a great deal of traffic to news websites or remain the primary entry point for many of them, factors such as visibility and high ranking in search engine results remain crucially important. This project work examines Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) and its implementation and influence in online

journalism. According to Richmond (2008) “SEO has a significant impact on this field and its knowledge can be useful tool for journalists whose work appear online. The actual purpose of this network appears online. The actual purpose of this work is to outline a framework of suggested practices that can make journalistic work and Internet Journalism, more effective and contemporary”.

There is no doubt that the internet is currently one of the most popular sources of news and has now become the preferred choice of many news consumers.(Pew Research Center, 2013). “ The reason why we see a large part of Internet traffic depends on a great extent on search engines, and also, a lot of people use search engines as a basic tool of navigation and filter for new and online content” Safran (2013) Newman and Levy(2014).

It is a common practice for users to choose results only from the first page search results. According to Dick 2011 cited in Spidow & Veglis (2012) “...while more websites are indexed by search engines and are basically competing with each other, it’s obvious that to be the highest

ranking and top of the results page become increasingly essential for an online media and consequently for online article”.

Simply put, “visibility of a site through web servers has become a necessary ingredient for the survival of the site” Galitsky and Levene (2004). However, the transition to digital journalism means different thing for journalists because their major aim now becomes how do I get my news content of article to the first search page.

According to Anderson (2009) “due to the Internet’s wealth of news websites, the rapid dissemination of information and also the existence of culture of “the click” the aim has now become to ensure that a news story find readers through the search engines. Besides journalists are writing to be read and these days that means ensuring that the stories are found by search engines”.

This impact on modern day journalism is exactly why media organisations and as well journalists need to be aware of web technologies and at the same time respond to new reading tendencies or information consumption habits in order to make online news sites better and have a better chance of getting their news read. The aim of this project work is in two phases, on one side, to makes Mass Communication students,

journalists or other digital media content creator understand what Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) is and its impact on online journalism. Whilst on the other end, to outline a general framework of guidelines that will help media professional produce and distribute news in a synchronized and more effective manner. The basic approach is related to the opportunities presented to news organisations through the utilization of search engines and web search in general.

2.4 Google Search Engine

Google is a world renowned web search engine created by three student developers. It is the most used search engine in the World Wide Web across all platforms. It was developed by Larry Page, Sergey Brin and Scott Hassan. Being the lead search engine in the market, all websites and web journalists, bloggers want their content ranked high by the Google algorithm. Now this algorithm is a “page ranking” system criteria created by Google and other search engines to determine and ensure that only user friendly websites and good contents rank high. So the algorithm was

created as a guide, check point or gatekeeper to the type of websites and contents that rank high. This Google algorithm offers journalism and news researchers an opportunity to study how search engines mediate news stories and news events online.

Google as a search engine is number one and is also predicted to remain number one over the next couple of years unless another search engine with amore user friendly algorithm comes along. For examples in September, 2019 Google made a change to their Google news algorithm to upgrade its search results ranking for news stories. Its new algorithm highlights original reporting on the web. Google made this change in its search engine because it wanted to prioritise original reporting, bump it up in its searches and thus get news media's more clicks and ad revenue. This proves the significant influence that Google has over the online news business and in long hand offline news businesses as well. Why there was a need for a change in the algorithm is that false and unproven news sources with good SEO ranked high in search engine results compared to actual "original" news sources.

As the New York Times points out, after the 2018 massacre in Park Land, Florida, YouTube's number one trending video was a fake news story saying that the survivors were actors. Facts should matter more than clicks or views, which is why Google took a step to improve its news algorithm making it better suited for online media houses and news sources to have accurate news stories ranked high.

2.5 Yahoo! Search Engine

Yahoo! is one of the most popular search engines out there in the world currently. It is also believed to be the foundation for all other search engines such as Google. Yahoo! was created at Stanford University in the United States of America by two graduate students Jerry Yang and David Filo. Yahoo! was established in 1994 and was originally called "Jerry and David guide to the World Wide Web" Yahoo! as this World Wide Web guide functioned as a ranking system of other websites, which were all organized in a hierarchical form. Later on in April 1994, "Jerry and David

Guide to the World Wide Web” was renamed “Yahoo!” and their domain was created the next year.

Yahoo as a search engine, as of April 2017, makes up 11.7% of the United States Search Engine share. According to recent research one in every ten persons uses it on a daily basis. Yahoo as a search engine isn't as complicated as Google; the inbound algorithms for ranking their web contents are different. Yahoo! makes use of a simpler algorithm. It's easier for contents to rank high.

As a content developer or especially an online news reporter/journalist, content is king when it comes to optimization. According to another search engine Bing “ By providing clear, deep easy to find content on your website, we are more likely to index and show your content in search results. Ones content should be easy to navigate, rich and engaging to the visitor and provide them the information they seek. Just like Google, relevant and quality contents are one of your best bets to achieving a higher rank on Yahoo!

The average content writer/reporter therefore needs to have at least an average level of knowledge on Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) in order to create high ranking rate contents, news, editorials, articles, etc. on Yahoo!

2.6 Review of Empirical Studies

Introduction

Search Engine Optimisation and online journalism in this era are so interrelated that they are interdependent. Search engine needs content to rank and display while online journalism needs SEO to rank high. This interdependence leads to the realization that there is a need to fill in the knowledge gap in order to fully explore their interdependence.

In this section it will be explored, other scholars work in this field will be evaluated. Here, this work reviews Dimitrios Giomelekis, Andreas Veglis (March, 2015), research on “Employing Search Engine Optimisation Techniques in online News Articles”

2.6.1 Review of Dimitrios Giomelekis, Andreas Veglis (2015) “Employing Search Engine Optimisation Techniques in Online News Articles”.

The focus of this research work was to examine SEO (Search Engine Optimisation), its impact on visibility, evaluate modern day journalism, provide and suggest solutions on how to encourage modern day journalists and media practitioners to learn more Search Engine Optimisation.

It was expatiated in this work that Search Engine Optimisation has a major role to play in modern day journalism due to its influence in online contents visibility including written, audio or visual content. The various search engines make use of algorithms that affect the ranking of search results by readers. This thereby, creates a need for online journalists/writers to know how to rank high in these search results by readers through proper Search Engine Optimisation Knowledge. This opinion is supported by Dick (2011) “The processes involved in SEO can be significant to the entire online news production chain. Journalists are still writing to be read. The highest possible ratings and search engine

exploitation are a new reality, an adaptation to the new practices; therefore SEO can be described as a natural part of the journalistic work”.

However, Dimistios Giomelakis, Andreas Veglis (2015) in their study observed that there was a need for news rooms or media houses to employ SEO (Search Engine Optimisation) experts to carry out the SEO process. In their study they acknowledge the impact and importance of Search Engine Optimization but lean towards SEO experts doing the optimization for the news/media houses. For their study survey method was used to analyse the response from News room respondents.

From the above analysis given in the study, it was observed that Dimitrios Giomelakis and Andreas Veglis (2015), focused on the techniques used by the experts on SEO in the News room. They were more focused on SEO experts optimizing news stories for articles headlines and all being done by SEO experts but due to the changing times this research work focuses on the impact of SEO (Search Engine Optimisation) on modern day journalism with the focus being the need for journalism/media students (Mass Communication students) learning about the SEO

themselves in order to apply it in their future work on the field. This shows that unlike Dimitrios and Andrea's research work, this is more focused on the students learning journalism in Nigeria.

Therefore, since findings have not been made on the impact of SEO Knowledge on the visibility of web contents in modern day journalism, this creates need for future journalists and media practitioners to know more on Search Engine Optimisation in order to make their contents rank high and become visible to their readers. This creates a gap in knowledge that is to be filled by this project work with SEO expert lecturers input from the interview in later chapters.

2.7 Theoretical framework

In this research work, the theoretical frameworks adopted are two:

1. Gatekeeping Theory
2. Media-morphosis theory

1. Gatekeeping Theory

In order to delve deep into this theory and its relevance to this research, there is a need to have a basic understanding of the term

‘Gatekeeping’. Now ‘Gatekeeping’ can be said to be the process of selecting and filtering items of media that can be consumed by the public. This means gatekeeping falls into a role of agenda setting and data monitoring. The gatekeeping activities/decisions are made every day to sort out the relevant items, in this context news, articles, videos e.tc the audience will see.

Now focusing on the news room gatekeeping, the gatekeeper decides what information should move past them through the “information gate” to the group or individuals beyond and what information should not. For example, in the news room the editor plays the role of the gatekeeper. He/she will decide which story is published and choose news stories based on priorities considering their target audience.

The gatekeeping theory was first propounded by Kurt Lewin (1890-1947). His idea of the theory argued that the gatekeepers operate a complex field, in which the gatekeeper and its environment “have to be considered as one constellation”. This gatekeeping theory was used by mass communication and news dissemination by David Manning White.

He gave a seminal study on gatekeeping in 1950, investigating how editor of a local Newspaper, referred to as Mr. Gates, selected which messages were published.

Building on the Gatekeeping theory in relations to the concept of Search Engine Optimisation (SEO), the SEO algorithm has now become a modernized version of the gatekeeper. In the modern day news room, after a reporter passes the manual gatekeeper (editor), he or she will still need to pass the digital gatekeeper for online search engines in order to make their content visible and strategically positioned for their target audience. Just like the news channel has its own set of ethics, policies and biases through which the editor decides which news items will be published, aired or killed, the search engine algorithm plays this same role in a different capacity. Search Engine Optimisation as a digital gatekeeper ensures well written, TRUE and well optimized news contents or media contents are visible to its target audience or searchers.

Due to the gatekeeping factor of Search Engine Optimisation a modern day journalist needs to be enlightened on search engine optimization and its algorithm rules in order to have their web contents pass the gatekeeper. A good knowledge of its algorithm is the key to passing the gates.

Media-morphosis Theory

The new media theory 'Media-morphosis theory' is another theory related to the given project topic. Media-morphosis is a Mass Communication new media theory. The theory was coined in 1990 by Roger Fidler to the transformation of communication media. According to Fidler (1995, P5) "Media-morphosis is a unified way of thinking about technological evolution of Communication". He studied the communication system as a whole, he observed that the new media do not arise spontaneously and independently, they emerge gradually from the Media-morphosis of already existing ones. According to Biagi (2003) Media-morphosis was coined from two words. Media and Morphosis (a scientific term used to describe the way an organism or any of its parts

undergoes change) to create a new word to describe the simultaneous changes taking place in the media world today. Existing media evolve when a new one enters and each form is operating in a system where its evolution is dependent on evolution around it.

According to history the old and new media forms coexist, rather than the old ones dying. Although, we cannot doubt the obvious change in the way we share, produce and receive information. Even at that, these traditional media forms continued to coexist with the new media forms because no type of media exists in isolation, rather each incorporates features of technology and adapts to new landscape, Fiddler, Bender, Davenport (2005).

Building on the Media-morphosis theory on the transformation of communication media which occurs without the expulsion or death of the old media. This explains the growth of manual gatekeeping to the modern day gatekeeping process which has now gone digital with the search engine algorithm. In relations to the Media-morphosis theory, the gatekeeping experience in the media world has grown into the digital form

but the manual gatekeeping process hasn't died off, editors still check and determine which news story or content is more relevant and important to their target audience.

The role of the Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) algorithm is to play the same role by determining what web content deserves or is adequately written or optimized to be properly positioned or visible to its target audience. According to Nwammuo (2011) "The digital media that are emerging will be similar to the old media, yet different in ways that will make them distinct from their predecessors". So therefore Search Engine functions as a digitalized gatekeeper but still performing same role, with different tools and in a different way.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

To an average man research is known as the act of looking into a particular subject or phenomenon. Now according to Hampshire (2020) “Research is a process of systematic inquiry that entails collection of data, documentation of critical information, and analysis and interpretation of that data/information in accordance with methodologies set by specific professional fields and academic disciplines”. Research is conducted to evaluate the validity of a hypothesis or an interpretative framework to assemble a body of substantive knowledge(1985) also defined as the systematic and objective analysis and recording of controlled observations that may lead to the development, generalization, principles or theories, resulting in prediction and possibly ultimate control of events.

This chapter will be looking at the projects research design, population of study, its sample size, research instruments, sampling techniques, sources of data, data analysis, method, scope and limitation of the study.

3.1 Research Design

According to AdiBhat (2020) “Research design is the framework of research method and techniques chosen by a researcher. The design allows researchers to hone in on research methods and more that is suitable for the subject matter and set up their studies for success. It can also be explained as the arrangement of conditions for collection and analysis of data in a manner that aims to combine relevance to the research purpose with economy in procedure (Tonwe, 2014:77).

The research method that was chosen for this project work is the Sample Survey method of collecting data. Interviews were conducted on select SEO expert lecturers from the University of Benin. The interviews were in the forms of face to face and Telephone.

Furthermore, information for this research was gathered from books, articles, online journals, websites, and other sources of information.

3.2 Population of Study

Population of study means theselect people that are being observed or ought to be observed. Okwechime (2011:58) the population of study is “any group of individuals, items, that have one or more characteristics in common into what the research wants to study. This is the total number from which the researcher will draw his sample”.

Consequently, the population of study for this research involves all SearchEngine Optimisation expert lecturers in Benin. However it would be impossible to get all involved. Therefore sampling was applied.

3.3 Sampling Technique

The sampling technique that was adopted in this research work is the non-probability sampling technique. The specific one applied is the purposive sampling. In relations to the selection of the Purposive sampling technique, Ohaja (2003:82) adds “Purposive sampling is used when a

researcher seeks certain characteristics in his sampling elements and he wants to ensure that those chosen have those characteristics, he therefore, eliminates other members of the population and works with those that meet his requirements”. Ukala also asserts that the researcher can resort to purposive sampling and “pick his/her sample from the most appropriate class or stratum”.

There are Three Universities in Benin offering Computer Science. The study took a sample of University of Benin. The choice was arrived at after considering some variables which include its geographical location, present state of session and development.

3.4 Sample Size

The sample size for this study is Universities of Benin (UNIBEN). The researcher selected these schools computer science lecturers to give audience to the interview question, as such a study of a selected few will enable the Researcher draw conclusions as to what possible Influence search engine optimization can have on online contents and if it’s an added

advantage to a basic journalist. The data to be gathered from SEO experts in this institution would aid the researcher in carrying out the study.

3.5 Instrument of Data Collection

The instrument of data collection selected by the researcher is an Interview guide. The interview guide consists of ten questions. The selected instrument of data collection was specifically chosen to ensure that the interviewees were given enough space to express and speak on each given question.

The interview is for the Computer Science lecturers that are experts in Search Engine Optimisation. The selected Lecturers will be interviewed on this research topic and their opinions will be recorded, noted and later on evaluated.

3.6 Validity and Reliability

In order to ensure the reliability of the data collected, the interview questions were carefully developed by the Researcher and were duly reviewed by the supervisor and other professionals. The corrections were

noted and put in place to help create the final interview questions. Hence the interview guide can be said to be reliable.

To ensure that adequate information was gotten, the researcher chose to use Primary and Secondary data collection sources. The Primary data collected were sourced from various Search Engine Optimisation expert lecturers. The instrument use to source from the Primary source was an Interview guide. While the secondary data were mostly published online articles, journals and published literature on the object of the study, they were taken from libraries, various books and academic websites.

3.7 Method of Data collection

The questions on the interview guide were administered on the various Computer Science Lecturers in the selected university. Different methods were applied in the collection of needed data; some of them were interviewed in face-to-face interviews and some through Telephone. Let it be noted that they answered the same questions and each interview was in depth.

3.8 Method of Data Analysis

After the interview was conducted and questions were answered by respondents the data collected was analysed through Qualitative analysis. This method was selected because it gave an in depth evaluation of all answers given by the interview respondents. The information gotten from the interview was evaluated based on its quality.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter entails the data presentation and analysis. The analysis will be qualitative in nature and will be arranged from Respondent 1 to 3. Each lecturer's response will be evaluated separately to avoid confusion.

Demographic of the Interviewees

Out of 3 respondents, 3 of them are University of Benin Computer Science lecturers, two females and a male.

Table 4.1: Category of Informants

S/N	Gender	Numbers	Age
1	Male	1	20-60
2	Female	2	20-60

4.1 Data Presentation

Respondent 1

Interview with Dr. P.E. Ebietomere: A Current lecturer at the University of Benin in the Department of Computer Science, Edo State.

Researcher: How would you describe the concept of Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)?

Dr. P. E. Ebietomere: Thank you very much for that question, the concept of search engine optimization is deep but we'll look at it from the lame man perspective. First I will like to break the concept into search engine first then I'll talk about search engine optimisation. Well search engine to a reasonable extent can be seen as a tool that can help you get content, this content could be videos, documents or anything searchable via the internet. This search engine came with the advent of the internet and we know that the internet is like the air we breathe these days, without it we cannot do most things as it stands. Since contents are now moving into the internet, retrieving these contents is now really important and getting this content, in getting them we need this search engines as tools.

When we talk about search engine optimization, it's just like a way of making a content available to whoever is looking for the content, not only that but making sure that of all that is retrieved using these search engines the one that will be at the top are well optimized. When we are able to get

contents at the very top of a search result, then you'll say that that particular content is well optimized. So if your content must appear at that very top it means that there are some things you need to do to make that happen. Search engine optimization is a way of making your page, content or website appear at the very top of the lists each time the information is being retrieved from the internet.

Researcher: In what ways do you think Search Engine optimization affects online contents visibility?

Dr. P. E. Ebietomere: Since everything is now on the internet and all we are searching for to a reasonable extent they are all online. When you put a content on the internet you want to make sure that every searcher in any domain of our choice, e.g. book on software engineering, if my content(the book) is properly optimized using a search engine then each time someone searches for that you will see that my content (the book) will be at the top. When you see it at the top this should tell you that the content is well optimized. Optimisation will ensure that whatever one is searching for appears at the top of the results. That is why we always say

that it is good to optimize, so anybody that is looking for it will always see it.

Researcher: In what ways has the availability of Search Engines like Google and Yahoo! affected modern day online content sharing?

Dr. P. E. Ebietomere: The availability of these search engines has simply changed the content sharing game. There is ease, comfortability and storage of data or information. This even goes to news and articles.

Researcher: How does Google and Yahoo! Search engine algorithms affect online contents rank?

Dr. P. E. Ebietomere: Algorithms for content rank exists for all search engines and you cannot say one is better than the other but in terms of robustness and popularity we know Google and Yahoo! stand out but in recent times Google is used by most persons. When it comes to ranking every search engine has its own algorithm when it comes to ranking but the thing is when you optimize, what you do is an addition to the algorithm that is being used by that search engine. This could be through you doing things like proper linking, keyword use etc. when you optimize you are

trying to make it better. In what you are doing, you are not altering the algorithm per say but you are making it work to your favour.

Researcher: Is it possible to have content optimized for Google but it isn't optimized for Yahoo?

Dr. P. E. Ebietomere: It's possible, very possible. It depends on which of the search engines you optimized. Some persons will register their page with a particular search engine. That is why a content that you find in say Yahoo and it ranks high when you use Google its possible t will rank at a different number.

Researcher: In what ways does Search Engine Optimisation affect modern day journalism?

Dr. P. E. Ebietomere: I think in several ways but I'll talk on one. Everything has gone online. The Internet is like a sea of data. Just like a sea once one search for something online, the information returned is very large and often a time the information there may not be what you need. You will need to start going through the information to see the one that best suits what you are looking for. At times the first to second, most sometimes fiftiethpage does not have the information. Let's say the

information needed is on the last page. Most searchers don't have that patience. So to avoid this journalists, for news, information or content, when they are optimized they will not appear on the fiftieth page but on the first and whoever is looking for such information, news etc. will easily see it.

Researcher: Should journalist use Search Engine Optimisation practices to write and why?

Dr. P.E. Ebietomere: YES, I think they should. Just like I earlier explained if they don't their information may never be seen and we know that if one has a content and it isn't seen, it is as though the content does not exist. So when modern day journalist optimize, it means their content will be seen and once that happens it means your passing the necessary information and whatever to those that need it.

Researcher: How does Search engine optimization affect contents rank in Search results?

Dr. P.E. Ebietomere: I think I've mentioned that it will ensure that that particular content appears at the top of search results list at all times. If you don't optimize it may never be seen. There are so many information that we say are not online which is not true, an individual's combination of

words is important. Google uses synthetic search (it uses keywords) so it is the keywords that you use then help you optimize or show you your result.

Researcher: In what ways can Search Engine Optimisation related to Mass communication students?

Dr. P.E. Ebietomere: There is a relationship. When one talks about journalism you can't take away mass communication students. They as journalists will always want to create content and we know most of these contents are going online. If their contents are going online they should consider search engine optimization. They should because it will help their contents a lot.

Researcher: How can Journalists practically apply Search Engine Optimisation when writing?

Dr. P.E. Ebietomere: They should use keywords, proper linking and more.

RESPONDENT 2

Interview with Professor (Mrs.) A. Egwali: A lecturer of the department of Computer Science, University of Benin, Edo state.

Researcher: How would you describe the concept of Search Engine Optimisation(SEO) ?

Professor (Mrs.) A. Egwali: Search Engine Optimization is the act of upgrading a site to be more efficient.

Researcher: In what ways do you think Search Engine optimization affects online contents visibility?

Professor (Mrs.) A. Egwali: Of course it helps contents to be visible.

When a web content is optimized it is streamlined to the searcher.

Researcher: In what ways does Search Engine Optimisation affect modern day journalism?

Professor (Mrs.) A. Egwali: It helps the contents to be seen when searched for.

Researcher: In what ways has the availability of Search Engines like Google and Yahoo! affected modern day online content sharing?

Professor (Mrs.) A. Egwali: It has helped the online sharing game really well.

RESPONDENT 3

Interview with Dr. (Mrs.) V. I. Osubor: who is a lecturer in the University of Benin, Computer Science Department, Edo State.

Researcher: How would you describe the concept of Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)?

Dr. (Mrs.) V. I. Osubor: It enables document retrieval to be done in the shortest possible time. It helps in retrieval of relevant information needed by the user.

Researcher: In what ways do you think Search Engine optimization affects online contents visibility?

Dr. (Mrs.) V. I. Osubor: It pulls information according to field of interest.

Contents retrieved according to specialty can be defined. User profile will be defined as similar contents related to specific users will be retrieved together. It will also help in knowing the user of a particular profile.

Researcher: In what ways has the availability of Search Engines like Google and Yahoo! affected modern day online content sharing?

Dr. (Mrs.) V. I. Osubor: Links can easily be shared faster. Minimal time is used for sharing information. The task of sharing is made easy.

Researcher: How does Google and Yahoo! Search engine algorithm affect online contents rank?

Dr. (Mrs.) V. I. Osubor: Google and yahoo search algorithms affect online content rank positively. The ranking is in increasing order of di-similarity. i.e. as the number increases the level of the ranking di-similarity also increases.

Researcher: Is it possible to have content optimized for google but it isn't optimized for yahoo?

Dr. (Mrs.) V. I. Osubor: Yes because they are operating on different algorithms. Google major task is information search and retrieval. Hence, this makes Google search more optimized than yahoo.

Researcher: In what ways does Search Engine optimisation affect modern day journalism?

Dr. (Mrs.) V. I. Osubor: In developing their contents for authentic information to track and block fake news, for online broadcasting of information to cause conflict and also make peace enhancing information publicity.

Researcher: Should journalist use Search Engine Optimisation practices to write and why?

Dr. (Mrs.) V. I. Osubor: Yes. It is a veritable tool to use because it can help them to retrieve required contents in reduced time.

Researcher: How does Search engine optimization affect contents rank in Search results?

Dr. (Mrs.) V. I. Osubor: By using similarity measurement for easy prioritization in terms of meaning

Researcher: In what ways is Search Engine Optimisation related to Mass communication students?

Dr. (Mrs.) V. I. Osubor: Up-to-date and accurate information is made available to them.

Researcher: How can Journalists practically apply Search Engine Optimisation when writing?

Dr. (Mrs.) V. I. Osubor: By Using Keywords, optimized headlines and adding the right links to the write-ups and lots more.

4.2 Discussion of Findings

This study aimed to identify the influence of Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) on online contents in modern day journalism. The results obtained in this study showcases that not many people, most especially journalists are aware of the power of search engine optimization on their web contents. One fact that was agreed on by all respondents was that modern day journalism has moved to the internet with the creation of the internet. While most agreed that Modern day journalism is now global few didn't know to what extent Search engine Optimisation affects modern day journalism.

This is due to the fact that this information is usually reserved for thorough experts in the field but the average journalist needs to know how digital technologies like Search Engine Optimisation can affect his/her contents.

4.2.1 Does Search Engine Optimisation help content visibility?

Furthermore, the findings in this work observed that research question one is answered with the results of the interview question 1-2.

The responses attained from all respondents does agree that Search Engine Optimisation does indeed have a high level of influence on online contents visibility because it controls and determines which content gets seen before the other and also reveals the content that is related to the searchers keyword.

Although all responses given are valid I agree more with Respondent number 1 over the response of respondent number 3. This is so because the response of respondent 1 is in line with the empirical work reviewed“Employing Search Engine Optimisation Techniques in Online News Articles” Dimitrios Giomelekis, Andreas Veglis (2015). In the literary work it was stated that Search Engine Optimisation affected online contents visibility bythe various search engines making use of algorithms that affect the ranking of search results for readers.

4.2.2 To what extent does journalist’s knowledge on Search Engine Optimisation affect their web contents visibility?

The findings in this study observed that research question 2 is answered by the responses gotten from the interview questions 5, 6 and 8.

Journalists having knowledge on modern technological trends truly affect their contents visibility and viewership. A journalist who is more aware and makes use of all these new techniques and technology is at an advantage compared to those who don't. According to Dick (2011) "The processes involved in SEO can be significant to the entire online news production chain. Journalists are still writing to be read. The highest possible ratings and search engine exploitation are a new reality, an adaptation to the new practices; therefore SEO can be described as a natural part of the journalistic work".

4.2.3 What is the importance of Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) to web journalists?

Research Question 3 is answered by the responses attained from interview question 7 and 8. Over the course of this study website journalists i.e. online journalists have been discovered to have an interdependent relationship with Search Engine Optimisation whether they are aware or not. From the findings Research question 3 is answered because Search Engine Optimisation is important to web journalists due to

its duty of ranking which content is ranked high and seen by the searchers or browsers.

This is further explained by respondent 1's reply "...that it will ensure that that particular content appears at the top of search results list at all times. If you don't optimize it may never be seen." Basically Search Engine Optimisation to web journalists determines if their content will be seen. Respondent one's reply resonates with me more compared to that than Respondent Three. Respondent 1 simply hit the nail on the head because every journalist or media house wants their contents seen so this directs to Search Engine Optimisation.

4.2.4 What makes role does Google and Yahoo play in web content sharing?

All respondents agreed that search engines like Google and Yahoo have revolutionized the content sharing game. Respondent 3 said "Links can easily be shared faster. Minimal time is used for sharing information. The task of sharing is made easy." Also respondent 1 concurred with the answer given, he said "The availability of these search engines has simply changed the content sharing game. There is ease, comfortability and

storage of data or information. This even goes to news and articles”. The case studies of this work are two of the most popular search engines used in the world today and their creation has indeed changed how information is attained, exchanged and stored.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This chapter summarizes the details of what the study is about, the method used in collecting data and the finding of the collected data.

5.1 Summary

The primary aim of this study was to determine the influence of Search Engine Optimisation on web contents in modern day journalism using two of the most popular search engines as case studies. The research was carried out using the survey method, which was purposively deemed appropriate by the researcher and the Project supervisor.

Based on the survey method adopted, interview questions were used as an instrument to get response of (3) three respondents on these interview questions.

- i. How would you describe the concept of Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)?
- ii. In what ways do you think Search Engine optimization affects online contents visibility?
- iii. In what ways has the availability of Search Engines like Google and Yahoo! affected modern day online content sharing?
- iv. How does Google and Yahoo! Search engine algorithms affect online contents rank?

- v. Is it possible to have content optimized for Google but it isn't optimized for yahoo?
- vi. In what ways does Search Engine Optimisation affect modern day journalism?
- vii. Should journalist use Search Engine Optimisation practices to write and why?
- viii. How does Search engine optimization affect contents rank in Search results?
- ix. In what ways is Search Engine Optimisation related to Mass communication students?
- x. How can Journalists practically apply Search Engine Optimisation when writing?

From the responses gathered from the respondents through the interview, the following were the findings of the study:

- i. Search Engine Optimisation is the act of enhancing contents, websites or pages to ensure that they are ranked high in the algorithm.

- ii. Search Engine Optimisation affects online contents visibility by determining their ranking points and value through the search engines algorithm.
- iii. These search engines have changed the way content is shared and made it all easy and also accessible.
- iv. Simply put the algorithms determine what is optimised for the public.
- v. Each search engine has its own algorithm and ranks to its own taste, its possible to please one and at the same time displease the other.
- vi. By determining what content ranks high and what can be easily found by searchers.
- vii. Yes journalists need to use Search Engine Optimisation practices, reason being that they need searchers to see their contents.
- viii. It ensures that well optimized contents are seen and ranked high.
- ix. Yes, there is a relationship. Mass Communications students need to learn Search Engine Optimisation so their web contents can be seen.
- x. using keywords, proper linking, strong headline casting and more.

5.2 Conclusion

The conclusions on this study are based on the findings on the objectives of the study which focused on the influence of Search Engine Optimisation on website contents visibility and how this plays a role in modern day journalism. The study findings has led to the conclusion that Search Engine Optimisation truly has a positive influence on web contents visibility through the various algorithms used by some search engines like Google and Yahoo!, it also influences modern day journalism. Even though modern day journalism is facing the challenge of journalists accepting New Medias or learning how to use them; it can be promoted and utilized which will aid the spread of information or contents.

5.3 Recommendation

Based on the results of the study, the following recommendations have been made:

1. Journalists on all levels should accept Search Engine Optimisation practices and should learn it in order to know how to apply them when writing and uploading contents to the internet.
2. Media houses should train their writers on how to make use of Search Engine Optimisation to their advantage and also employ SEO professionals to optimize their websites and pages,
3. Search Engine Optimisation should be added to Universities curriculum for Mass Communication students. This is so they learn it before hand and before stepping into the journalistic field.
4. Media houses should keep their contents in hard copy but they should also move their contents to the internet. This ensures more viewers, readers and listeners because almost everyone is online.

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APPENDIX I



Department of Mass Communication,
Faculty of Arts,
University of Benin.
Ekehuan Campus.
Benin city, Nigeria.
1st of April, 2021.

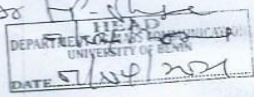
To:
The Head of Department
Computer Science,
University of Benin,
Benin City, Nigeria.

Through:
The Head of Department,
Mass Communication, Faculty of Arts,
University Of Benin, Benin city, Nigeria.

The beneficiary is a final year student currently working on her project. Please kindly assist her necessary assistance. Thank you.

AND
Project Supervisor
Mass Communication, Faculty of Arts,
University Of Benin, Benin city, Nigeria.

Approved
Sharon Shael
01.04.2021




REQUEST FOR AN INTERVIEW FOR A REASEARCH PROJECT WORK

Good day sir/ma'am, my name is Ekeopara Onyinyechi Daniella, a student of University of Benin from the department of Mass Communication. I am writing to humbly request for an interview opportunity with four of your lecturers for my ongoing project research work titled "The influence of Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) on the visibility of web content in modern day journalism, a study on Google and Yahoo"


Due to the nature of the work, there is a need for expert insight on the research work which I believe your highly intellectual lecturers can help contribute to my project work.

Because of the urgency of the work and the on ground deadline, I will appreciate it if I am granted an audience for the interview, before or by next week. I can be contacted by email daniellaeke2000@gmail.com and smartphone on 09064662907.

Thank you in anticipation of a favorable response.

Yours sincerely,


APPENDIX II



Department of Mass Communication,
Faculty of Arts,
University of Benin.
Ekehuan Campus.
Benin city, Nigeria.
1st of April, 2021.

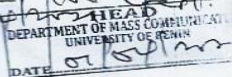
To:
The Head of Department
Computer Science,
University of Benin,
Benin City, Nigeria.

Through:
The Head of Department,
Mass Communication, Faculty of Arts,
University Of Benin, Benin city, Nigeria.

AND
Project Supervisor
Mass Communication, Faculty of Arts,
University Of Benin, Benin city, Nigeria.

*The lecturer is a final year student
currently working on her projects
Please kindly attend her request
assistance. Thank you very much.
Or for this only*

*Approved,
Shalshael
01.04.2021*




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Due to the nature of the work, there is a need for expert insight on the research work which I believe your highly intellectual lecturers can help contribute to my project work.

Because of the urgency of the work and the on ground deadline, I will appreciate it if I am granted an audience for the interview, before or by next week. I can be contacted by email daniellaeke2000@gmail.com and smartphone on.09064662907.

Thank you in anticipation of a favorable response.

Yours sincerely,

Ekeopara Onyinyechi Daniella.

*The following staff will attend
to you -
01/04/2021*

APPENDIX III INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- i. How would you describe the concept of Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)?
- ii. In what ways do you think Search Engine optimization affects online contents visibility?
- iii. In what ways has the availability of Search Engines like Google and Yahoo! affected modern day online content sharing?
- iv. How does Google and Yahoo! Search engine algorithms affect online contents rank?

- v. Is it possible to have content optimized for Google but it isn't optimized for yahoo?
- vi. In what ways does Search Engine Optimisation affect modern day journalism?
- vii. Should journalist use Search Engine Optimisation practices to write and why?
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- ix. In what ways is Search Engine Optimisation related to Mass communication students?
- x. How can Journalists practically apply Search Engine Optimisation when writing?