INTERACTIVITY IN ONLINE JOURNALISM: A CASE STUDY OF THE INTERACTIVE NATURE OF NIGERIA'S ONLINE *GUARDIAN*

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ABSTRACT

Interactivity is a distinguishing feature of the online environment but online newspapers have been slow in recognising interactivity as an essential condition of effective Web communication. Existing research show online newspapers generally offer few and token interactive options.

This research explored interactivity in online journalism using Nigeria's online *Guardian* as a case study exploring the nature, levels and utilisation of interactivity and interactive features on the site.

This study found that few interactive options are offered in Nigeria's online *Guardian* and those interactive options on offer just produced an illusion of interactivity; it was apparent that little effort was made to give interactive options on the site the significant attention they deserve. The study highlighted the difference between the availability and use of interactive features on an online newspaper site: the mere presence of such features does not necessarily speak to the levels or nature of interactivity on the site.

The difficulty in obtaining findings for the qualitative aspect of this study spoke significantly to the findings in light of the fact that these were attempts using interactive options provided by the newspaper site. They stress what relevant literature highlights: the mere presence of interactive features is not in itself interactivity.

Factors contributing to the low levels of interactivity in Nigeria's online *Guardian* include lack of technical expertise plus human and financial resources and the persistence of a mindset that hinders the development and integration of new information communication technologies and interactivity in online journalism.

Theoretically, the possibilities are vast but the likelihood of translating theory into reality appears slim. For Nigeria's online *Guardian* to become interactive in a participatory way, it must undergo changes and choices about values, goals and standards. There must be a shift in attitudes and approaches towards news-content production and delivery as well as the problematic commercial aspects of electronic publishing routines and the effect of such choices on management and newsroom organisation.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my loving parents, Rev. and Mrs. Folayan, in appreciation of all their selfless love, sacrifice and support.

To all the journalists in Nigeria, giving their all and making do with the resources that are available, this is for you too. Thank you for the inspiration, keep on upholding the integrity of journalism in the country. It is my hope that this study spurs you on to make true interactivity a practical reality in online journalism.

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I could not have done this on my own and I would like to acknowledge the help and support of those who have made it possible for me to see this through to the end:

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1. CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY.

1.1. Introduction.

> The traditional media of the Fourth Estate (originally called 'the Press') are
> converging with computing and telecommunications to create nothing less
> than a new medium of human communication with the Net at its heart
> (Don Tapscott in Riley et al. 1998).

The excitement surrounding the Internet lies precisely in its capability to do and offer things no other medium can. Interactivity is one such thing and this distinguishing quality of the Internet is hailed as the primary characteristic of new technologies. According to Schultz (1999), the Internet has the potential to increase interactive attempts and options in journalism. Kenny et al. (2000) say interactivity is one of the features that distinguish new media from traditional mass media because of its ability to empower the reader. Interactivity has been referred to as the main discerning characteristic of the online environment, which is especially of essential importance in the consideration of online journalism (Deuze 1999; Millison 1999). Reddick and King (1995:236), call it a Web-specific characteristic.

The importance of interactivity is reflected by the fact that it is the cause of a call for a reassessment of communication research, grabbing the attention of communication scholars since the latter half of the 1990s (Singer 1998; Rafaeli & Sudweeks 1997; Kenny et al. 2000).

According to McMillan (2002:163), the early 1990s saw an explosion of the use of the term 'interactivity' in the popular, trade and scholarly press. This sudden interest and excitement that arose around the concept of interactivity in relation to the Internet gained new heights, to the extent that interactivity has become a catch-phrase in all computer mediated circles, an ideal with so much potential, an ideal to be striven for and attained at almost any cost. This study explores interactivity in online journalism, using the online edition of Nigeria's *Guardian* as a case study to measure just how much, and in what ways the interactive quality of the Internet can be used as a feature of online newspapers. It further discusses the implications and significance of such interactivity in online journalism.

This chapter will briefly introduce and place the study within the context of interactivity in online journalism. It will also give background information on Nigeria's online *Guardian*, relating this especially to the national and historical context. The chapter will then briefly discuss the research problem, the aims, objectives and significance of the study and finally, the methods and procedures that the study will employ to address the issues at hand.

Chapter two will undertake a discussion of two key areas central to the study: online journalism and interactive options. The chapter will then go on to provide a theoretical framework for the study and discuss relevant models of communication and audience. It will discuss the concept of interactivity, exploring not only the more abstract and philosophical discussions around it but also highlighting core explications of interactivity. The chapter will use the various theories, discussions and existing research presented to construct a set of criteria for answering the research question.

Chapter three will discuss the methods of research that will be employed within this research, giving a detailed step-by-step analysis of how these methods and procedures will be applied to the questions raised within the study. It will also provide a theoretical foundation for the relevant quantitative and qualitative methods and break down the problem statement, goals and objectives of the study into specific questions to be addressed.

Chapter four will present the results of the research undertaken within this study and use those findings as a basis for discussions and interpretations around the research. The chapter will also undertake a discussion of the problems and challenges encountered by the researcher during the course of the study.

Chapter five summarises what the study has set out to accomplish as well as the issues and findings that have been discussed. It provides a conclusion to the study and discusses the scope for further research around some of the issues that have been raised.

1.2. Research Problem Statement.

This study tackles the very broad issue of interactivity in online journalism; it is specifically a case study of the interactive nature of Nigeria's Online *Guardian*. It will examine to what extent and in what ways the interactive quality of the Internet is a feature of one of the online newspapers in Nigeria (*The Guardian*).

The subject of interactivity in online journalism is both broad and diverse and this is one of the main reasons why this research has selected a case study as its focus: case studies allow for an in-depth analysis of the subject of focus. Bryman (1989:173-174) says that case studies can be utilised in an exploratory manner in order to gain insights into a previously uncharted area and that is exactly what this study proposes to do. Interactivity in online journalism within the Nigerian context is exactly that: an 'uncharted' area. Even within the European and North American context where the concept of interactivity and its associated technologies and skill were adopted much earlier, this area of research is still in its developing stages. Kenny et al. (2000) says that few people have studied interactive features of online newspapers and according to Schultz (1999), there have only been a few systematic content analyses of online media published so far.

Wimmer and Dominick (1994:154) also highlight the advantages of a case study to the researcher who is engaged in exploratory research. They maintain, however, that case studies can also be used for the purpose of gathering both descriptive and explanatory data and its use should not be confined solely to the exploratory stages of research.

It is true that while case study implies the study of one case, many examples of case study research do tend to focus on two or more sites in order to enhance generalisability of the research as well as to allow the special features of cases to be identified much more readily through comparisons (Bryman 1989:171). The case study does, however, include both single and multiple cases (Wimmer & Dominick 1994:154). Examples of single case studies can include the study of an individual, a group, an institution or a document while multiple case studies refer to comparative case study research (Pitout in Du Plooy 1995:121). This study is a single case study.

1.3. Aims and Objectives of the Study.

The purpose of this study is to determine if and to what extent one of Nigeria's online newspapers, *The Guardian*, incorporates the interactive quality of the Internet in its online site. This study will ask and seek to answer questions about the levels of interactivity, the provision of interactive features and the nature and the utilisation of these features on the newspaper site. The study will specifically highlight the provisions (if any) and nature of features on the newspaper site that allow for interaction between the readers and the paper, interaction amongst readers and the significance of these interactions.

1.4. Context.

1.4.1. Interactivity in Online Journalism.

According to Schultz (2000:205-206), from as far back as Habermas arguing the imposition of a "don't talk back" format on audiences in 1962, the lack of interactivity and limited one-way communication in traditional mass media has been an area of concern and dissatisfaction for many intellectuals. Scholars and practitioners have repeatedly bemoaned the lack of communication between audiences and journalists. The tradition of an emancipatory media theory is concerned mostly with the problem of people easily becoming passive consumers of mass media's manipulated or commercialised content; a problem probably arising in part because "the old mass media produced their messages largely independent from the audiences" (Schultz 2000:206).

Interactivity has been and continues to be hailed as a key feature of the Internet, a quality that distinguishes it from traditional media. Attempts to incorporate this feature of the Internet into journalistic ventures online have also served to distinguish what has come to be termed 'online journalism' from its more traditional counterparts, the mass print and broadcast media. While interactivity is not unique to new media, McMillan (2002:163) states that new media do facilitate interactivity in new environments. The link that is assumed between interactivity and new media is understandable, however, because as McMillan (2002:163) points out: it is in the context of new media that the concept of interactivity has become a widely recognised subject of exploration.

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The Internet provides an interactive component that is lacking in the print media and even in television; its greatest strength and distinguishing factor is its ability to support simultaneous and interactive communications among many people (Ott & Rosser 2000:142). Perlman (2002) also upholds interactivity as the one feature that clearly distinguishes the online medium from all others, maintaining that while the broadcast medium may be as immediate and the print medium may offer as much depth, there is no medium that can perform or accomplish interactivity like the online medium can. McQuail (2000:128) maintains that new media in general does have a capacity to be more interactive, especially in comparison with more traditional or 'old' media.

For the purposes of this study, the term 'traditional media' is being used to mean non-interactive mass (specifically print) media. This enables straightforward comparisons between online newspapers (one of which is the subject of this study) and its counterpart, the traditional print newspaper.

The more abstract and philosophical discussions around the concept of interactivity will be explored in more detail in the next chapter but for now it will suffice to say that interactivity is the chief and discerning characteristic of new technologies and the online environment. Interactive online journalism has the capability to make the reader a part of the news experience, to enable readers to actively pursue or seek out news and content that they want rather than passively being informed (Kenny et al. 2000; Deuze 1999). It has the ability to enable readers to control the information coming at them and to be active rather than passive recipients (Cuenca 1998). Interactive media can also blur the lines between the receivers and senders of a mediated message (Singer 1998).

Rafaeli and Sudweeks (1997) argue that interactivity is a continuum as well as a variable, and not just a condition of communication settings. In other words, interactivity is not just a condition that exists within communication settings of new media but rather a construct that is related to and achieved through a process or processes within such communication settings.

This explication of interactivity highlights an important point: interactivity does not necessarily just exists or is inherent within new communication technologies such as the Internet; it is instead something that must be aimed for and worked at in order for its full potential to be achieved and realised.

According to Millison (1999), traditional print journalism steers readers and it does so by using narrative momentum and a strong editorial voice to pull them through a linear narrative. Online journalism, on the other hand, allows readers to get more involved and become participants as they click their way through a hyperlinked set of pages. Interactivity makes it possible for the reader to progress through the material in non-linear ways through the use of numerous and diverse navigation pathways, branching options and hyperlinks that encourage the reader to continue to delve into various narrative threads. It is not only the reader that benefits from the interactivity that the Internet offers; according to Reddick and King (1995:236), the World Wide Web allows journalists to combine different kinds of information in both new and different ways. Interactivity plays a key role in enabling them to do so.

Although online journalism has the interactive capacity to blur the sender/receiver roles of journalists and readers, communication roles are interchangeable; traditionally, there have been few direct opportunities for interactive communication offered to audiences within journalism (Schultz 1999, 2000). Riley et al. (1998) observed that online newspapers have been slow in recognising interactivity as an essential condition of effective Web communication.

The concept of interactivity is a complex one indeed and as such it is very difficult to provide an exact definition for it. The problem of definition is also largely due to the fact that it is still a relatively new concept within the area of communication studies. Rafaeli (1988); calls it an under-defined concept with narrowly based explications while Kenny et al. (2000) say it is a concept that few have defined. Schultz (2002:164) observes that many scholars have remarked on the fact that the term 'interactivity' is often either undefined or under-defined. Nevertheless, this section highlighted some key definitions and explications that exist on the subject within the area of communication studies and research and especially those that will prove significant for the purpose of this study.

Chapter two of this study will further aim to provide a detailed and multifaceted theoretical framework around the concept of interactivity and attempts to use this theory to define exactly what interactivity is and what it means for and within online journalism.

1.4.2. Nigeria's Online *Guardian* and the Nigerian Context.

Africa is a newly independent continent; relatively speaking at least and the 1990s saw democratic reforms on the African continent off to a slow and shaky start (Ott & Rosser 2000:139; Bourgault 1995:206-225). Nigeria, for instance, was returned to civilian rule on 29 May 1999 and this signalled the beginning of a difficult and challenging process of restoration from years of military rule and associated political and social unrest. Ott and Rosser (2000:139) state that it is particularly in such an environment that the indirect effects of electronic communication are often the most critical because by contributing to both free speech and the free flow of information, electronic communication (specifically the Internet) has unmistakably demonstrated its potential to boost the power of the African citizen vis-à-vis the state, with beneficial effects for liberalisation and democratisation programmes.

Suppression of the press and regulation of the media in general is a practice that is deeply rooted in Nigeria's history. It has especially been the common practice of the country's military regimes, which have ruled the nation for 29 of its 43 years of independence. According to Bedu-Addo (1997), the relationship between the Nigerian press and politicians in the country has been characterised by continuous wrangling for most of the country's history since independence. He further states that in order to stifle the press, the country's governments have made relentless attacks through the use of both judicial and extra-judicial measures.

In the face of all the repression, journalists in Nigeria have continued to publish without fear and in more cases than not, fighting against such restriction of the press. This has in turn led many commentators (including the Nigerian government) to describe the press in Nigeria as the freest in sub-Saharan Africa (Bedu-Addo 1997). The Nigerian press has always been regarded as one of the most vibrant on the continent. A country profile on the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) News website refers to the Nigerian media scene as on of the most vibrant in Africa (BBC News Country Profile 2003).

The brave practices of the Nigerian press have often resulted in a high level of political participation by citizens. A relationship of reciprocal commitment and support between the press and the citizens of Nigeria is deeply rooted in the country's history. For example, a high level of new newspapers and brave editorial opinions characterised much of the post-colonial period from as far back as 1979. This resulted in a high level of political participation and the press was recognised for upholding the basic objectives of the constitution as well as for holding government accountable to the people even in the face of considerable government interference (Bedu-Addo 1997).

The most unrelenting attack on journalists began under the regime of General Ibrahim Babangida in 1985. It was during this time that the famous Dele Giwa, editor-in-chief of the weekly publication *Newswatch*, was assassinated after being rumoured to be working on a story implicating the president and his wife in drug smuggling activities. The detention of journalists for trivial and insignificant reasons was common practice, as was the banning of newspapers on a regular basis (Bedu-Addo 1997).

The trend continued when notorious military leader, General Sani Abacha, came to power in 1993; six months later, journalist and leader of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), Ken Saro-Wiwa, was arrested on charges that are widely believed to be false. In spite of widespread national and international protests, Abacha had Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni activists executed. He also placed a ban on three independent newspaper groups in 1995. These are just a few examples of what has for a long time been the norm for journalists and the journalism profession in Nigeria. The death of Abacha in 1998 symbolically brought an end to a decade-long legacy of antagonism and repression of the Nigerian media.

President Olusegun Obasanjo became a civilian head of state in 1999 and was again elected president for a second term in April 2003 in Nigeria's first civilian-run presidential poll for 20 years. Media freedom has improved significantly for the Nigerian press and a new hope has invigorated the country once deemed one of the world's most dangerous countries for practising journalism. Although the president is said to view the press with disdain and during his former regime as a military ruler, harassment of the press was intensified, his hands are now tied under a democratic dispensation and constitution. Restrictive decrees remain in force, however, and press groups are opposed to continuing government control over the media (BBC News Country Profile 2003).

The *Guardian* is one of Nigeria's most professional and successful newspapers; started in 1983, the paper came onto the newsstands with a standard that has become the envy of most Nigerian newspapers. Its owners set out to establish a paper based on an independence of opinion and a balanced coverage of views. Impressed and motivated by the professionalism of The *Guardian* in the United Kingdom, the paper's financier sought to replicate its standards in Nigeria. The *Guardian* is considered one the most authoritative of newspapers in Nigeria and possibly most of Africa (Bedu-Addo 1997).

The *Guardian* is an independent newspaper/site. It is a liberal newspaper/site that claims to be committed to the ideals of a republican democracy, to the individual freedoms and rights of all citizens and to upholding the need for probity in public life. According to Bedu-Ado (1997), most of the Nigerian press, especially the independent press, see themselves as guardians of democracy.

Online newspapers or Internet sites of well-established media can, and therefore should, play a decisive role as forums of valid information and serious debate. They have the support of professional editors and in addition, have a wide and varied reach in terms of readers, more so than most of the lesser known newsgroups, bulletin boards or listservers (Schultz 2000). In the Nigerian context, *The Guardian* is such a paper, it is a well-established newspaper in the country and it has a wide reach both on and off line.

The Press in Nigeria is in a unique position as the forum of debate and a reflector of public opinion (Bedu-Addo 1997). It is important that their presence online also reflects and assumes this unique role and one of the most significant ways in which it can do this is to ensure it realises and benefits from the potential that interactivity offers within online journalism.

1.5. Significance of the Study.

> Interactivity is quintessentially a communication concept… its time has come for communication research. Interactivity is a special intellectual niche reserved for communication scholars. (Rafaeli in Jensen 1998:185).

The hype surrounding the concept of interactivity involves expectations regarding its possibilities. In terms of its potential and possibilities, the concept of interactivity seems to be loaded with positive implications along the lines of grassroots democracy, political independence and individual freedom of choice (Jensen 1998:185).

The significance of the Internet may not appear to be all that astounding for those who enjoy the benefits of a truly democratic state that respects the freedom of expression among its citizens. However, in countries where the mainstream media have a history of being tightly controlled and where freedom of the press is just a lofty ideal that is rarely observed, the Internet takes on a new significance. In fact, it is particularly with

respect to the mounting need for democratisation that the Internet promises the greatest potential in the developing world. The Internet strengthens the very foundations of democratic governance by not only providing a public forum in which citizens can express themselves freely but by also aiding greater transparency and accountability on behalf of 'elected' leaders (Uimonen 2000).

Ever since the advent of the Internet, there have been numerous cases where journalists have managed to obtain crucial information from the Internet, information that had been concealed from the public by national governments; this happened in Nigeria under military rule (Ott & Rosser 2000:139). Similarly, in Zambia and Liberia, for example, there have been instances where newspapers have published online in defiance of government bans (Ott & Rosser 2000:139). Cases like these go to show the immense potential that the Internet holds for interactive online journalism and for the role of the press on the Net in making the activities of governments transparent and accountable as well as providing citizens with opportunities to have a voice in the enhancement of democracy in the country.

Nigeria's press has a long tradition of vibrant activism in the country's political process through its watchdog and advocacy roles, the provocative role of journalists was a natural consequence of development leading up to the political transition that recently took place in the country. There is a need for journalists and journalism in the country to take this same attitude, assertiveness and commitment on the Internet, extending into the practice of online journalism.

The Internet and indeed the role that online journalism has to play through its active presence and function on the Net also takes on a new significance in a country like Nigeria where as Bedu-Addo (1997) describes, there has been much oppression of the press and of journalists and the freedom of the press has been won at a high price. In an environment where journalists and journalism has fought to exist and to maintain its principles and ideals and basic human rights for the citizens for whom it is a voice, the potential, possibilities and significance presented by interactivity within online journalism cannot be discounted.

This study is significant because it ultimately seeks to ascertain to what extent and in what ways one of Nigeria's leading newspapers makes full use of what is hailed as one of the greatest quality and strength of the Internet. The study seeks to ascertain if and how the Nigerian online *Guardian* uses its online presence and the opportunities offered by the interactivity of the online medium.

Hagen (2000:58) maintains that within the context of rife disillusionment with the role of traditional mass media in the political process in the United States, the advent of a new communication technology such as the Internet is prone to become a crystallisation point of hope for a better and more meaningful discourse in the public sphere. Although the disillusionment with traditional media may not be as severe in Nigeria, combined with the fragile state of democracy in the country, the Internet and the role of media on the Internet form just as much a point of hope in Nigeria and in other countries where democracy and press freedom is still a delicate reality. Indeed, Sassi (2000:90) observes that with every change in the media landscape, as with for example the emergence and augmentation of information networks today, the utopia of the capability of new media for advancing democracy and empowering citizens surfaces anew. Technological change in the news media has always led to great challenges but it also leads to greater opportunity. The emergence of the World Wide Web presents journalists with an entirely new medium unfettered by many of the constraints of other news media (Reddick & King 1995:237).

Technologically there are now more opportunities for an active citizenship and ideally, new media should facilitate consensus-finding processes that enhance open and free public discourse. The claims of the Internet about its advantages over more traditional media are numerous: providing far more interactive opportunities, enhancing participation of audiences, providing new ways of organising forums for discussion and debate, being a technology for the enhancement of democracy and providing far more information at a greater speed and scale (Lax 2000; Hacker & van Dijk 2000).

Its benefits are evident, but whether all its claims are achieved has always been a matter of heated debate. What is clear, however, is that its interactive potential is significant and holds promising results for democracy, the role of journalism in this,

its audiences and society at large. Therefore a study and examination of tools and techniques that enhance interactive communications, the level of their presence and use on an online journalism site seems to be a useful contribution to these debates.

Online newspapers, like other online media, have the potential to be interactive and more so than their traditional counterparts. This ultimately provides them with the potential to foster participation and uphold the ideals of public journalism, the public sphere and democracy; this is especially vital within the African context where these are mostly still relatively new and delicate realities. Herein lies the significance and relevance of this study that examines the provision of interactive options and the levels of interactivity in the online *Guardian* newspaper.

1.6. Methods and Procedures.

This study will employ both quantitative and qualitative methods of research to examine if; to what extent, and in what ways the Nigerian online *Guardian* has incorporated the interactive characteristics of the Internet.

According to Wimmer and Dominick (1994:154-155), one of the great advantages of case study research is that it enables the researcher to employ multiple sources of data in the examination of a research problem. Therefore, documents, interviews, direct observation and even traditional survey questionnaires can all be used in a case study research. Pitout (in Du Plooy 1995:122) says that consequently, triangulation is frequently used in case study research to enhance the validity of research findings. Bryman (1988:131) talks of the 'logic of triangulation' and says that it is more likely for social scientists to demonstrate greater confidence in their findings when these are derived from more than one method of investigation. He adds that combining the two enhances the reseracher's claims for the validity of the conclusions if they can be shown to provide mutual confirmation.

Quantitative content analysis enables the studying and analysing of communication in a systematic, objective, and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables (Wimmer & Dominick 1994:163-164). It is a "research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (Berelson in McQuail 2000:325). Quite simply, content analysis is a

research method based on measuring the amount of something (e.g. violence, negative portrayal of women, or whatever) found in a representative sample of a mass-mediated popular art form (Berger 1991:25). To apply the term 'whatever' (as used in the latter definition) to this study would be to say content analysis is used in this study to measure the amount of interactivity in a particular online newspaper site.

Wigston (in Du Plooy 1995:152) uses definitions of content analysis similar to those above and says that:

> What emerges from these definitions is a method that focuses on the message, which is reduced to a set of **categories** representative of the **research problem**, in order to discover the **meanings** contained in these messages in a systematic way.

This research will carry out quantitative content analysis of the online *Guardian* based on the use of content in the broadest sense to encompass not only the written word but also interactive tools and features that have become characteristic of the Internet. McQuail (2000:315-316) asserts that it need not matter which type of media content is at issue when it comes to quantifying the amount of information that is sent or received and measuring some aspects of the quality of messages. Indeed, the unit of analysis according to Wimmer and Dominick (1994:170) may include both humans as well as documents such as newspapers, television programmes or magazines. In this case, this can be extended to include a website or particular features of a website.

The unit of analysis (descriptive content analysis will be used to define each unit of analysis) is each interactive feature of the online newspaper. Heeter's (1989) dimensions of interactivity are specific and measurable and will therefore be adopted in this study. Kenny et al. (2000) also constructed categories of analysis from dimensions of interactivity in order to render those dimensions measurable. Similarly, this study will break down interactivity into measurable dimensions to construct categories of analysis.

Some of these categories of analysis are: complexity of choice available (a choice of language, search engines, news stories prominently placed on the home page, links within news stories and hyperlinks); effort users must exert/how easy or difficult to find information; responsiveness to the user; monitoring information use (cookies,

counters and registration); ease of adding information and facilitation of interpersonal communication (chat rooms, discussion groups, bulletin boards, feedback mechanisms and email addresses displayed on the home page). There is also a category for other (unexpected) interactive options.

This study will be complemented by email interviews with journalists of the online newspaper. The interviews will seek to explore both the attitudes and practices of these journalists regarding interactivity in online journalism, interactive features and activities on their site, the utilisation of these features by both readers and journalists and the level of commitment as regards the role of journalists/editors in the effort and practice of interactive journalism in the online environment.

It is important to note at this point that while content analysis provides some indication of relative prominences and absences of key characteristics in media texts, the inferences that can be drawn from such indications depend wholly on the context and framework of interpretation by which the (analysed) texts are circumscribed (Hansen 1998). One must also note as Wimmer and Dominick (1994:167) point out, that content analysis cannot on its own serve as the sole basis for making statements for instance about the effects of content on audience or claims about media effects. They go on to add that such assertions would require the support of an additional study of the viewers. Likewise, applying the same principle, the significance of interactivity in online journalism cannot be inferred from a counting process alone, qualitative inferences through for instance discussions of relevant theoretical literature will also be made to complement the quantitative aspect and provide an insight that is not only informed but also balanced.

2. CHAPTER TWO
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.

2.1. Introduction.

Perhaps because of the relative newness of interactive media, models of communication and theoretical perspectives incorporating their use are still yet to be fully developed. Jensen (1998:186) stresses the urgency of scholars shifting towards models that accommodate and incorporate the interactivity of most of the new communication technologies; there is no doubt of the need for new models, based on and incorporating new terminology.

This chapter undertakes a discussion of two key areas central to the study: online journalism and interactive options. It then goes on to provide a theoretical framework and basis for the study as well as discuss relevant models of communication and audience. It will discuss the concept of interactivity, exploring not only the more abstract and philosophical discussions around it but also highlighting core explications of interactivity.

Using the various theories, discussions and existing research presented in this chapter, the researcher intends to construct a set of criteria for answering the research question as presented: examining to what extent and in what ways the interactive quality of the Internet is a feature of one of the online newspapers in Nigeria (*The Guardian*).

2.2. Online Journalism: The Claims of a New Medium.

The dawn of new communication technologies has brought about an array of both opportunities and challenges for traditional media professions such as journalism (Huesca & Dervin 1999). Deuze (1999) goes on to add that the development of new media, specifically in terms of the Internet and the World Wide Web has led to the creation of a form of journalism that is referred to as 'online journalism', a kind of journalism that is characterised by three dimensions: interactivity, personalisation and convergence. By using its technological constituent as a determining factor in terms of a working definition, online journalism can be functionally distinguished from other kinds of journalism. It utilises the Internet's potential by largely facilitating platforms for the exchange of ideas and stories, among other things (Deuze 2001).

Practically every major newspaper now has some form of online product or the other with larger papers having essentially put the entire paper online; even many smaller newspapers have joined this online bandwagon and are running their own operations with just a few staff (Riley et al. 1998). This is also increasingly the case in African countries such as Nigeria, albeit to a lesser degree or on a lesser scale.

Online journalism according to Harper (1998) was set to radically alter the traditional roles of the reporter and editor because it places far more power in the hands of the user; because primarily through the technical components of the new medium, it opens up new ways of storytelling and because it has the potential to provide outlets for non-traditional means of news and information.

The development of the World Wide Web has made possible a move away from traditional newspaper models of news presentation towards more flexibility of products, offering an information source, more capacity for interaction with and between users and the opportunity for users to be more involved in the creation of news content (Light & Rogers 1999).

Part of the challenges of the new technologies for journalism is not only a shift to online journalism but also a shift towards viewing readers more as collaborators than consumers and once this is achieved, the undertakings of reporting and writing must also shift from content delivery to information development and design; news reporting and editing from within this perspective must be centred on creating narrative structures that facilitate user navigation through a variety of information resources. Journalists will also need to enlarge their professional role from arbiters of reality and truth to include being facilitators of social dialogue (Huesca & Dervin 1999).

Hume (1998:4) calls for a new model for news called "resource journalism"; a multimedia model that depends on "objective" and "independent" journalism and one which better serves democracy than today's journalists normally do. 'Resource journalism' is particularly interesting and relevant because it draws especially on the flexibility offered by the new digital technologies, the Internet, and public journalism experiments.

Resource journalism attempts to offer thorough yet unbiased reporting, assembling for citizens authentic information (such as a multiple sources of news) that they need to make civic choices, enlisting the interactivity and depth afforded by the Internet. It works to combine news about problems with news about a range of potential solutions to those problems without seeking to encourage any particular action. It tries to offer a relevant selection of deeper information resources, a range of clearly labelled, diverse opinions and interactive access points for citizens who may want to get involved (Hume 1998).

2.3. Interactive Options.

There are a number of interactive options available that online news editions can utilise to enhance their products on a story-by-story basis as well as on a general basis. These include links to other stories, links to some source material, email to reporters and editors, chat rooms, forums, animations, photographs and biographical information about reporters and columnists, related coverage and searchable databases and multimedia such as audio and video (Dibean & Garrison 2000).

According to Schultz (2000) however, most online newspapers are not achieving their potential in terms of their offerings of interactive options and still have to improve in offering real participation to their audiences. Rafaeli's model of interactivity also conjures up such a picture of unfulfilled potential in terms of the interactive nature of the use of the new technologies but he does maintain that along the continuum of interactivity, there are settings that make it more likely that full interactivity will occur (Schultz 2000).

The mere availability of interactive tools and options that allow for interactive communication does not say much about the way in which they are utilised by journalists and their audience; nevertheless, it is a necessary condition for the initiation of interactive discourse (Schultz 1999).

Deuze (2001) subdivides interactive options into three types: navigational interactivity which includes scrolling menu bars and buttons that enable the reader to navigate on the page and to and from pages; functional interactivity which includes Bulletin Board Systems (BBS), moderated discussion lists and direct 'mail-to' links; and adaptive interactivity which includes chat rooms and personal customisation through 'smart web design'.

For Millison (1999), hyperlinks embody the main instrument for the interactivity of online journalism; they link the various elements of a lengthy and complex work, introducing multiple viewpoints and adding depth and detail. A typical work of online journalism can be made up of a hyperlinked set of web pages; pages that can themselves include hyperlinks to other web sites.

Email functions as one of the tools that can be used for increasing interactivity; it is a fast and direct channel between readers and editors/reporters. There are, however, some obstacles to its use within the context of online journalism and one of these is that newsroom schedules do not usually regard discussions with the audience as an essential or integral part of the job and would have to make the extra time to deal with requests of their readers, not to mention make considerable time for interactive discussions (Shultz 2000).

Online forums can also be considered interactive options or tools within online journalism and are arenas of discourse where readers have the opportunity to comment on articles and discuss new topics. The obstacle to this is that although online staff/journalists do take notice of what is going on in the forums, their interest can often be limited to issues of technicality and content control. However, in spite of this, there is no doubt that online forums do increase the interactivity of the mass media in general by broadening opportunities for reader-to-reader communication. Forums that are surrounded by the online environment of a mass medium have an added advantage because the discussions are related to the content of the mass medium and this in turn ensures that people share some basic knowledge and background and that the discussions have more of a chance of achieving a certain coherence (Schultz 2000).

Synchronous live chats are another interactive option that can lead to interactive threads, especially in journalistic chat rooms where the discussions can be guided by moderators and defined topics (Schultz 1999).

Online polls and surveys offered on journalistic sites could also be considered interactive options although they generally remain reactive. Their failure to be representative and the fact that it is possible for readers to cast multiple votes are associated problems. In spite of these shortcomings, however, there is the potential for them to be used as a means of generating issues for discussion and providing direction for these discussions. If rooted in areas of background information and discussion, they can also become part of a communicative effort that may reach an interactive level (Schultz 1999).

2.4. Employing Models of Communication and Audience.

Traditional media perspectives maintain a view of mass media as a one-way flow. Interaction on the other hand, demands a two-way or multi-directional model of communication and interactivity as a feature of new media, acknowledges the receivers as active participants that seek or select information more than they 'receive' information sent by journalists (Kenny et al. 2000).

As developments in media advance, existing media theory is proving increasingly less able to explain and clarify current media phenomena (Jensen 1998:187). New media represent a mounting challenge to traditional media and communication research, a challenge that demands a thorough rethinking of all central models and concepts (Jensen 1998:187). Interactive systems are a new hybrid of interpersonal and mass communication found in new media and the traditional model of communication just does not correspond with these interactive systems (Kenny et al. 2000).

The media typology developed by Bordewijk and Kaam and used extensively by Jensen (1998:186) in *'Interactivity: Tracking a New Concept in Media and Communication Studies'* helps in establishing a framework for understanding the various concepts of interactivity currently in circulation; it does this in relation to already existing models of communication and audience. McQuail (2000:129) also discusses this new pattern of information traffic set forth by Bordewijk and Kaam and

labels it a useful way of considering the implications of the changes associated with new media and concepts such as interactivity. This study relies heavily on Jensen's (1998) discussion of interactivity because it is one of the explications of interactivity that provides an in-depth analysis of various theories surrounding the concept. His discussion evaluates the various theories of interactivity, incorporating theories of mass communication and audience to arrive at a model of interactivity that provides practical definitions of the concept within the area of communication studies.

This media typology is based on and deals with two fundamental aspects of all information traffic or flow: the question of ownership and provision of the information and the control of its distribution in terms of timing and subject matter. If these two fundamental aspects of information traffic are cross tabulated in relation to whether they are controlled by either a centralised information provider or a decentralised information consumer, a matrix with four primarily different communication patterns becomes apparent as is demonstrated in the figure below (Jensen 1998:186-187):

	Information produced by a central provider	*Information produced by the consumer*
Distribution controlled by a central provider	**Transmission**	**Registration**
Distribution controlled by the consumer	**Consultation**	**Conversation**

Figure 1.   **Bordewijk and Kaam's Matrix for the Four Communication Patterns: 'Transmission', 'Conversation', 'Consultation' and 'Registration'. (Bordewijk & Kaam in Jensen 1998:187).**

According to Jensen (1998:186), a transmission pattern of communication depicts a situation where pure reception is the significant consumer activity. McQuail's (2000:129) discussion calls this the allocution pattern of communication and describes it as one where the dissemination of information takes place from a centre simultaneously to many peripheral receivers, adding that it is typical one-way communication to many with comparatively little opportunity for personal feedback.

A conversation pattern is a traditional two-way communication pattern that depicts the production of messages and delivery of input in a dialog structure as the significant consumer activity (Jensen 1998:186). Individuals in such a pattern of communication are equal in the exchange and interact directly with each other, sidestepping a centre and making choices as regard partners, time, place and topic of communication parties. In principle more than two can take part in such an exchange (McQuail 2000:130).

The significant consumer activity in a consultation pattern of communication is one that involves active selection from available possibilities and in this scenario, the consumer requests the delivery of specific information from the centre that provides information (Jensen 1998:186-187). In other words, an individual in such a communication setting searches for information at a central store of information (McQuail 2000:130).

In a registration communication pattern, the information providing centre collects information from or about the user and the distinctive aspect of this pattern is the storage, processing and use of the data or knowledge from or about the user by the media system (Jensen 1998:187). It is the opposite of a consultation pattern and in such settings, the centre exercises more control than the individual in determining both the content and occurrence of communication traffic and it gathers information from participants, usually without their knowledge (McQuail 2000:130).

Models and insights of communication and media studies have up until now been based for the most part on the transmission/allocution pattern with its basis and bias leaning predominantly towards concepts such as sender, receiver, channel, effect etc. The transmission pattern, of the four patterns of information that have been discussed above, is the only one that has no return or back-channel that makes an information flow possible from the information consumer to the media system; it is characterised by a one-way communication flow from the information providing centre to the consumer (Jensen 1998:187).

The study of communication patterns that fit into the conversational type have naturally been conducted within the field of interpersonal communication but the work has actually been based on models from the transmission pattern. The consultation and registration patterns of communication have been virtually left unexplored by mass communication and media research and remain largely uncharted territory (Jensen 1998:187).

Within the field of communication studies, there has, however, been a movement away from the transmission pattern towards the other three media patterns of communication and this has been largely due to recent and ongoing media developments and the arrival of what is being called 'new media'. These new media open up the possibility for various forms of input and information flow from information consumers to the system and they can hardly be portrayed using traditional one-way models (Jensen 1998:187).

Ritual and publicity models of communication also provide a theoretical basis for studying interactivity of online newspapers. The ritual model is linked to terms such as sharing and participation and consequently seems more suited than the traditional transmission model, especially that interactive features on online newspapers support a two-way or multi-directional flow of communication among a community of users (Kenny et al. 2000).

Through listening to and involving online readers in the collection of news, online journalists endeavour not only to increase reader satisfaction but also to make their readers revisit their sites. This upholds the ideals of the publicity model and shows that it can also be applied to online newspapers (Kenny et al. 2000).

2.5. Establishing and Defining the Concept of Interactivity.

The term 'interactivity' is not only one that is widely used but a concept that has an intuitive appeal. Nevertheless, it remains an under-defined concept and although it is highly valid and carries weight as a way of thinking about communication, it has narrowly based explication, little consensus on meaning and only recently is empirical verification of its actual role emerging (Rafaeli 1988). Interactivity has remained a buzzword that many people use, yet few define the concept (Kenny et al. 2000).

The situation that has been described above should not be surprising. The meaning of the term and concept of interactivity has, just like a lot of other specialist terms, been watered down after its popular acceptance in daily usage. And in recent years, the explosive development and decided commercial success of interactive technologies and the interactive approach that has taken place in the form of most importantly, computers and multimedia, Internet, intranets, the world wide web and networked computers, leaves no doubt that interactivity has indeed unsurprisingly entered common usage (Jensen 1998:185-186).

In spite of the fact that interactivity and interactive media are so topical and have so many positive associations, it still seems relatively unclear, by comparison to their popularity, just what the terms and concepts mean and according to Jensen (1998:185):

> The positiveness surrounding the concepts and the frequency of their use seem, in a way, to be reversely proportional to their precision and actual content of meaning.

The term 'buzzwords' refers to words which, within a particular area or subject matter, appear to refer to something of extreme and popular importance, and which for a given time are heard constantly but are often difficult to comprehend since in reality nobody can pin down their meaning. According to Jensen (1998), 'Interactivity' is such a word and is currently one of the most utilised buzzwords within the media community.

> Interactivity has almost turned into a dull buzzword. The term is so inflated now that one begins to suspect there is much less to it than some people want to make it appear (Schultz 2000:205).

It might be an exaggeration to say nobody really seems to know what the term 'interactivity' means and perhaps a more apt depiction of the situation would be to say that because the word 'interactivity' and other such buzzwords do not have one defined meaning, they are open to people attaching multiple meanings to them depending on the context. Indeed, Jensen (1998:188) and McMillan (2002:163) go on to say as much by further adding that the concept of interactivity can mean different things depending on the context within which it is used.

The concept of interactivity takes on numerous and various meanings within diverse individual fields of scholarship. In the book *'Key Concepts in Communication and Cultural Studies'*, such a concept is called 'multi-discursive' and this refers to concepts whose meanings or connotations differ significantly according to their use within different discourses. As a result, such concepts "depend to a very large extent on their context for their meaning to be clear" (O'Sullivan et al. 1994).

The concept of interactivity and interactive media is mostly used to characterise a feature or features of new media that differs from the more traditional media. From among all the existing definitions of interactivity that exist within media studies and even in computer science, it seems evident that there are three fundamental ways of defining the concept: as prototype, as criterion and as a continuum. A discussion of these will crystallise what particular trait of new media differs from traditional media and is characteristic of the concept of interactivity and interactive media (Jensen 1998:191).

Based on Durlak's representative definition in *'A Typology for Interactive Media'*, definitions of interactivity by prototypic example usually involve a listing of various interactive media. In this context, prototype therefore means to give examples, instances of or cases in point:

> Interactive media systems include the telephone; 'two-way television'; audio conferencing systems; computers used for communication; electronic mail; videotext; and a variety of technologies that are used to exchange information in the form of still images, line drawings, and data (Durlak in Jensen 1998:191).

Such definitions are by their very disposition never very enlightening, in part because they fail to point out which traits of a given media qualify it as interactive. Such definitions also raise another fundamental question because they list among their examples of interactive media, media that are also used for interpersonal communication, media using the conversational pattern of communication such as email and telephone. Therefore, it is not at once obvious within certain academic traditions that these types of interpersonal media should be considered interactive even though it might not be uncommon within large parts of English and American literature where interpersonal and especially face-to-face communication is considered the ideal type of interactive communication (Jensen 1998:191).

In keeping with this line of thinking, such definitions by prototype tend to consider the most interactive media to be those whose communication form comes closest to face-to-face communication, whereby conversational media such as video conferencing are considered more interactive than consultative media such as computer-based online services for instance (Jensen 1998:191). As is evident thus far, the concept of interactivity refers to media patterns of both the consultative and the conversational type.

Interactivity defined as criteria is the definition of interactivity as a specific feature, trait or characteristic that must be fulfilled or accomplished. A representative definition of this type defines interactivity as "a reciprocal dialogue between the user and the system" (Miller in Jensen 1998:191). Interactive is understood to mean the user's active participation in directing the flow of information of the computer, it refers to a system that allows for the exchange of information with the user, with the user's input being processed in order to create the proper response within the context of the program (Jensen 1998). Interactive media is understood as meaning:

> Media which involves the viewer as a source of input to determine the content and duration of a message, which permits individualised program material (Miller in Jensen 1998:191).

On the one hand, these definitions are comparatively precise and on the other hand, their weaknesses lie in the fact that they are narrowly attached to specific technologies, they look mainly at interactivity from within the consultation pattern of communication and even with that, they leave out a number of services which are normally considered interactive, services in which there is no actual processing of the user's input and choices can only be made from constant transmissions. Definitions of interactivity as criteria generally tend to include and exclude differing types of media generally thought of as interactive in a relatively casual way and consequently, they tend to be archaic and quickly outdated by technological developments. In addition, it is not possible, with such definitions, to distinguish between different forms or levels of interactivity (Jensen 1998).

Although also afflicted by the weaknesses that are characteristic of this type of definition, Carey's constructive criteria definition of interactivity is useful and worth a mention. He defines interactive media as:

> Technologies that provide person-to-person communications mediated by a telecommunications channel and person-to-machine interactions that stimulate an interpersonal exchange…most of the content is created by a centralised production group or organisation and individual users interact with content created by an organisation (Carey in Jensen 1998:192).

Again, one must note that this scenario pretty much leans directly towards the conversational and consultative communication patterns, the two media patterns that collectively make up 'interactive media' (Jensen 1998).

2.5.1. The Continuum and Dimensions of Interactivity.

Defining interactivity as a continuum whereby interactivity is seen as a quality that can be present in varying degrees is the third type of definition of interactivity. It is a comprehensive collection of definitions and appears to be emerging as the most popular and constructive of the three types of definitions; and for this reason, it will be discussed separately.

The definition of interactivity as a continuum, although probably creating other problems of its own, helps to solve some of the problems and weaknesses associated with the other ways of definition. Definitions of interactivity as a continuum contain different dimensions and a logical way to structure such a discussion would be to look at definitions grouped by the number of dimensions they contain (Jensen 1998).

In Jensen (1998), Rogers gives a relatively straightforward model of interactivity as a continuum, which operates from only one dimension. He defines interactivity as:

> The capability of new communication systems (usually containing a computer as one component) to 'talk back' to the user, almost like an individual participating in a conversation. Interactivity is a variable; some communication technologies are relatively low in their degree of interactivity (for example, network television), while others (such as computer bulletin boards) are more highly interactive (Rogers in Jensen 1998:192).

This definition discusses interactivity within the context of the consultation pattern of communication with the basic model being that of human-machine interaction, understood within the context of interpersonal communication. Although such a definition allows various communication technologies to be placed on a continuum from 'low' to 'high' depending on their degree of interactivity, its attempt to classify and characterise is relatively rough and lacks sufficient information on which to base and enable an understanding of such classification and characterisation, even more so because if fails to provide explicit criteria for the placement of each medium on a continuum from 'low' to 'high' depending, of course, on their degree of interactivity (Jensen 1998).

Degree of Interactivity

Low   High

Press,   Teletext   Computer communication
Radio,   via videotext, computer
TV,   bulletin boards, electronic
Film   messaging systems,
Etc.   computer teleconferencing,
                                                         interactive cable TV, etc.
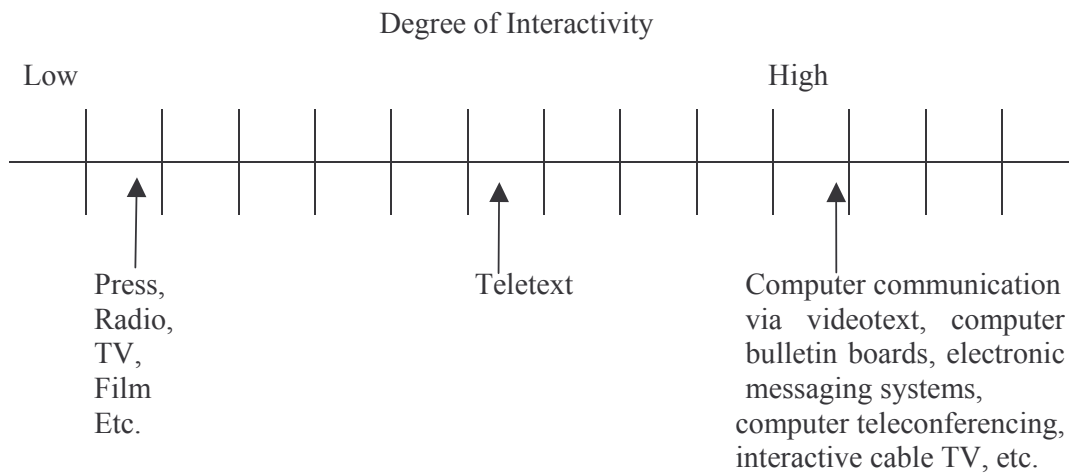
Figure 2.   E. M. Rogers' One-Dimensional Interactivity Continuum showing the Degree of Interactivity for Selected Communication Technologies. (Rogers in Jensen 1998:193).

There are several other uni-dimensional concepts of interactivity that give more advanced and technologically up-to-date scales and definitions of various levels of interactivity. The division of levels and definitions of interactivity as a continuum operating in one dimension are usually meant to portray a close association with the technology of the time and include several types of information patterns whereby the transition from one level to the next usually marks the transition from one communication pattern to another (Jensen 1998).

Szuprowicz provides one of the several two-dimensional concepts of interactivity and maintains the importance of defining and classifying the various levels and categories of interactivity that are of relevance if one is to understand all the problematic issues related to what he calls 'interactive multimedia networking and communications'. He believes that interactivity is best defined by "the type of multimedia information flows", which he divides into three main categories: 'user-to-documents', 'user-to-computer' and 'user-to-user' (Szuprowicz in Jensen 1998:195-196).

According to McMillan (2002:166), this three-dimensional construct of user-to-documents, user-to-system and user-to-user interactivity not only seems to encompass the primary literature on interactivity in new media, it also corresponds to historical developments in the concept of interactivity that predated new media.

'User-to-documents' interactivity refers to "traditional transactions between a user and specific documents" and it is characterised by its restrictive nature seeing as it limits itself to the user's choice of information and selection of the time of access to the information. The prospect of manipulating or altering existing content is almost non-existent (Szuprowicz in Jensen 1998:195-196).

McMillan's take on user-to-document interactivity seems more apt for the purposes of this study because it better allows for the application of the construct within the environment of new media. User-to-documents interactivity is the interaction of users with documents and the creators of those documents and it is evident in the way that active audiences interpret and use mass media messages. The emergence of new media also saw the emergence of new forms on this kind of interaction and within the context of new media, this kind of interactivity is evident for instance in the active navigation of websites (McMillan 2002:169).

'User-to-computer' interactivity refers to "more exploratory interactions between a user and various delivery platforms" and it is characterised by more advanced forms of interactivity that offers the user a wider assortment of active choices, including access to tools that can influence existing material (Szuprowicz in Jensen 1998:195-196).

'User-to-user' interactivity refers to "collaborative transactions between two or more users" and it describes scenarios whereby the type of information flows make direct communication between two or more users possible, be it point-to-point, person-to-person, multi-point, multi-person etc; it is characterised by operating in 'real time' (Szuprowicz in Jensen 1998:195-196).

Within the three-dimensional conceptual constructs of interactivity, Laurel (in Jensen 1998:196) maintains that, "interactivity exists on a continuum that could be characterised by three variables". The first of these is frequency, "how often you could interact"; the second is range, "how many choices were available"; the third is significance, "how much the choices really affected matters" (Laurel in Jensen 1998:196).

Subsequently, a low degree of interactivity is characterised by the fact that the user rarely can or must act, by the fact that only a few choices are available to the user and by the fact that these choices have only a minor bearing on the overall outcome of things. A high level of interactivity is, on the other hand, characterised by the user possessing the ability to act frequently, the availability of many choices to choose from and the fact that these choices have a significant influence on the overall outcome (Jensen 1998).

As implied by the description of variables and also given that 'choice' appears to be the recurring term, this concept of interactivity can be placed mostly within the framework of the consultation pattern of communication; in addition, it highlights three aspects of interactivity within the consultation pattern of communication.
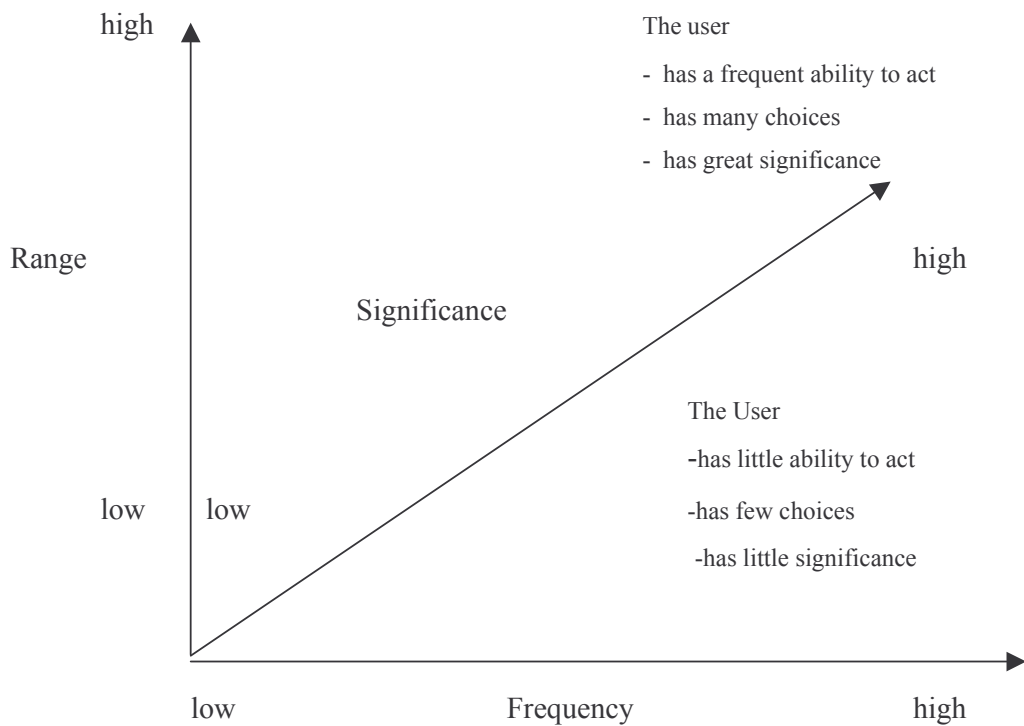
The user

- has a frequent ability to act

- has many choices

- has great significance

Range

high

Significance

high

The User

-has little ability to act

low   low

-has few choices

-has little significance

low   Frequency   high

Figure 3. **Jensen's Illustration of Brenda Laurel's Three-Dimensional Interactivity Continuum made up of: 'Frequency', 'Range' and 'Significance'. (Laurel in Jensen 1998:197).**

Four-dimensional concepts of interactivity refer to constructs whereby four dimensions of meaning constitute interactivity and an example of this is Goertz's isolation of four dimensions, said to be meaningful for interactivity. The four dimensions are: "the degree of choices available", "the degree of modifiability", "the quantitative number of the selections and modifications available", and "the degree of linearity or non-linearity" (Goertz in Jensen 1998:197).

The dimension of interactivity that is concerned with the degree of choice available relates to the choices offered by the medium in use and it falls within the consultation pattern of communication. The dimension of interactivity that is concerned with the level of modifiability concerns the ability of the user to modify existing messages or add new content whereby these adjustments and additions are saved and stored for other users; it naturally falls within the framework of the conversation pattern of communication. The third dimension of interactivity within this conceptual construct refers to the actual number of choices that can be made within each of the available dimensions and it falls within the consultation pattern of communication. The final dimension of interactivity within this construct serves as a calculation of the user's

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control on the time, tempo and progression of the reception or communication that is taking place; and because like the third dimension it refers to the possibility of choice, it too falls within the consultation pattern of communication (Jensen 1998).

Every one of the four dimensions above also makes up a continuum of its own which is placed on a scale; the higher the scale value, the greater the level of interactivity. Each of the aspects of the four-dimensional continuum and its corresponding scale is illustrated in the table below:

Degree of Choice Available	0: No choice available except a decision about when reception starts and ends… 1: Only basic changes available in the quality of the channel (such as light/dark, high/low or fast/slow). 2: As in 1, plus the ability to choose between selections in one choice dimension; choices occur simultaneously (such as television or radio programs)… 3: As in 2, but the selections available within the choice dimensions are not time dependent (such as newspapers or video-on-demand), 4: As in 3, but there are two or more choice dimensions for a user to choose from (e.g. video games with various levels of play, forms of presentation, forms of action and story lines to choose from).
Degree of Modifiability	0: No modification possible with the exception of storing or erasing messages, 1: Manipulating of messages is possible (e.g. through the choice of sound or colour), 2: Modification to some degree of random additions, changes, or erasure of content is possible, 3: Modification possible through random additions to, changes in, or erasure of any type of content (e.g. computer word processors or graphics software, and in most media as a means of communication.
Selections and Modifications	0: No choice possible, 1: Some choice available (between 2 and 10 choices) within at least one selection or modification dimension (e.g. television reception via terrestrial frequencies), 2: As in 1, plus more than 10 choices within one selection or modification dimension (A reader can choose from several hundred newspaper articles and reviews, teletext offers more than 100 pages though no other choices are available), 3: More than 10 choices available in more than two selection and/or modification dimensions (limited selection available e.g. in branched choices…, or: an infinite or seamless selection available from one selection or modification dimension respectively (e.g. video games which allow the user to write in a random name at the beginning), 4: An infinite or seamless selection available from all selection and/or modification possibilities (applies to media uses which allow participants random messages, e.g. word processing programs, but first actually for all media which function as a means of communication).
Degree of Linearity/ Non-Linearity	0: The time and order of the material is completely controlled by the information producer or the sender (e.g. television, radio, film), 1: The order of the material is determined by the information producer or sender, the user initiates the communication process and can stop or re-start it (video, records, other sound media), 2: As in 1, but the user determines the tempo of the reception (e.g. books), 3: As in 2, the user can select single elements of information which have little or no connection to each other (e.g. newspapers), 4: As in 3, the user can now retrieve elements of information, which are highly connected (e.g. references in an encyclopedia or via hypertext functions on a World Wide Web site).

Figure 4.   **Lutz Goertz's Four-Dimensional Interactivity Continuum showing each dimension and its scales. (Goertz in Jensen 1998:197-198).**

According to Jensen (1998), Goertz's construct is problematic because it offers such a large number of possible combinations (no less than 500 different combination possibilities) that it becomes impossible to deal with in actual practice; its complexity defeats the purpose of simplicity that necessitates the construction of such media systems/typologies in the first place. It is, however, possible to argue that the very nature of interactivity does demand a complex model albeit that the possibility of no less than 500 different combinations from one construct does seem extreme and impractical.

Another weakness of this construct is a failure on the author's part to observe one of his own specified fundamental requirements which states that the various interactive dimensions must not only be selective but must not contradict themselves. There appear to be conflicts between the definitions, scales and possibilities of the third and first two dimensions, and the fourth dimension also reflects a certain aspect of the third (Jensen 1998).

Goertz (in Jensen 1998), illustrates his four dimensions of interactivity using 21 specific contemporary uses of media and among many things that this chart shows is that there are media which provide the user with a high degree of modifiability but a low degree of choice and on the other hand, there are media that provide the user with a low degree of modifiability but a very high degree of choice. In addition, the illustration considers media that use interpersonal communication (in other words, conversational media) to have the highest degree of interactivity (Jensen 1998).

Van Dijk (2000:47-48) provides another four-dimensional construct of interactivity and discusses interactivity in levels; referring to the spatial dimension, the first and most primitive level, as the sheer existence or possibility of two-way communication that is defined by action and reaction to reactions. The second level is reflected in synchronous communication and is the time dimension of interactivity. This level is defined by the way it contrasts with asynchronous communication which damages interactivity with too much time between action, reaction and reaction to reaction. The third level of interactivity is the dimension of action and control and it is the degree of control of communication by the (inter)actors involved; in other words, the possibility of exchanging roles between sender and receiver at will and at every time

and a more or less equal determination of the content of communication. The fourth, last and highest level in this definition is the contextual and mental dimension and it is the intelligence of contexts and shared understanding which until now has only been attained in face-to-face communication and not in the use of media.

Finally, in considering interactivity's continuum and dimensions, are concepts of interactivity that operate with more than four dimensions. One of these is Heeter's (1989) six-dimensional conceptual construct of interactivity, which deserves to be singled out because it has become something of a reference point within this field of study and has been hailed, by McMillan (1998) among others, as a definition that provides one of the few analyses of interactivity that offers dimensions that are specific and measurable.

2.5.2. Heeter's Dimensions of Interactivity.

The changes and development in new media technologies call for a fundamental re-conceptualisation of the conventional communication models used in communication research. "Increased interactivity" is "a primary distinction of new technologies" and "interactivity as it relates to communication technologies is a multidimensional concept" (Heeter in Jensen 1998:192).

Heeter identifies and defines six such dimensions of interactivity as follows:

i.   Selectivity: the extent to which users are provided with a choice of available information.

ii. The amount of effort users must exert to access information.

iii. The degree to which a medium can react responsively to a user.

iv. The potential to monitor system use, described by Jensen (1998) as a form of feedback that automatically and constantly registers all user behaviour while on the media system.

v.   The degree to which users can add information to the system that a mass, undifferentiated audience can access.

vi. The degree to which a media system facilitates interpersonal communication between specific users.

(Heeter 1989).

Heeter's theoretical construct regards interactivity from both sides of a two (or more) directional flow of information. Four of the dimensions stress the role of the user, whereby interactivity empowers the user and this empowerment is what clearly distinguishes interactive new media from traditional mass media. The dimension concerned with the potential to monitor system use, empowers the sender of messages within the context of online newspapers and the dimension that is concerned with the facilitation of interpersonal communication, treats both parties (the sender and the user) equally (Kenny et al. 2000).

The first and second dimensions fall within the consultation pattern of communication, the third and fourth within the registration pattern and the fifth and sixth into the conversation pattern. Such a construct of interactivity will logically allow for a much more advanced and finer classification of interactive media but, as is usually the case with such constructs, its many dimensions and highly complex nature make it extremely difficult to deal with the concept on a practical basis. Also an issue is the fluidity of the boundaries between the dimensions and their tendency to overlap each other (Jensen 1998).

2.5.3. Rafaeli's Explication of Interactivity.

Rafaeli's explication of interactivity is hailed as one of the most productive definitions of interactivity; one that can be applied to empirical research but that does not view interactivity solely in technological terms (Schultz 2000).

Sheizaf Rafaeli's (1988) construct of the concept of interactivity is also based on one continual dimension but its emphasis focuses on the concept of 'responsiveness' as a measure of the ability of a medium to be receptive and react in response to a given user or more specifically, a measure of how much one message is based on previous messages in an exchange (Jensen 1998).

Rafaeli's model employs three progressive levels in its continuum: two-way communication which occurs when messages are delivered both ways; reactive communication, which requires that a later message reacts to a previous message and interactive communication which requires that a later message responds to a series of previous messages (Jensen 1998).

In one-way communication settings, one source sets the agenda and receives indirect or no feedback at all; in two-way or reactive communication settings, one side responds to the other but such communication according to Rafaeli and Sudweeks (1997), remains reactive except if later messages in any chain of messages take into account not just the messages that came before them but also the way in which previous messages were reactive. In other words, when messages flow bilaterally, such a setting is reflective of two-way communication and this is also the case with reactive communication settings except that in addition, the later messages must refer to or cohere with earlier messages (Schultz 2000).

'Responsiveness' plays a central role within this construct and it demands that the medium registers and stores information about a given user's requests and distinguishing characteristics. It can be said then that this concept of interactivity refers primarily to the registration communication pattern, a scenario within which a medium understands the user. In addition, it is apparent within this construct that interpersonal communication serves as an ideal to be measured up to with characteristics like those of the sociological concept of interaction, and its requirements of reciprocity (Jensen 1998).

Rafaeli defines interactivity as a variable quality of communication settings and emphasises the "thread" of messages in the chain of "interrelated messages" (Rafaeli in Schultz 2000:210). A message thread refers to a chain of interrelated messages and interactivity within this context is the dependency among messages in threads. In other words therefore, interactivity is about the extent to which messages in a sequence relate to each other, and distinguishing between different levels of interactivity involves probing whether and to what extent later messages recount relevant aspects of earlier messages. It is a process-related construct about communication; the condition of communication in which concurrent and continuous exchanges transpire, exchanges that carry a social, binding force (Rafaeli & Sudweeks 1997).

	Journalist-Reader	Reader-Reader (Journalism as forum)
One-way communication	Journalistic messages	Published letters/email to the editor Reader sites Citizens quoted/portrayed
Two-way/reactive communication	Letters (mail, email, fax) Polls Question and answer sections Call-ins	Letters and calls referring to other letters or calls Online forum postings
Interactive communication	Town meetings Online discussion boards/chats with journalists participating In general: communicative threads via (e)mail, phone, face-to-face, video-conferencing	Town meetings Online discussion boards Chat rooms Email threads initiated by forums

Figure 5.   **A Model of Rafaeli's Explication of Interactivity.**
(In Schultz 2000:211).

2.5.4. Encapsulating Interactivity.

Having reached this point in the discussion, one must agree with Jensen (1998) that the concept of interactivity is indeed a complicated one, with a long list of very diverse and explicit variations.

According to Jensen (1998), the review of various concepts of interactivity undertaken in this chapter thus far has made apparent among other things:

i.   The inappropriateness of definitions of interactivity that are founded too rigidly on specific historic technologies.
ii. The inappropriateness of defining interactivity using a prototype.
iii. The inappropriateness of defining interactivity as criteria.

More appropriate and flexible, appears to be a definition of interactivity as a continuum and especially related to the numerous and varied levels of interactivity, the numerous and differing technologies and rapid technological advancements. In addition, it has also become apparent that there are different forms of interactivity and not all of these different forms can be easily compared or covered by the same formula. There seems to be a specific and distinct difference in: interactivity which is made up of a choice from a selection of available information content; interactivity which consists of producing information through input to a system and interactivity which consists of the system's ability to adapt and respond to a user. The suggested recommendation is therefore that it might be appropriate to operate with different, mutually independent, dimensions of the concept of interactivity (Jensen 1998).

As has repeatedly been suggested at in the review of interactivity, the communication patterns (transmission, consultation, conversation and registration) play an important role in understanding the concept of interactivity. This role becomes obvious as the various significant aspects of the concept of interactivity can to a large extent be condensed to four dimensions, which can be understood using the above-mentioned communication patterns. Based on this understanding, interactivity may then be defined as: "*a measure of a media's potential ability to let the user exert an influence on the content and/or form of the mediated communication.*"
(Jensen 1998:201; emphasis added).

Jensen (1998) further divides the concept of interactivity into four sub-concepts or dimensions based on the four patterns of communication:

1. *Transmissional Interactivity* - a measure of a media's potential ability to let the user choose from a continuous stream of information in a one-way media system without a return channel and therefore without a possibility for making requests (e.g. teletext, near-video-on-demand, be-your-own-editor, multi-channel systems, datacasting, multicasting).

2. *Consultational Interactivity* - a measure of a media's potential ability to let the user choose, by request, from an existing selection of pre-produced information in a two-way media system with a return channel (video-on-demand, online information services, CD-Rom encyclopedias, FTP, WWW, Gopher etc).

3. *Conversational Interactivity* - a measure of a media's potential ability to let the user produce and input his/her own information in a two-way media system, be it stored or in real time (video conferencing systems, news groups, email, mailing lists etc).

4. *Registrational Interactivity* - a measure of a media's potential ability to register information from and thereby also adapt and/or respond to a given user's needs and actions, whether they be the user's explicit choice of communication method or the system's built-in ability to automatically 'sense' and adapt (surveillance systems, intelligent agents, intelligent guides or intelligent interfaces, etc).

(Extracted from: Jensen 1998:201).

Interactivity increases as:

o The goal of communication is more to exchange information than it is to persuade.

o Participants have greater control of the communication environment.

o Participants take an active role to fully benefit from the communication.

o Participants act and react to messages via two-way communication.

o Timing of communication is flexible and responsive to the demands of participants.

o The communication environment creates a sense of "place.

(McMillan & Downes in Kenny et al. 2000).

According to Arata (1999), interactivity indicates active interrelations between players and mediums and in its most broad outline is a way of creation, a way of being and a perspective. Such a perspective celebrates a constructive flexibility that is appropriate for navigating in open, changing or unknown environs.

In the challenging task of exploration that has preceded, the researcher has attempted to provide a framework of literature and theory within which this study can be located. The diverse nature of this framework reflects and relates directly to the numerous and diverse theories that exist around the concept of interactivity. The discussion that has taken place was intended to alert the reader to this fact and also to give as much understanding as possible on the subject.

While the discussions that have taken place are relevant to the study as a whole, it is important to provide practical models that will directly contribute to constructing a set of measurement constructs for use within this study.

This study will adopt Heeter's (1989) dimensions of interactivity for constructing the categories of analysis required for conducting the research. These dimensions of interactivity are specific and measurable and have been acknowledged as such by scholars including McMillan (1998) and Kenny et al. (2000) who also adopted them in their studies and operationalised them to render them measurable and so construct categories of analysis for their research.

In an empirical study of 100 online newspapers, Kenny et al. (2000) developed and applied an operational definition of interactivity that included 18 measures. They adopted Heeter's (1989) definition of interactivity because it offered them specific measurable dimensions that matched the concept of interactivity found in the professional literature.

McMillan (1998) used content analysis to examine 395 sites on the World Wide Web and used this analysis to present four models of funding for content in computer-mediated communication (CMC). The key factors underlying the models were interactivity, ideologies related to intellectual property, and audience size. The level of interactivity was operationalized using the dimensions of interactivity defined by Heeter (1989).

This study breaks down interactivity into measurable dimensions in order to construct categories of analysis. Heeter's (1989) dimensions of interactivity and the operationalisation of these categories by Kenny et al. (2000) and McMillan (1998) provide the basis for this. The justification for this lies simply in the fact that although there are many definitions and explications of interactivity, there are not as many practical ways of applying these theories to research. Heeter's (1989) dimensions of interactivity addresses this because they are measurable.

Below are discussions of each category of analysis and how each dimension of interactivity will be measured within this study:

1. **Complexity of Choice Available.**

The more hyperlinks there are on a newspaper site, the more choice users have to navigate through the site; these choices are important to interactivity. Users are also empowered and the complexity of choice available is high when they are able to choose to use a text or graphics browser, or receive information in English or a different language, or if they can utilise a search engine to locate the information they want (Kenny et al. 2000).

Measured by: a choice of language, search engines, news stories prominently placed on the home page, links from the first page of the site, links within news stories, hyperlinks and taking into account users' browsers and connection speeds.

2. Effort Users Must Exert.

"The ratio of user activity to system activity" is how Paisley (in Kenny, Gorelik and Mwangi 2000:5) mathematically defined interactivity; it is a definition that specifically reflects the meaning of this particular dimension of interactivity. There are two opposing views of the way in which this dimension is understood and therefore measured. On the one hand, users exert minimal or no effort beyond the reading of text/information automatically "pushed" to them by the site and based upon information the users provided about themselves. On the other hand, users select, through the use of navigational tools, each "page" or screen to view, sending a message to the central computer asking to display the requested page. It is all about asking: how much effort the users wish to exert? Some believe that reducing user effort is desirable while others believe that users like to work because it makes them feel in control and allows them to get the precise information they want (Kenny, Gorelik and Mwangi 2000).

This dimension of interactivity, concerned with the effort users exert, is all about how easy or difficult it is to find information on the site but because of the differing views that exist about how much effort users should or should not or wish to exert, this can actually be a complex thing to actually measure and the way in which it is measured depends on the viewpoint one takes on how much effort users should exert in finding information on the site and how this relates to the level of interactivity involved in doing so.

Kenny, Gorelik and Mwangi (2000), for instance, define this dimension of interactivity by how easy or difficult it is for users to find information on a particular site and measure it based on how many clicks it takes the user to find specific information. For them:

➤ The more clicks it takes users to find the information sought, the more difficult it is to find that information and therefore the more effort exerted by users. This makes the site less interactive in this regard.

➤ The less clicks it takes users to find the information sought, the easier it is to find that information and therefore the less effort exerted by users. This makes the site more interactive in this regard.

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McMillan (1998), on the other hand, defines this dimension of interactivity by how many tools are provided on a site to help users navigate the site. This dimension of interactivity is consequently measured based on how many of a pre-determined list of navigational tools existed at the site. The rational behind McMillan's thinking (which she implies is Heeter's logic) is that more effort indicates higher interactivity and vice versa; adding that while navigational tools might make the novice user more comfortable in using the site, they actually reduce the number of choices the user makes. For McMillan (1998):

> The more navigational tools a site has, the less effort users exert in finding the information they seek and therefore, the lower the level of interactivity on the site in this regard.

> The less navigational tools a site has, the more effort users have to exert to find the information they seek and consequently, the higher the level of interactivity on the site in this regard.

This study will utilise the definition and measurements of this level of interactivity as defined by McMillan (1998) and the reason for this is that it puts forward what seems to the author to be the more logical way of reasoning, which is that: the more involved users are in the process of seeking information on a particular site, the higher the level of interactivity within that process.

Kenny et al. (2000) argue the complete opposite: that more involvement by users in this dimension of interactivity denotes a lower level of interactivity and vice versa. Unlike McMillan (1998), they give no justification for their reasoning, which in addition just does not seem to fit in with the implications of most of the available literature. Interactivity implies involvement and it follows that the higher the level of involvement by users, the higher the level of interactivity. McMillan's (1998) logic fits into this line of thinking. Deuze (2001) links a high level of interactivity to a high level of user involvement in the site. There are users who talk about being frustrated with too many choices but that does not change the fact that the more engaged a user is in the site, the more involved he/she is and more involvement implies a higher level of interactivity.

The way in which McMillan (1998) measures this dimension of interactivity is questionable: she uses the presence and absences of navigational tools and rating them as equalling to low and high levels of interactivity respectively. However, the principle and theory behind the means of measurement is supported by most of the relevant literature and provides enough justification for its use within this study.

Measured by: a menu bar on the first page of the site that provides a brief description of the sections of the site and has links to primary sections of the site; a menu bar on subsequent pages' and the presence of a hot link that takes the site visitor directly back to the home page.

3. Responsiveness to the User.

This dimension of interactivity is reflected in online newspaper sites when they, for instance according to Kenny, Gorelik and Mwangi (2000), interpose a human or use technology to respond to user queries. Generally, reporters or editors simply answer email questions from users of their online site but computer response is, however, possible and ultimate machine interactivity is achieved when there is an interchange of communication roles between human and machine. Such intelligent interactivity is currently difficult or impossible for media systems to achieve, but online newspapers can achieve lesser levels of such responsiveness by programming instructions, help pages and (informative) error messages.

Measured by: help pages, programmed instructions, informative error messages, means of contacting the Webmaster, the response rate and nature to such queries and a 'feedback form' for eliciting input from the user.

4. Facilitation of Interpersonal Communication.

There are a number of interactive options that can facilitate this dimension of interactivity on an online newspaper site and these include chat rooms, discussion groups, bulletin boards, feedback mechanisms and email addresses displayed on the home page.

Email addresses, discussion forums and live chat areas can serve to make communication easy between users and staff at online newspapers and attract and keep readers at a site. In addition, a site may offer synchronous communication with data transfers occurring at fractions of a second, or at the other extreme, a mandatory

time delay may be imposed, perhaps to allow editors to screen messages. The presence and use of options concerning channels of communication, such as text, sound or full-motion video can also serve to facilitate interpersonal communication (Kenny, Gorelik and Mwangi 2000).

Measured by: chat rooms, discussion groups/newsgroups, feedback mechanisms and email addresses.

5. **Ease of adding information.**

In this case, the user becomes the reporter-editor, and the message intentionally is transmitted to a larger audience. If online websites make it easy for users to add information, then they empower users and stimulate creativity and discovery. Some online newspapers allow users to add the following types of information: web pages, hobby and special interest pages, announcements of births, marriages and deaths and reviews of movies, plays and other cultural and entertainment events; some even allow users to make contributions to reporters' stories (Kenny, Gorelik and Mwangi 2000).

Measured by: public bulletin board for posting messages and any other means for users to add information to the newspaper's site.

6. **Monitoring Information Use/System Use.**

This refers to a site's use of a monitoring device, which is any explicit means by which the site operator/webmaster can record who has visited the site and/or which part of the site they visited. The potential for continuous monitoring of system use has implications for billing and for programming system content to meet user interests and the information can also be a valuable measure of how the site has attracted and maintained users' attention (Kenny, Gorelik and Mwangi 2000).

According to McMillan (1998), although the measures of monitoring information and system use are relatively simple measures of monitoring, they are nevertheless functional as indicators of the level of attention site creators are paying to the audience and the content of the site.

Measured by: cookies, counters (displays the number of visitors to a site); visitor registration; and a message indicating when content was updated.

7. Other/Unexpected Interactive Options.

There will be a category for interactive options that have not been accounted for or expected within the other categories of analysis.

An index measuring feedback options will also be applied within this study. In an exploratory content analysis of 100 U.S. newspapers, Schultz (1999) developed an index combining the different feedback tools that were encountered in the research. The index assigned values to options in accordance with their sophistication and significance for interactive communication and the higher an online newspaper scored, the more likely it was to offer different and sophisticated feedback options, which may encourage interactive communication.

Having discussed various issues and theories surrounding the concept of interactivity and giving a context within which this study can be located, the following chapter looks at the research methods and procedures that will be applied to the research problem.

3. CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH METHODS AND PROCEDURES.

3.1. Introduction.

This chapter aims to discuss the methods of research that will be employed in this study. It will provide a theoretical basis and structure for the quantitative and qualitative methods that will be used in this study and break down the problem statement, goals and objectives of this study into specific questions to be addressed. This chapter will also give a detailed step-by-step analysis of how these methods and procedures will be applied to the questions raised in the study, culminating in results that will be further analysed and discussed in the next chapter.

3.2. The Case for Quantitative and Qualitative Methods of Research.

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, this study will employ both quantitative and qualitative methods of research to address the research problem of examining if; to what extent and in what ways the Nigerian online *Guardian* has incorporated the interactive characteristic(s) of the Internet.

This research is a study in case and according to Bryman (1989:175), case studies provide one of the chief arenas within which quantitative and qualitative research can be combined. In fact, most case study research involves the use of more than one method of data collection and many examples have shown a whole array of data collection methods employed within one investigation.

Although a lot of writers do regard 'qualitative research' and 'case study' as one and the same, Bryman (1989:171) maintains that not all case studies can adequately be described as cases in point of qualitative research, since they also sometimes make substantial use of quantitative research methods, as will be done in this study.

To go beyond the fact that the nature of this study requires it, the reasoning and justification of using both quantitative and qualitative research methods within this study is fairly straightforward: according to Bryman (1989:176), the combined use of quantitative and qualitative research methods may often allow access to different levels of reality within a study.

Furthermore, precisely because quantitative and qualitative research have their own strengths and weaknesses, it is not hard to see that each will be relevant to some issues but not to others. Quantitative and qualitative research are different ways of conducting research and the choice between them should be made in terms of their appropriateness in answering particular research questions. The crucial issue is to be aware of the appropriateness of particular methods (or combination of methods) for particular issues (Bryman 1988:176).

Deacon et al. (1999:117), support this line of thinking when they say that content analysis, which this study will employ, is better at providing some answers than others. While content analysis provides some indication of relative prominences and absences of key characteristics in media texts, the inferences that can be drawn from such indications depend wholly on the context and framework of interpretation by which the texts analysed are circumscribed (Hansen 1998).

The purpose of content analysis, according to Deacon et al. (1999:116), is to quantify salient and manifest features and then use the statistics gathered to make broader inferences about the process and politics of representation. This is where the qualitative method of research comes in within this study: to contribute to making such broader inferences, to help deduce the significances of the results of the counting process (quantitative method), to help draw on the framework and context of the study to interpret the findings and also to provide its own findings, independent of the quantitative process.

The quantitative categories of this study will, therefore, include qualitative annotations as well, notes that Schultz (1999) says makes it possible for the researcher to obtain more specific information on interactive options encountered in the quantitative process.

3.3. Quantitative Content Analysis.

This study will conduct a quantitative content analysis of the online *Guardian*, this analysis is being incorporated primarily to determine the level of interactivity on the site and is being based on the use of content in the broadest sense to include not only the written word but also interactive tools and features that have become characteristic of the Internet. McQuail (2000:315-316) provides a justification for this by asserting that it need not matter which type of media content is at issue when it comes to quantifying the amount of information that is sent or received and measuring some aspects of the quality of messages.

Quantitative content analysis, according to Wimmer and Dominick (1994:163-164), enables the study and analysis of communication for the purpose of measuring variables and it does so in a manner that is systematic, objective, and quantitative. It is a "research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" says Berelson (in McQuail 2000:325).

According to Wimmer and Dominick (1994:170), the unit of analysis is "the thing that is actually counted". For this study, that would be each interactive feature in the online *Guardian*.

3.3.1. Constructing Measurable Categories of Analysis.

At the heart of any content analysis is the construction of categories for analysis, a system whose precise makeup, according to Wimmer and Dominick (1994:171), varies with the topic under study. Heeter's (1989) dimensions of interactivity are specific and measurable and will therefore be adopted for constructing the categories of analysis in this study. Kenny et al. (2000) and McMillan (1998) also adopted Heeter's dimensions of interactivity in their studies and operationalised them to render them measurable and so construct categories of analysis for their research.

Similarly, this study breaks down interactivity into measurable dimensions in order to construct categories of analysis and for the most part, this will be based on the operationalisation of these categories by Kenny et al. (2000) and McMillan (1998). The previous chapter discussed each category of analysis and how each dimension of interactivity will be measured within this study. To recap:

1. **Complexity of Choice Available** will be measured by: a choice of language, search engines, news stories prominently placed on the home page, links from the first page of the site, links within news stories, hyperlinks and taking into account users' browsers and connection speeds.

2. **Effort Users Must Exert** will be measured by: a menu bar on the first page of the site that provides a brief description of the sections of the site and has links to primary sections of the site; a menu bar on subsequent pages' and the presence of a hot link that takes the site visitor directly back to the home page.

3. **Responsiveness to the User** will be measured by: help pages, programmed instructions, informative error messages, means of contacting the Webmaster, the response rate and nature to such queries and a 'feedback form' for eliciting input from the user.

4. **Facilitation of Interpersonal Communication** will be measured by: chat rooms, discussion groups/newsgroups, feedback mechanisms and email addresses.

5. **Ease of adding information** will be measured by: public bulletin board for posting messages and any other means for users to add information to the newspaper's site.

6. **Monitoring Information Use/System Use** will be measured by: cookies, counters, visitor registration; and a message indicating when content was updated.

7. **Other/Unexpected Interactive Options**: there will be a category for interactive options that have not been accounted for or expected within the other categories of analysis.

3.3.2. Index of Feedback Options.

In an exploratory content analysis of 100 U.S. newspapers, Schultz (1999) developed the following index combining the different feedback tools that were encountered in the research. The index assigned values to options in accordance with their sophistication and significance for interactive communication and the higher an online newspaper scored, the more likely it was to offer different and sophisticated feedback options, which may encourage interactive communication.

General email address (es) to contact newsroom	1 pt
List of at least some editors'/writers' email (limited) OR List of editors'/writers' email addresses (general pattern)	1 pt 2 pts
Email links to at least some articles' authors (limited) OR Email links to articles' authors (general pattern)	1 pt 2 pts
Email links to politicians/officials	1 pt
Discussion forum(s) OR Discussion forum(s) obviously hosted/journalists participate	2 pts 3 pts
Chat room(s) provided OR Chat room(s) obviously hosted/journalists participate	1 pt 3 pts
Quick poll/user survey OR 'Sophisticated' poll/survey (open questions/linked to forum/background info)	1 pt 3 pts
MAXIMUM MINIMUM	15 pts 0 pts

Figure 6.   **Index of Feedback Options (points per option offered).**
(Schultz 1999:9).

Schultz (1999) maintained that while certain assumptions about the index may be challenged, its construction was in no way arbitrary or haphazard. For instance, it was theoretically appropriate to give more weight to discussion forums in comparison to simple quick polls, which are not ingrained in any further discursive effort, simply based on the fact that quick polls create reactive communication only while a forum is comparatively more likely to host fully interactive threads. Applying this idea, the index resulted in a scale ranging from a maximum of 15 to a minimum of 0 points and Schultz's study demonstrated that the higher an online newspaper scored, the more likely it was to offer different and sophisticated feedback options, which may encourage interactive communication.

This index will also be applied within this study in order to measure feedback options.

3.4. Research Questions: An Application of Relevant Methods.

In looking at the interactive nature of Nigeria's Online *Guardian*, the goals and objectives of this study have already been stated as examining and determining the extent to which the interactive quality of the Internet is incorporated into the site. Additional overall aims of the study were also said to include raising and answering questions about the levels of interactivity, the provision of interactive features and the nature and the utilisation of these features in the online *Guardian*. They also included specifically highlighting the provisions (if any) and nature of features on the site that allow for interaction between the readers and the paper, interaction amongst readers and the significance of these interactions.

Deacon et al. (1999:120-121) say that when it comes to content analysis, what you count should always be determined by your research objectives. In view of all of this, it is important that the research question, goals and objectives of this study be broken down into more specific research questions in order to provide clear direction and facilitate the process of research in a simple and straightforward manner; and because this has already been achieved in the quantitative aspect of the study through content analysis (the construction of categories of analysis and indices for measurement), this refers especially to the qualitative aspect of this study. Specifically, it refers to the schedule of questions for the interviews that will be conducted with some of the journalists of the online newspaper.

3.5. Qualitative Procedures.

The research aspect of this study will involve email interviews with some journalists of the online newspaper. The most traditional type of unstructured interview, according to Denzin and Lincoln (1994:365), is the open-ended ethnographic (in-depth) interview and it is appropriate for this study because its qualitative nature ensures that such unstructured interviewing provides a greater breadth than other types.

According to Bryman (1989:147), qualitative research interviews are relatively loosely structured and aim to draw out respondents' ways of thinking about the issues with which the study is concerned and for this reason, there is usually an inclination for reducing the degree to which the respondents are inhibited or guarded. Bryman (1989:147) goes on to say that truly unstructured interviews may be guided by an "aide-mémoire" (a sort of memory aid) which helps the interviewer keep in mind the areas they want to cover and at the same time giving respondents considerable freedom over what they want to say and how they say it.

In many ways, the interviews that will be conducted within this study will conform to definitions of unstructured interviewing as provided by Denzin and Lincoln (1994:365-366) and Bryman (1989:147), in other words, the interviews will seek to elicit information of greater depth than is produced with structured interviews; they will mostly be open-ended and seek to draw out responses from the respondents' that are both descriptive and explanatory as well as uninhibited.

The interviews that will be conducted within this study will be guided by an 'aide-mémoire' which will act to guide the researcher in the direction necessary to obtain the relevant data. The 'aide-mémoire' will also consist of a pre-existing schedule of detailed questions, which although is not usually the case with unstructured interviewing, serves the purpose of obtaining specific data necessary for the research (see appendix for interview schedule).

The researcher will aim to give as much latitude as possible and the interviews will be carried out with the realisation and even expectation that in spite of the presence and use of a schedule, departures from this schedule will occur and will be acknowledged. In other words, the interviews will not be limited to the schedule of questions that already exist and there will be room for exploration as is the case with unstructured interviews.

The interviews will explore both the attitudes and practices of these journalists regarding interactivity in online journalism, interactive features and activities on their site, the utilisation of these features by both readers and journalists and the level of commitment as regards the role of journalists/editors in the effort and practice of interactive journalism in the online environment. In addition, the interviews will also aim to determine their perceptions of how successful interactive efforts on the site are to date.

4. CHAPTER FOUR
RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION.

4.1. Introduction.

The purpose of this chapter is three-fold: firstly, it aims to present the results of the research undertaken within this study. Chapter three of this study (Research Methods and Procedures) set out the structure in which the research was to be carried out and in as much as is possible, this chapter will adhere to the same structure in setting out the resulting outcomes of this study.

Secondly, this chapter also aims to utilise the findings of this study as a basis for informed discussions and interpretations around the research. These discussions will not only be based on the findings of the research, but will also aim to explicate these findings on their own merit and in conjunction with relevant theoretical literature. It is the researcher's intention that these discussions will ultimately give rise to interpretations of the study's findings, which are both contextually consistent with and relevant to the overall aims and objectives of the study.

Thirdly, this chapter will also discuss the numerous problems and challenges encountered by the researcher during the course of this study.

4.2. Quantitative Content Analysis: Findings.

A quantitative content analysis of the online *Guardian*, was carried out to determine the level of interactivity on the site and as discussed in the previous chapter, was based on the use of content in the broadest sense to include not only the written word but also interactive tools and features that have become characteristic of the Internet McQuail (2000:315-316).

4.2.1. Measurable Categories of Analysis.

In order to construct measurable categories of analysis for this study, the concept of interactivity was broken down into measurable dimensions. For the most part, this was based on the adoption of Heeter's (1989) specific and measurable dimensions of interactivity as well as the operationalisation of these same categories by Kenny et al. (2000) and McMillan (1998).

The previous two chapters undertook a discussion of each category of analysis and also set out specifically how each dimension of interactivity was to be measured within the study. This chapter will not reiterate the discussions of each category of analysis; it will merely set out the findings obtained from the measurement specifications contained within each of those categories. As mentioned in chapter three, the quantitative findings of this study will also include qualitative notes as well with the aim of providing more detailed and specific information.

In the course of conducting this research, the researcher visited the online *Guardian* site twice a week over a period of six months. During this time, the researcher was able to make observations and conduct an analysis of the site in relation to the research question as set out in the categories of analysis that were constructed. The actual content analysed were interactive features utilised on the site. These included interactive features used on the pages of the site (both the home page and subsequent pages) as well as interactive features used in the stories on the site (for example to link headlines and/or blurbs to complete stories). Advertisements were not included in this analysis.

The findings of this research as related to the measurable categories of interactivity set out within this study and found in Nigeria's online *Guardian* is as follows:

1. **Complexity of Choice Available.**

    - A choice of language: the Nigeria's online *Guardian* provided users with only one choice of language (English).

Although English is Nigeria's official language, there are three main languages in the country, which correspond to the three main ethnic groups in the country, Hausa, Yoruba and Ibo. There are in addition over 250 other languages and ethnic groups.

    - Search engines: the online newspaper site of Nigeria's *Guardian* does have a search engine.

The search engine on the online *Guardian's* site will only search the current publication for those who are not members or subscribers of the online edition. The search engine on the site is quite basic in its makeup, it merely asks for users to enter a keyword, it does not offer advanced or any other search options. The search engine does not provide or search for users' requests on any other part of the Web apart from the site itself. Users have to be subscribed members of the site in order to have access to search the site's archives.

    - News stories prominently placed on the home page: the online *Guardian* does have news stories prominently placed on its home page.

There are headlines of the top stories with a blurb and then a hyperlink to take the reader to the rest of the story. Other stories are listed and indexed using headlines which are links to the stories themselves.

- Hyperlinks: the online *Guardian* does make use of some form of hyperlinks within the site.

Top stories on the site are structured in the format of a headline with a blurb and a 'more' link to the rest of the respective stories within the site. Other stories, not considered top stories are indexed by headlines, which also act as links to the rest of those stories within the site. The site also has a menu bar, which contains links to the various news categories and sections of the site. These links takes the user to headlines of various stories with a blurb and a link to read more of the stories.

The use of hyperlinks on the site is at a very basic level considering the fact that hyperlinks are the most essential ingredient of hypertext systems, including the World Wide Web.

- Links from the first page of the site: the online *Guardian* site does contain a number of such links.

Apart from the hyperlinks, which have just been discussed above, there are also links in the left hand corner of the first page in the form of news categories that take the user into various sections of the site. These links take the user to headline stories with blurbs and a link to read more of the story. There are other links from the first page of the site and these are to do with the other aspects of the site (such as an 'about us' link) as opposed to news content.

- Links within news stories: there are no links within news stories in the online *Guardian's* site. At the very most, the only links that exist are links that invite users to read more of a particular story.

- Taking into account users' browsers: the site does not take the users' browsers into consideration.

In terms of users' browsers, the website does not take this into consideration. During each visit to the site, the researcher attempted to access the site on both Internet Explorer and Netscape. The site appears on Internet explorer but not at all on Netscape, which means that users who use Netscape as a browser cannot access the site.

- Taking into account users' connection speeds: the site does take the users' connection speed into consideration.

In terms of taking users' connection speeds into consideration, the fact that there are minimal pictures (one usually on the first page), minimal graphics, no video or audio does indicate that the site is considering the low connection speeds of its local/national users because downloading the site is much easier for such users as opposed to if the site was loaded with many pictures, graphics, audio, video and any other elements that contribute to making download speed slower. There is the possibility, however, that the more likely reason such multimedia elements were absent from the site is due to a lack of relevant resources.

2. Effort Users Must Exert.

- A menu bar on the first page of the site that not only provides a brief description of the sections of the site but also contains links to primary sections of the site: the online *Guardian* site does have a menu bar on the first page and it contains links to the primary sections of the site.

In terms of explanatory text, the menu bar does not provide brief descriptions of the sections of the site. However, the research did find the links to be pretty much self-descriptive of the sections of the site.

- A menu bar on subsequent pages: the online *Guardian* site does have a menu bar on subsequent pages of the site.

The menu bar on the first page of the site remains constant throughout the site, regardless of which page on the site a user is on and there is in addition, an indication of which section of the site the user is currently at.

- The presence of a hot link that takes the site visitor directly back to the home page: the online *Guardian* site does have a hot link on every page that takes the user directly back to the home page.

The hot link is located on a menu bar across the top of the first page of the site and this stays consistent throughout every page of the site.

3. **Responsiveness to the User.**

- Help pages: there are no help pages on the online *Guardian* site.

- Programmed instructions: there are no programmed instructions on the online *Guardian* site either. There are not even rollover texts to give the user brief and basic descriptions or instructions.

- Informative error messages: there are informative error messages on the online *Guardian* site.

Such informative error messages are generated, for example, when an invalid username or password is entered when requested or when a vote is submitted in the online poll without having selected any option.

- Means of contacting the webmaster: there is no obvious means of contacting the webmaster of the online *Guardian* site.

At the bottom of each page on the online *Guardian* site, users are informed that the site is "powered" by '*Dnetsystems.net*', a web design company that designs and hosts sites and provides other services such as networking solutions and software development. There is a link that then takes the user to this site but it takes the user to the site rather than generate an email form to send questions/comments to the webmaster, which is the more typical means of contacting a webmaster.

It is not clear if *Dnetsystems* is the Webmaster, it is especially unclear what "powered" means in this context and efforts to find this out from the online *Guardian* and *Dnetsystems* proved futile. Information from the website of *Dnetsystems* did, however, reveal that they are responsible for hosting the online *Guardian* site but are not involved in the daily update of the site. Whatever the case, this study concluded there is no means of contacting the webmaster of the online *Guardian* site.

- The response rate and nature to such queries: the researcher did not receive any responses to queries made, either from the online *Guardian* or the site that hosts it.

- A feedback form for eliciting input from the user: the online *Guardian* does have a feedback form that allows users to send any comments/enquiries they might have.

4. **Facilitation of Interpersonal Communication.**

- Chat rooms: the online *Guardian* does have a chat room.

Access to the chat room is restricted to subscribers, members that have paid for that service.

- Discussion/news groups: the online *Guardian* site has no discussion or news groups.

- Feedback mechanisms: there is a 'contact us' link that is consistent throughout the site. The 'contact us' section of the site itself provides postal, telephone, fax and telex details of the site

- Email addresses: there is a 'mail-to' link for users to send comments or enquiries they might have. There is a separate 'mail-to' link for the users to send enquiries regarding advert placements.

Although the names of four editors appear on the 'contact us' section of the site, their email addresses are not provided. Stories on the site have bylines and although these bylines could easily be made 'mail-to' links, this is not the case.

5. **Ease of Adding Information.**

- Public bulletin board for posting messages and any other means for users to add information to the newspaper's site: the online *Guardian* site has no public bulletin board for posting messages.

At the most basic level of adding information to the site, there are opinion polls that allow users to vote on topical issues.

6. **Monitoring Information Use/System Use.**

- Cookies: the online *Guardian* site does not leave cookies on users' hard drives.

- Counters: there is no visible counter system on the online *Guardian* site.

Although there was no counter visible on the site, information from the online *Guardian* does make reference to how many hits the site has had to date. This suggests that there is some form of counting system within the site or by the host site.

- Visitor registration: there is no visible means of visitor registration on the online *Guardian* site.

- Message indicating when content was updated: the online *Guardian* does not have a specific message that indicates when content on the site was updated, however, each daily edition of the site does contain the date which serves to indicate that content on the site is updated on a daily basis.

7. Other/Unexpected Interactive Options.

Unexpected interactive options not accounted for within the other categories of analysis: there were no unexpected interactive features encountered on the online *Guardian* site.

Kenny et al. (2000) combined measures to create an index for the various dimensions of Interactivity within their study. This research adopted the same principle to rate the online *Guardian's* site in relation to the dimensions of interactivity just discussed.

The index used to measure the dimensions in this study gave one point to each dimension within each of the measurable categories of interactivity. The lowest score attainable is zero and the highest varies with each dimension being measured and is indicated for each dimension in the table below. The findings are outlined in the table below:

Categories of Interactivity	Maximum Attainable Score	Rating for the Online *Guardian* Site
Complexity of Choice Available	8	4
Effort Users Must Exert	3	3
Responsiveness to the User	6	2
Facilitation of Interpersonal Communication	4	3
Ease of Adding Information	1	0
Monitoring Information Use/System Use	4	1
TOTAL SCORE	**26**	**13**

Figure 7.   **Table of Findings: Measurable Categories of Interactivity.**

The findings of this research in terms of the dimensions of interactivity therefore reveal that:

- Complexity of choice is at an average on the site of Nigeria's online *Guardian*. The percentage achieved by the site with regard to this dimension is 50%.

Breakdown of Marks Obtained: a choice of language (0pts), search engines (0pts), news stories prominently placed on the home page (1pt), links from the first page of the site (1pt), links within news stories (0pts), hyperlinks (1pt), taking into account users' browsers (0pts) and taking into account users' connection speeds (1pt).

- The requirements within the dimension of effort users must exert were all met; this implies that users were empowered to find information on the site quickly and easily. The percentage achieved by the online *Guardian* site with regard to this dimension is 100%.

Breakdown of Marks Obtained: a menu bar on the first page of the site that provides a brief description of the sections of the site and has links to primary sections of the site (1pt); a menu bar on subsequent pages' (1pt) and the presence of a hot link that takes the site visitor directly back to the home page (1pt).

- In terms of responsiveness to the user, only two of the required six conditions were met and in addition, there was hardly any way to contact the webmaster or reporter of any of the stories. There was only one email address provided and although this research made use of that, there was no response whatsoever. The percentage achieved by the online *Guardian* site with regard to this dimension is 33.3%.

Breakdown of Marks Obtained: help pages (0pts), programmed instructions (0pts), informative error messages (1pt), means of contacting the Webmaster (0pts), the response rate and nature to such queries (0pts) and a 'feedback form' for eliciting input from the user (1pt).

- There were a number of options related to interpersonal communication available on the site. The percentage achieved by the online *Guardian* site with regard to this dimension is 75%.

Breakdown of Marks Obtained: chat rooms (1pt), discussion groups/newsgroups (0pts), feedback mechanisms (1pt) and email addresses (1pt).

- The site offered no means for users to add information to the site. The percentage achieved by the online *Guardian* site with regard to this dimension is 0%.

Breakdown of Marks Obtained: public bulletin board for posting messages and any other means for users to add information to the newspaper's site (0pts).

- Information/system use was monitored on the site in some form though it is not comprehensive or obvious in the cases that did exist. The percentage achieved by the online *Guardian* site with regard to this dimension is 25%.

Breakdown of Marks Obtained: cookies (0pts), counters (1pts), visitor registration (0pts) and a message indicating when content was updated (0pts).

- Overall, the percentage achieved by the online *Guardian* site with regard to all the dimensions of interactivity measured is 57.7%. This figure was achieved by dividing the overall attainable mark (26) by the mark obtained by the online *Guardian* (13) and converting this to a percentage.

It is important to bear in mind that these figures only reflect the presence of these interactive features on the online *Guardian* site, it does not say much about how or if these features are utilised. The qualitative notes that complemented the findings so far have hopefully provided more descriptive data about the interactive features on the site and about how and if they are utilised.

The mere presence of interactive features on an online newspaper site, as was found in Nigeria's online *Guardian*, is not in itself interactivity. As Noth says, "the meaning of interactivity is elevated beyond a click" (Noth in Schultz 1999:3).

To elaborate this point further, in some of the quantitative aspects of the research, the online *Guardian* site scored high marks simply because a certain interactive feature was present on the site. Ironically, further analysis revealed that the utilisation of such features were at a level too minimal to be truly representative of significant interactivity on the site. For instance, the site scored 75% by simply having three out of the four requirements for the dimension of interactivity to do with the facilitation of interpersonal communication. In reality, the research found that none of the apparently fulfilled requirements were utilised to any level that can be said to be significant or reflective of interactivity as discussed within this study.

The three options that were available but that were not effective in performing the function they ought were: a chat room that showed no activity whatsoever at any of the times it was visited during the course of this research, feedback mechanisms that were utilised but which elicited no response and mail-to links that, as above, were used to send enquiries but that elicited no response.

There is a significant difference between the availability and use of interactive features on an online newspaper site; the mere presence of such features does not necessarily speak to the levels or nature of interactivity on the site. As Katz says, many online papers are just producing "an illusion of interactivity" and are making little effort to give interactive options on their sites the kind of serious attention they deserve (Katz in Schultz 2000:210).

4.2.2. Index of Feedback Options.

An index developed by Schultz (1999) in an exploratory content analysis of 100 U.S. newspapers combining the different feedback tools that were encountered in the research was also employed as part of the quantitative aspect of this study. The index assigns values to options in accordance with their sophistication and significance for interactive communication. The previous two chapters provide more discussion of the index as well as the justification for using it within this study.

The findings of this study, generated by the use of the index of feedback options are as follows:

Feedback Options	Maximum Attainable Scores	Rating of Nigeria's Online Guardian
General email address(es) to contact newsroom	1pt	1 pt
List of at least some editors'/writers' email (limited) OR List of editors'/writers' email addresses (general pattern)	1pt 2pts	0 pt 0 pts
Email links to at least some articles' authors (limited) OR Email links to articles' authors (general pattern)	1pt 2pts	0 pt 0 pts
Email links to politicians/officials	1pt	0 pt
Discussion forum(s) OR Discussion forum(s) obviously hosted/journalists participate	2pts 3pts	0 pts 0 pts
Chat room(s) provided OR Chat room(s) obviously hosted/journalists participate	1pt 3pts	1 pt 0 pts
Quick poll/user survey OR 'Sophisticated' poll/survey (open questions/linked to forum/background info)	1pt 3pts	1 pt 0 pts
SCORE	**15pts**	**3pts**

Figure 8.   **Table of Findings: Index of Feedback Options.**

The findings therefore reveal that feedback options, a very essential part of a site's interactivity, was at a very low level in the online *Guardian* site. The findings also indicate that where some of these options were available, they exist at the most basic level. The percentage achieved by the site with regard to this index of feedback options is 20%.

Schultz (2000) discusses two main hindrances to the increase of interactivity through the use of email between journalists and the readers. One of these is the time schedule of the newsroom, which does not regard discussions with the audience as an integral part of the job; journalists already have to make extra time when dealing with requests from their readers not to mention the time to deal with desirable interactive discussions. The second hindrance is to do with the risk of getting a lot of 'hate' and 'junk' mail, a risk that increases with email communication. Generally, the use of email seems to be mainly reactive and not interactive in the practice of online journalism but nevertheless the researcher received no response whatsoever to the numerous emails sent, even at this very basic reactive level, not to mention at an interactive level.

According to Schultz (2000), a feature of the Internet that is especially open to misuse is the speed of news delivery. The exploitation of this characteristic of the Internet has led to for instance, elements of pseudo participation such as quick online polls where mere headlines are used as questions. The failure to be representative and the possibility of readers casting multiple votes are other problems associated with online polls and surveys.

This appears to be the case with Nigeria's online *Guardian*. The site has quick online polls that use headlines as questions, examples of some of the poll questions found on the site include: "How do you rate Nigeria at 42?" The answer options provided were "successful, not so successful, failure, don't know"; "Do you support the U.S plans to overthrow President Saddam Hussein of Iraq?" The answer options provided were "yes, no, indifferent". One does begin to see how such polls could be considered 'pseudo participation'. The questions are broad and respondents are forced to provide similarly broad answers with no room for providing rationale attached to their answers.

4.3. Qualitative Procedures: Findings.

4.3.1. Email Interviews/Questionnaire.

Conducting email interviews with some of the staff of the Nigerian online *Guardian* was to form a part of the qualitative aspect of this study. Chapter three gives a more detailed discussion of the nature of the interview schedule but the general aim of the interviews was to explore and determine the general attitudes and practices of journalists in the online *Guardian* regarding interactivity in online journalism, interactive features and activities on their site, the utilisation of these features by both readers and journalists and the level of commitment as regards the role of journalists/editors in the effort and practice of interactive journalism in the online environment.

The researcher prepared a loose schedule of questions to act as a memory aid for the areas to be covered in the interviews. However, the researcher faced so many problems in getting in touch with any staff of the online newspaper in question and in having any one of them commit to the time to conduct open-ended, in-depth interviews that this schedule was developed into a questionnaire. (The questionnaire is enclosed within the appendix).

During the course of this study, the researcher sent emails to the online editor of the Nigeria online *Guardian* but to date there have been no responses to any of those emails. The researcher initially sent an introductory email and thereafter sent emails with further details about the study requesting co-operation and interviews with online staff at the online *Guardian*. These emails were sent about twice a month over a period of six months but all of these attempts proved futile.

During the course of the study, other attempts (apart from those already discussed above) were made to get in touch with and get some feedback from staff at the online *Guardian*. These attempts included telephone calls and faxes. It is not possible to provide evidence of all attempts made, copies of email correspondences with the source at the online *Guardian* as well as more details on the researcher's attempts to elicit responses have been included in the study's appendix.

There is an interesting point of note within all of this that should be highlighted. On a whim (an intellectually induced whim driven by the need to seek answers and also partly to satisfy a nagging thought about the lack of response from the online *Guardian*) the researcher used a feedback form provided on the site to send a brief email requesting information about advert placements on the site; the usual message stating: "we will get back to you as soon as possible" had till now remained an empty promise. The very next day, there was a response in the researcher's inbox giving the requested information on costs of adverts, the reach of the site and the number of hits it generates (see appendix for email).

Generating revenue is a problem for many online newspaper sites and within this context; such an instant response to the possibility of incoming revenue might be understandable. Nevertheless, this reflects the priorities of the site and speaks volumes about the need for a shift towards placing more value on integrating interactivity within the site and elevating the levels of responsiveness to the users. At the very least, there should be feedback - even computer generated - acknowledging receipt of all correspondence from users.

The questionnaires were sent to 4 reporters, including an editor at the online *Guardian*. A Sheer persistence finally elicited a response from one of these reporters and his response to the questionnaire is included in the appendix.

The responses were not very comprehensive and did not provide adequate answers to all the questions that were posed but here is a summary of the findings obtained:

The online *Guardian* is a purely news website and it went online five years ago with the purpose of enabling Nigerians and Africans outside the continent to have access to information about both Nigeria and the African continent. The site aims to cater to intellectuals.

The online *Guardian* underwent a re-design two years ago in order to allow more people have access to the site. Apparently, there were too many people visiting the newsroom of the newspaper and the re-design of the site was intended to re-direct this traffic and queries to the website. This implies the commitment of the online

Guardian to addressing the needs of its audience. The reporter added that this has to a large extent reduced the number of people visiting the newsroom of the newspaper. The implication here is that the needs of these audiences were met online.

The site is run in-house and it is not an independent entity from the print paper and the production process for the website is carried out simultaneously with that of the newspaper. Copy for the site does not undergo editing and/or re-writing for the web before it is put on the site.

The site has according to the reporter, given Nigerians outside the country an opportunity to know what is happening in the country. The issue of interactivity and empowering the user through more choices is said to be a major consideration in running the site and the discussions that apparently take place in the chat room gives the management an avenue of receiving feedback on how the site's performance.

The journalist acknowledged the necessity for online journalists to be trained and competent in both journalism and the web.

Responding to questions about the response rate to queries from users, the journalist says the *Guardian* tries as much as possible to reply queries from users of its site. The site also claims to be interested in eliciting feedback from its readers and the practical ways in which it attempts to do this is by publishing letters and articles sent in by users of the site. The site also claims to afford readers and writers the opportunity and forum to share ideas on issues of public interest.

In the discussions that follow, the study will address these findings, especially in light of whether the research finds them to be consistent with the quantitative findings that have been obtained.

4.3.2. Discussion Forums and Chat Sessions.

Schultz (2000) makes a distinction between chat forums of general online settings as opposed to those surrounded by the online environment of a mass medium, adding that the latter has specific advantages over other online settings. Unlike a lot of chat forums on the Internet that are characterised by trivial talk, one would expect discussions in journalistic chat forums to not only be related to the content of the mass medium but also to have a higher likelihood of being considered rational and significant public discourse. Bukota (2001) also stresses the point of having enough background explanation provided in discussions within an online journalism environment; this, he says, ensures that the article or issue under discussion is tied to both informed and deliberative content.

During the course of this study, the researcher visited the online chat forum of Nigeria's online *Guardian* three times a week over a period of a month and after that visited the forum at least once a week over a period of three months. The forum was empty at all these times. The researcher's visits to the forum stopped when access to the forum (which was previously free) became restricted to paying members in the form of subscription.

With respect to the involvement of online staff in discussion forums, Schultz (2000) says that although online staff will at best take notice of reader discussions in the forums, their interest, however, will often be limited to technical problems, content control and decisions about topics of discussion. While online chat forums are initiating interactive discussions and debate between readers but there is a need for more participation and involvement by journalists in these forum discussions and live chats.

The researcher's use of interactive options on the site to obtain data and the resulting lack of response speaks volumes in and of itself. It indicates a lack of responsiveness to the user, one of the dimensions of interactivity measured within the study and a deduction consistent with the findings that the study was able to obtain.

Another issue that speaks to the interactivity of online newspapers is that of content. Schultz (2000) claims that at the beginning of the Internet hype, most newspapers simply put the content of their print edition online and little effort was made to take interactive options seriously; online papers were apparently just producing what Katz describes as "an illusion of interactivity" (Katz in Schultz 2000). Kenny et al. (2000) point out the need for original content that is designed specifically for the web as a new medium of communication. Deuze (1999) also makes reference to the term 'original content' and defines it as content that is produced exclusively for the online news site, as opposed to what is called 'shovelware' which refers to print media content that is literally dumped onto the Web.

This study was able to compare the content of the online *Guardian* with that of its print edition and the findings of that revealed that the content on the site is an exact reproduction of the print edition, in other words, 'shovelware'. Further study (supported by the findings of the questionnaire, limited as they were) indicated that there is no 'online staff' as such and the online edition is not a separate entity from the print. This was based on a combination of reasons:

- o The journalists were the same (same stories and same by-lines appeared in both the online and print editions),
- o The editors were the same as above.
- o Even the categories of the print newspaper were the same as the sections of the site.

4.4. Further Discussion of Research Findings.

According to Schultz (1999:16), it would seem that "journalistic web sites are not necessarily interactive at all". There are many questions surrounding the issue of whether the process of making news online is different from that of the traditional 'offline' environment and there are just as many questions about what the nature of those differences are.

According to Singer (1998), few media scholars have yet to begin the quest of providing answers to these questions, one of the reasons for this being that for a lot of news organisations, the process of making news online is currently not very different at all from that of their traditional 'offline' environment.

Singer (1998) goes on to add that generally, online newsrooms have a small staff in comparison to the print newsroom and 'shovelware' content simply lifted from print form and shovelled indiscriminately on to the Internet still dominates the sites produced by most media outlets.

It is apparent that there is a need for the online staff of Nigeria's online *Guardian* to take into consideration the features and characteristics that distinguish the web medium from the print media and there is an even greater need for them to begin exploring and utilising these differing possibilities and capabilities.

The mere presence of interactive features on an online newspaper site, as was found in Nigeria's online *Guardian*, is not in itself interactivity. As Noth says, "the meaning of interactivity is elevated beyond a click" (Noth in Schultz 1999:3). For instance, in some of the quantitative aspects of the research, the online *Guardian* site scored high marks simply because a certain interactive feature was present on the site. Ironically, further analysis revealed that the utilisation of such features were at a level too minimal to be truly representative of significant interactivity on the site.

Kenny et al. (2000) talk of the persistence of an old mindset within some newsrooms, a mindset that is hindering the development and integration of new information communication technologies and interactivity in online journalism. Their discussion of expert opinions about why this old mindset has persisted within the newsroom focuses on two main things: the first of these is the argument that because newspaper companies have a business-oriented priority, they are consequently both culturally and corporately incapable of understanding the egalitarian, decentralised, peer-to-peer, autonomous nature of communication on the Net. The second is the reluctance within some newsrooms to update antiquated computer systems (this might be partly due to financial restraints) and a lack of understanding about the nature of the Net, especially interactivity.

An analysis of 100 U.S online newspapers by Schultz (1999) revealed that these online newspapers generally offered few and token interactive options. Schultz (1999) compared the findings of his study with that of Tankard and Ban's 1998 study and found a concurrence with their conclusion that a lot of online newspaper sites were simply using their sites to mirror or reproduce the content of their print editions. In their study of interactive features of online newspapers, Kenny et al. (2000) supported the finding that previous research and professional literature has indicated: that online newspapers have low levels of interactivity. Ha and James' 1998 study of interactive features also found a generally low use of interactive options and even when interactive features were present, they found that it often just created a false sense of empowerment because the reality of it was that in actual fact, the company still defined consumer choice (Kenny et al. 2000). The findings of this study point to a concurrence with those just discussed.

The findings of this study, especially if they are representative of the online journalism environment in the country, indicate that the penetration of a new mindset regarding information and communication technology (ICT) into the world of online journalism and journalists in Nigeria is going to prove to be an extremely challenging task indeed. It is easy to assume that all that needs to be done is to integrate more interactive features and strategies into online newspaper sites like Nigeria's online *Guardian* but like Deuze (2001) says, such changes go deeper than that, well beyond the mere adding of email links, hypertext or a feedback form. They involve more fundamental changes that have to do with already existing editorial organisation patterns and challenges to established and conventional journalistic ways, norms and values of storytelling.

Journalists now working in the online environment are not only faced with a new delivery method but also with what may be a fundamental shift in their role in the communication process, a role that has to adapt and evolve to incorporate the nature of a more interactive medium. Changes in the nature of storytelling, for instance, point to more subtle changes in the sociology of news work, changes in the ways journalists perceive themselves and their jobs (Singer 1998).

According to Deuze (2001), in order for an online news site to become interactive in a participatory way, the particular newsroom itself first has to undergo quite a few changes and tackle some tough choices about values, goals and standards. However, even if the online staff and relevant decision-makers of Nigeria's online *Guardian* manage to make a shift in their thinking and approach towards news-content production and delivery, they still have to deal with the problematic commercial aspects of electronic publishing routines and the effect that such choices may have on management and newsroom organisation.

Ideally, however, the job of an online journalist (especially in relation to civic journalism) should not end at uploading information to the reader, it should move on from there to include developing roles for their existing and intended readers as active participants in discussions and deliberations as well as in problem solving that will have a significant bearing on the process of democratisation. They should provide readers with points of entry for having a voice and for taking responsibility, to come aboard, shoulder some of the responsibility and share a stake in the outcome (Rheingold 2000:177). These principles also apply to the online journalist's role in the effective integration and utilisation of interactivity within the site.

In defence of the low levels of interactivity found in the online *Guardian*, especially in light of the fact that this study has made use of extensive references to the interactive levels of sites within an Anglo-American context (which although are not necessarily ideal models of interactivity do tend to demonstrate a higher level of interactivity), one has to expect that there will be a marked difference in the interactive quality of online newspapers that originate from regions that are characterised as being developed such as the United States and Europe and those originating from regions comparatively characterised as developing, such as Nigeria. Kenny et al. (2000) make such a distinction in their study of interactive features of online newspapers and cite reasons why countries such as the United States are more advanced in terms of interactive technology and skills. The United States, for instance, adopted interactivity technology earlier than other countries and therefore more people in the United States have access to interactive computer technology and the skill levels of interactive designers are higher as compared to other countries where the technology was adopted much later (Kenny et al. 2000).

Furthermore, to expand on the previous point, a lot of other resources that aid the development and integration of interactivity into online journalism, technologically as well as conceptually, are more readily available, accessible and affordable in more developed countries such as the United States as opposed to developing countries such as Nigeria. Kenny et al. (2000) cite telephone company rates as an example of such a resource that is affordable for U.S citizens and which consequently means that Internet users can enjoy more bandwidth and can stay online longer, so they can utilise interactive features more than in countries where the cost of connecting to computer networks is relatively higher.

Although all African nations can boast of some form of Internet access, such access is largely confined to the capital cities in most African countries. Access costs are generally higher in Africa than anywhere else in the world and this is mostly due to the nature of the telecommunications sector where the revenue per subscriber line is twice as high as that of Europe, for instance. Ott and Rosser (2000:144) divide major barriers to the development of electronic communication in Africa into 2 categories: infrastructure limitations and regulatory barriers. Infrastructure limitations include problems such as scarce and/or poor quality telephone lines, unreliable power supplies, outdated equipment and a lack of knowledge and training while regulatory barriers include government monopolies on telecommunications, high access rates for telephone service, high Internet Service Providers (ISP) rates and legal disincentives to foreign investment

Interactivity is an essential factor in building good broad-based citizen involvement through the Internet but it is by no means the only factor and several other elements come into play in developing such citizen involvement through the Internet. One of these is reach; while most reporters in Europe, North America and other developed parts of the world may be surrounded by pervasive Internet access, one must bear in mind that the world is not yet completely wired (Bukota 2001).

Indeed, journalists in Nigeria cannot boast the privilege of consistent Internet access, and in a lot of cases, none at all. The culture of journalism within which technological advancement is the norm and even taken for granted is not yet a reality within the Nigerian context and consequently, neither is the mindset that prioritises issues along thee lines of the use of interactivity within online journalism to build citizen participation and enhance democracy.

Other keys to a more effective wired citizenry include access and competence. A growing number of people may be gaining Internet access but they will not participate in online citizenship unless they fee competent to do so, and today that means being able to type and being "eloquent" enough to confidently stand up for their beliefs in an online forum (Bukota 2001).

The low level of interactivity found in the online *Guardian* cannot be wholly blamed on a lack of effort on the part of the online staff. Other factors, as discussed above, also contribute to such low active levels of interactivity both on the part of the staff and the local audience.

In as much as new media technology provides enormous opportunities and potential for more interactive media use and the enhancement of democracy, it does not necessarily follow that its beneficial effects on broader democratic processes and government is automatically guaranteed. Schultz (2000) makes this point by saying that on their own, communication and participation do not signify much in terms of quality and value of content, adding that it is possible for communication to remain without any significant effects as long as it is not transformed into communicative power and effective decisions.

Schultz (1999:16), stated that it would seem "journalistic web sites are not necessarily interactive at all". As demonstrated in the findings of this research, the lack of significant interactive features in an online newspaper site is just as bad as the mere presence of some interactive options which do no more than produce an illusion of interactivity when in actual fact the interactive features of the site are neither given the kind of consideration they warrant or utilised to the full extent and effect of their potential.

The findings of this study, however, show that the practical reality reflect a situation that is a far cry from being consistent with the theoretical ideals and possibilities. When the situation exists as it does, the odds of translating theoretical truths into practical reality appear to be very slim indeed.

4.5. Case Study: A Reflection.

One major issue the researcher faced in presenting the findings of this research has to do with what Bryman (1989:170) calls a "loss of faith" in case studies as a result of the prevailing view that it is not possible to generalise the results of research deriving from just one or two cases. This research was a case study of Nigeria's online *Guardian* and because it was a study of only one of the online newspapers in the country, there is a difficulty; and some might even say presumptuousness, in concluding that the findings of the study are a reflection of online newspapers or journalists in the country as a whole.

It is true that case study does seem to imply the study of one case but nevertheless, many examples of such research tend to focus upon two or more sites and the reason for the inclusion of a second case or more are usually twofold: firstly, comparisons between the cases being researched allow the special features of the cases to be identified much more readily; secondly and perhaps much more importantly, the generalisability of the research is enhanced by the use of more than one case (Bryman 1989:171).

The researcher was aware of the fact that the problem of generalisation is often perceived as the chief drawback of case study research and that it causes a "loss of faith" in such studies. In undertaking this study, however, the researcher was much more aware and strongly subscribes to the view Bryman (1989:172) puts forth to counter the misgivings about case study research and the associated problem of generalisability and that is that, while on the one hand the problem of generalisation is perceived as a shortcoming of case study research, on the other hand:

> There is a growing recognition that some of the accusations about the limited generalisability of case studies may be based on an erroneous application of statistical notions, which treats the case as a sample of one (Bryman 1989:172).

According to Bryman (1989:173-174), case studies can be employed in a somewhat exploratory manner in order to achieve insights into a previously uncharted area and that was exactly what the purpose of this research was. This 'one case' case study was undertaken with the view and belief that:

> **Case studies should be evaluated in terms of the adequacy of the theoretical inferences that are generated. The aim is not to infer the findings from a sample to a population, but to engender patterns and linkages of theoretical importance** (Bryman 1989:173, emphasis added).

The intention of this research was not to generalise the findings to the population at large, although that is done at times, the intention was rather, to explore interactivity in a Nigerian online newspaper, an area that is definitely 'uncharted'. Furthermore, the intention of this study was to engender theoretical inferences as well as 'patterns' and 'linkages' that are theoretically sound and significant. This study also hoped to provide insights into the research area that highlighted the significance of interactivity within online journalism, revealing whatever key absences exist regarding the interactive practice of online journalism in the country and as such open up possibilities for further communication research that will contribute to addressing issues and concerns arising from the study.

Indeed, the findings of this research are an eye opener and indeed a wake up call in relation to the nature and levels of interactivity within the setting of a selected online newspaper site. The findings of this study indicate a minimal presence of interactive options in the online newspaper site of Nigeria's *Guardian*. Within some of the dimensions of interactivity measured, the findings were characterised by the sheer absence of any interactive features at all. In those instances within the study where there was an observed presence of interactive options, the research findings pointed to the fact that those options were utilised only at the most basic level, if at all.

5. CHAPTER FIVE
CONCLUSION.

This research undertook an exploratory investigation into the extent and ways in which the interactive quality of the Internet is an integrated feature within the practice of online journalism. More specifically, through the use of a case study, this research explored and analysed the nature and levels of interactivity in Nigeria's online *Guardian* with the aim of determining if, to what extent and in what ways the interactive quality of the Internet is incorporated into the online site of one of Nigeria's online newspapers.

Furthermore, the study sought to answer questions about the levels of interactivity, the provision of interactive features and the nature and the utilisation of these features on the newspaper site. Within this aspect of the research, the study specifically aimed to highlight the provisions (if any) and nature of features on the newspaper site that allow for interaction between the readers and the paper, interaction amongst readers and the significance of these interactions.

The introductory chapter of this research briefly introduced and placed the study within the context of interactivity in online journalism as well as highlighting its significance within the national and historical context of Nigeria and the practice of journalism in the country. The chapter also briefly discussed the research problem, the aims, objectives and significance of the study and finally, the methods and procedures that the study was going to employ to address the issues at hand.

Chapter two of this research provided a theoretical framework for the study, looking at online journalism and interactive options in online journalism and then discussing relevant models of communication and audience, exploring the more abstract and philosophical discussions around the concept.

Chapter three discussed the methods of research employed within the study, giving a detailed step-by-step analysis of how these methods and procedures would be applied to the questions raised within the study. It also provided a theoretical foundation for the relevant quantitative and qualitative methods, breaking down the problem statement, goals and objectives of the study into specific questions to be addressed.

Chapter four embarked on a presentation of the results of the research undertaken within this study, using those findings as a basis for informed discussions and interpretations around the research. The chapter also undertook a discussion of the problems and challenges the researcher encountered during the course of the study.

As discussed in the previous chapter, this study found a very low level of interactivity in the online site of Nigeria's *Guardian*. In addition, it found that such interactive options as did exist on the site were not effectively utilised to the extent that relevant literature indicates ought to be typical of a truly interactive journalistic site. In terms of the effective offering of interactivity within the site of Nigeria's online *Guardian*, the findings of this research correspond to Schultz's statement that while most news media are represented on the Internet, they do not necessarily employ the specific tools characteristic of the medium (Schultz 1999). Indeed, there is no lack of online newspaper sites on the Internet but that is not the issue; the concern is that the representation of such sites (like Nigeria's online *Guardian* for instance) constitutes nothing but a presence on the Net and while this in itself is not a bad thing, there is a need for representation on the Net to extend beyond a mere presence into an effective utilisation and offering of the unique qualities of the Internet such as interactivity.

If, according to Schultz (2000), the challenge of the future in relation to mass media and the concept of interactivity is to preserve the mass media not only as institutions of integration and public discourse but also to combine them with a new culture of interactivity, then this study echoes Schultz's plea that: "mass media online still have to improve in offering real participation to their audiences." (Schultz 2000:217).

However, as this study has discussed, hopes that interactive options of the Internet will facilitate the reinvigoration of public communication also depend to a large extent on the resolution of a lot of practical issues (Schultz 1999:17). Within the context of this study, some of such practical issues concern questions of both financial and human resources, a lack of relevant training and skills, government and telecommunication regulatory barriers and tariffs, bandwidth issues that affect the accessing of information and download speed and as such make it a painfully slow and expensive process and not least, the need for a shift and change from old mindsets within the practice of journalism.

The idea of improving public communication and even democratic deliberation is not obsolete but one has to go beyond questions of the mere availability of communicative tools and settings (Schultz 1999:18). It is the researcher's hope that this study contributes to the initiation of studies and questions about the reality and possibilities of online journalism.

Schultz (2000:217) maintains that the mass media are still one of the most efficient and important factors of integration. That being the case, it is imperative that online newspapers such as Nigeria's online *Guardian* cultivate a culture of thought that has a practical bearing on the offering of active and effective interactive options on their sites. It is especially imperative that their offering of interactive tools highlights an understanding of the significance of such interactive options and develops beyond a mere availability into an extensive and effective utilisation of such tools.

5.1. Scope For Further Study.

Interactivity in online journalism is an extremely broad and diverse topic. In the more developed parts of the world like Europe and the United States, communication research into the area of interactivity is growing and steadily clearing up a lot of the muddy waters that initially surrounded the concept of interactivity. Within the African context, however, the topic still remains largely unexplored and there are a lot of possibilities and avenues for scholarly research.

This study has raised a lot of issues as well as questions that need to be addressed and in doing so; it has also touched on a lot of areas that need to be explored further. Consequently, this study makes some suggestions for further communication research into the concept of interactivity, especially as related to online journalism. It would, for instance, be beneficial to look into the following:

- How do interactive media forms affect traditional newsroom routines of not only collecting but also disseminating news?

- How do changes in the method of delivery through which news reaches the public affect the definition of what constitutes a news story and the way in which the story is actually told?

- How does the nature of interactive technology affect the jobs and roles of journalists? How does it affect prevailing professional norms? In particular, it would be beneficial to explore the practical measures related to training and computer literacy issues that would ensure journalists are more competent in understanding and utilising new interactive technologies.

- Considering the problems the researcher faced in terms of response and feedback, it would be especially fruitful to conduct a participant observation study of two or more online newspapers in Nigeria (or within an African context) to answer a lot of questions about how they function and issues they face in relation to the effective integration of interactivity in their sites.

- An exploration into the mindsets that exist in newsrooms regarding new media and information and communication technologies and how this affects or hinders interactivity in online journalism.

In spite of the bourgeoning of communication research into the diverse and varied aspects of interactivity within online journalism, there is still an obvious lack of sufficient literature and documented research. The fact that most of the literature and research that does exist approach the issues from an European or North American point of view serves to make this deficiency of literature and documented research especially apparent within the African context. It is the researcher's hope that this study will in some way, however little, contribute to a knowledge base of literature and research from which communication scholars can perhaps draw, but most certainly one that they can work with and develop to relate to the issues of interactivity and its effective incorporation into online journalism within the African context.

APPENDIX 1

(One of the researcher's letter to the online *Guardian's* editor: sent by fax and email)

The (Online) Editor,
The Guardian Newspapers Ltd.
Tel: 234-1-4524111, 4529183, 4529184
Fax: 234-1-4524080, 4931797

Dear Sir/Madam,

I have been making numerous attempts to get in touch with you through email, fax and phone but all to no avail. I am re-sending this letter in the hope that I hear from you this time.

My name is Oluseyi Folayan and I am a student at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa. I am doing a Master of Arts in Journalism & Media Studies. I am writing to request your assistance and co-operation on my thesis. My faculty, the senate and the higher degrees committee approved my thesis proposal last year and I am currently working on my third chapter. I just wanted to introduce myself and request your permission to interview you and some of the journalists at your online publication (through email). My thesis looks at the issue of interactivity in online journalism and I chose your site as a case study. I am attaching my proposal, which contains a more detailed outline of my work.

I am a Nigerian but unfortunately have not really lived there for quite some time now. I have visited many times though and I am very interested in coming back to the country one day soon. I strongly believe that there is a lot that can be done and achieved to aid the development of our nation if people ploughed back into the country and that is one of the reasons I fully intend to come back home and also why I decided to focus on something close to home as the subject of my thesis.

I am also very interested in the Internet and its growth in the country and in Africa as a whole. I am studying and involved in various application courses programmes and projects, mostly in conjunction with my department and university. My interest in your online edition stems from many reasons but mostly I admire the pioneering work that I believe you do and believe that no matter how basic, it has a lot of potential and is the way forward for all forms of development in the country.

I apologise that I have not been in touch before now but I hope you will respond favourably to this email and to my request. Should you need any kind of verification, my supervisor's name is Ms Anthea Garman and she can be contacted at: a.garman@ru.ac.za Should you wish, you can also contact my head of department, Guy Berger, at: g.berger@ru.ac.za They will both be happy to confirm my status and request.
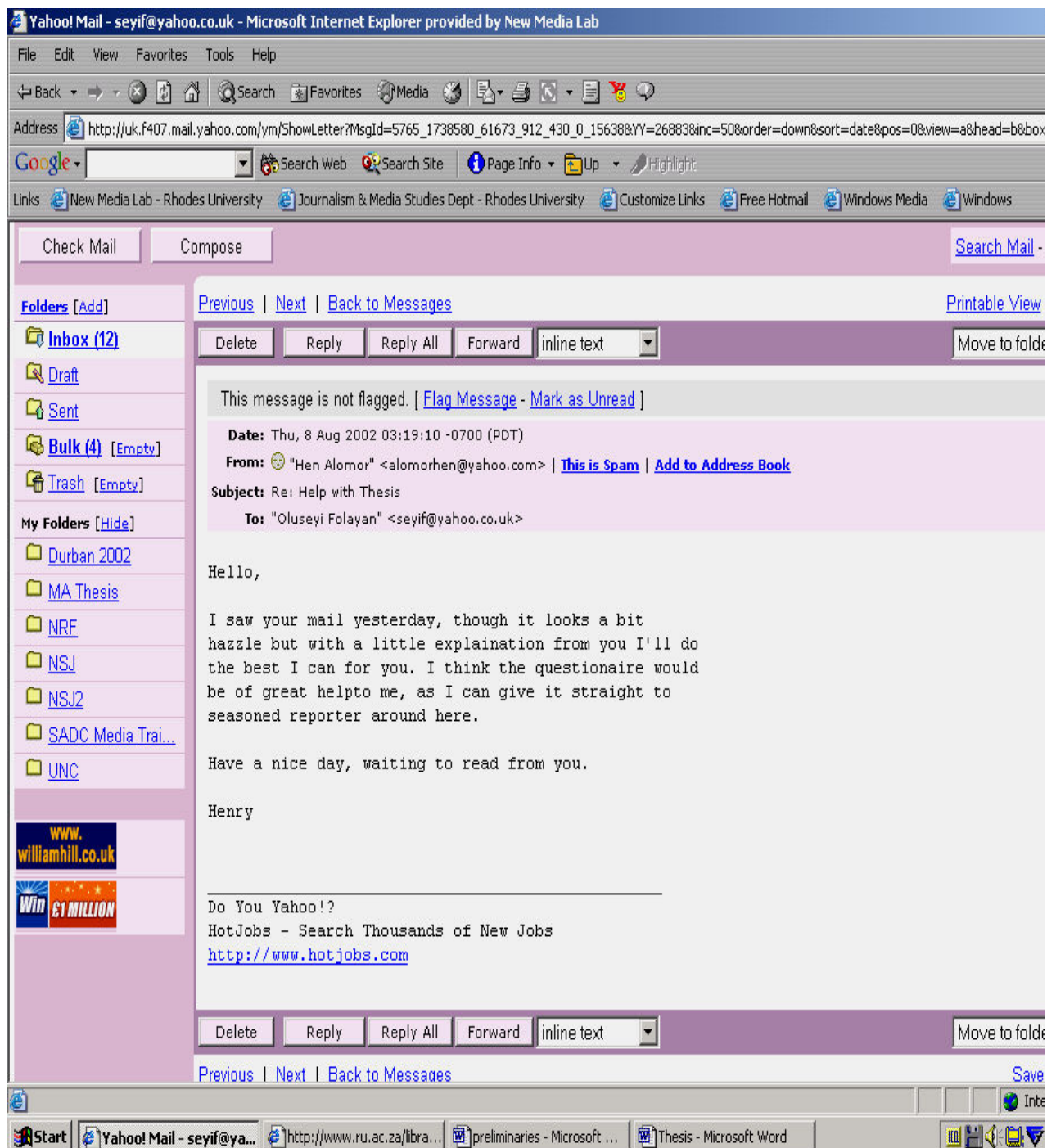
I anticipate hearing from you very soon.

Sincerely,
Oluseyi Folayan.

MA Journalism & Media Studies, Rhodes University
Grahamstown 6140. South Africa.
Cell: +27 (0) 82 754 6183
Fax: +27 (0) 46 622 8447
Email: seyif@yahoo.co.uk

APPENDIX 2

(Email correspondence between the researcher and an Online *Guardian* Staff)

Draft

Sent

Bulk (4) [Empty]

Trash [Empty]

My Folders [Hide]

Durban 2002

MA Thesis

NRF

NSJ

NSJ2

SADC Media Trai...

UNC

www.williamhill.co.uk

Win £1 MILLION

This message is not flagged. [Flag Message - Mark as Unread]

Date: Mon, 16 Sep 2002 14:41:07 +0100 (BST)
From: "Oluseyi Folayan" <seyif@yahoo.co.uk> | This is Spam | Add to Address Book
Subject: Any News?
To: "Hen Alomor" <alomorhen@yahoo.com>

Hi Henry,

Any news for me yet? I sent the stuff a while back and still have not heard from you. Please let me know as soon as you can, my deadline is quite near and I am trying to wrap up my thesis but I really need the information from the questionnaire to do that. I am sorry to bother you like this but I hope you understand.

God Bless.

Oluseyi Folayan

Oluseyi Folayan
(MA) Dept of Journalism & Media Studies
Rhodes University
P.O.Box 94
Grahamstown, 6139
South Africa
Cell: +27 (0)827546183

_____

Get a bigger mailbox -- choose a size that fits your needs.

Delete   Reply   Reply All   Forward   inline text   Move to folder...   OK

Start   Yahoo! Mail - seyif@ya...   http://www.ru.ac.za/libra...   preliminaries - Microsoft ...   Thesis - Microsoft Word   2:06 AM

90

Yahoo! Mail - seyif@yahoo.co.uk - Microsoft Internet Explorer provided by New Media Lab

File   Edit   View   Favorites   Tools   Help

Back | Search   Favorites   Media

Address   http://uk.f407.mail.yahoo.com/ym/ShowLetter?MsgId=4928_1877462_66075_903_451_0_18208&YY=4774&inc=50&order=down&sort=date&po

Google | Search Web   Search Site   Page Info   Up   Highlight

Links   New Media Lab - Rhodes University   Journalism & Media Studies Dept - Rhodes University   Customize Links   Free Hotmail   Windows

Check Mail   Compose

Folders [Add]

Inbox (12)
Draft
Sent
Bulk (4) [Empty]
Trash [Empty]

My Folders [Hide]

Durban 2002
MA Thesis
NRF
NSJ
NSJ2
SADC Media Trai...
UNC

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Win £1 MILLION

Previous | Next | Back to Messages

Delete   Reply   Reply All   Forward   inline text

This message is not flagged. [Flag Message - Mark as Unread]

Date: Thu, 19 Sep 2002 06:12:42 -0700 (PDT)
From: "Hen Alomor" <alomorhen@yahoo.com> | This is Spam | Add to Address Book
Subject: Re: Any News?
To: "Oluseyi Folayan" <seyif@yahoo.co.uk>

Hello Seyi!

I'm very sorry I've not been silent for some time now,
it wasn't delibrate, I actually travel out of Lagos to
Delta state where email services are very difficult
find. I'm back in Lagos now and working on your
questionaire, Hopefully, they should be ready early
next week if is not too late.

Regards,

Henry

_____

Do you Yahoo!?
New DSL Internet Access from SBC & Yahoo!
http://sbc.yahoo.com

Delete   Reply   Reply All   Forward   inline text

Previous | Next | Back to Messages

Done

Start   Yahoo! Mail - seyif@ya...   http://www.ru.ac.za/libra...   preliminaries - Microsoft ...   Thesis - Microsoft Word

Check Mail   Compose

Search Mail - **Mail Opti**

Folders [Add]

Previous | Next | Back to Messages

Printable View - Full Hea

Delete   Reply   Reply All   Forward   inline text

Move to folder...

Inbox (12)

Draft

Sent

Bulk (4) [Empty]

Trash [Empty]

My Folders [Hide]

Durban 2002

MA Thesis

NRF

NSJ

NSJ2

SADC Media Trai...

UNC

www.
williamhill.co.uk

Win £1 MILLION

This message is not flagged. [Flag Message - Mark as Unread]

Date: Wed, 2 Oct 2002 00:56:07 +0100 (BST)

From: "Oluseyi Folayan" <seyif@yahoo.co.uk> | **This is Spam** | **Add to Address Book**

Subject: Re: Any News?

To: "Hen Alomor" <alomorhen@yahoo.com>

Hi Henry,

I was just wondering what became of you after our last correspondence. I was excited and waiting patiently to hear from you last week like you said, what happened? My deadline is but a week or two away and I really need to hear from you. I know you must be tired of my bothering you with this but I'll really appreciate your help.

Gob bless, Seyi

Hen Alomor wrote:

Hello Seyi!

I'm very sorry I've not been silent for some time now, it wasn't delibrate, I actually travel out of Lagos to Delta state where email services are very difficult find. I'm back in Lagos now and working on your questionaire, Hopefully, they should be ready early next week if is not too late.

Regards,

Internet

Start   Yahoo! Mail - seyif@ya...   http://www.ru.ac.za/libra...   preliminaries - Microsoft ...   Thesis - Microsoft Word

(Response to Advert Enquiry: this reply was received from the online *Guardian* two days after the researcher sent an enquiry about the possibility of placing an ad on the website)
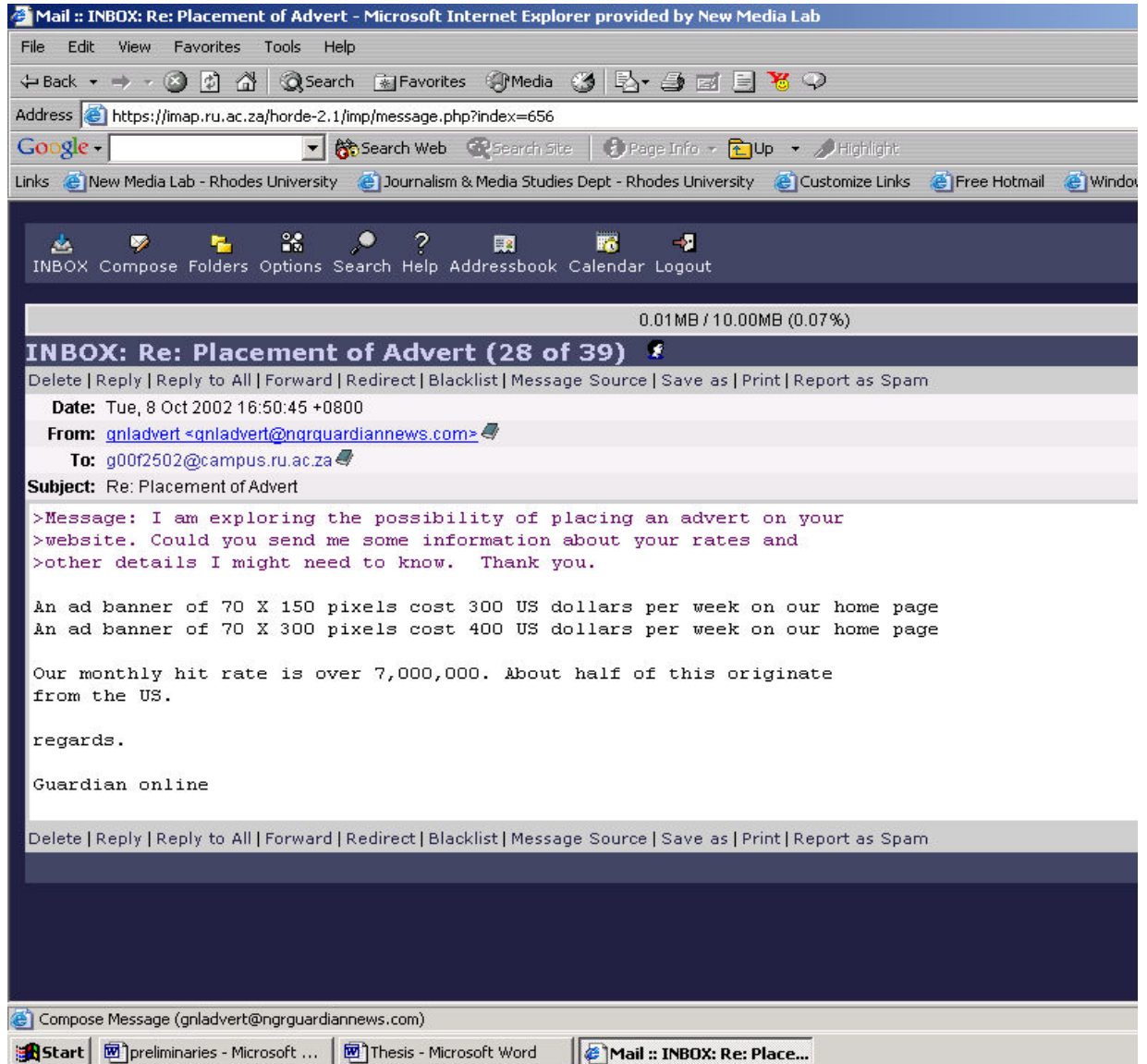
APPENDIX 4

At one point during the research (August 2002), the researcher was finally able to get in touch with one of the staff at the online *Guardian*. In addition to sending emails, the researcher also made numerous attempts to establish contact through acquaintances that already had contact at the online *Guardian*. Eventually one of these attempts was successful and contact was made with a staff member at the online newspaper.

The researcher sent all the required information and the decision was reached to gather research data through the use of questionnaires, which would be filled in by some of the online staff. The researcher sent follow-up emails about once a week to inquire about the progress of the questionnaires but responses to those emails were erratic. The last email received from the contact at the online newspaper stated that the questionnaires would be ready in October 2002 but to date, the researcher has not received any further feedback and correspondence from this staff at the online newspaper has ceased altogether.

In 2003, further attempts were made to get in touch with an editor and 3 journalists at the online *Guardian*. Phone calls, text messages and emails were exchanged and the situation seemed positive. The researcher was promised responses to the questionnaire. Eventually, one of the journalists responded and sent some responses to the researcher. These responses were, however, not complete or comprehensive.

APPENDIX 5
(Interview Schedule/Questionnaire)

(Please note that all answers will be kept confidential and used only for the purpose of this research).

1. Please give some general background and history of the newspaper and site.

1. When did the Guardian paper go online and what were the major reasons behind the decision to do so?

2. The site recently underwent a re-design, what were the reasons behind this?

   a. What improvements/differences were made as part of the re-design of the site?

   b. Have you found that traffic to the chat room has decreased as compared to when there was no subscription?

3. What audiences/demographics does the website cater for (in terms of age, literacy, social class, geographical location etc)?

   a. Does the website successfully reach this target audience? Can you provide in general terms, any demographics/statistics on this?

   b. What kind of portal does the website use (i.e. is it news only or news and commercial etc)? What kind of news does it carry?

   c. What kind of role does the staff of the site play in relation to the audience? How do you see your relationship with the audience and what obligations do you feel you have towards them?

4. Is the website a separate entity/independent from the print paper? Why or why not? Briefly explain the reasoning behind this.

   a. Elaborating on the question above, does the website have separate or the same staff (journalists, writers, editors etc) from the print paper?

5. Briefly describe the production of the website, in terms of how copy is gotten, any editing that takes place and how copy is put onto the site?

6. Does the website manage to generate any income/revenue/make profit?

7. What contribution does the site make to democratic debate among your citizens at home and abroad? How does it achieve this?

8. What pressures (economic, technology, staff shortage, politics etc) currently threaten the site? How does this affect the work that you do?

9. In terms of design (technology) and putting copy on the site (content), is the site operated/run/managed in-house or is it contracted to an outside party? In other words, does the site have a technical team that is responsible for designing and putting the site online?

10. Is the issue of interactivity and empowering the user through more choices a major consideration in running the site? If yes, how so? If no, why not?

    a. What are your personal thoughts on interactivity within online journalism?

    b. What do you think the role of a journalist should be in the practice of interactive journalism in the online environment and how important is this role?

    c. How as an online journalist do you uphold and practice the ideals of civic journalism and the extension of democracy in the country?

    d. What would you say are the key interactive features on the site?

    e. How are these features utilised by the users/audiences (i.e. frequency, time spent etc)?

    f. Do you think interactivity and engaging the reader to be more of a participant in the news process builds participatory behaviour and thus encourages audiences to be more active and involved in topical issues in the country as well as the enhancement of democracy in the country?

    g. Does the online staff make an effort to be interactive with the user/audience? If yes, how? If no, state why (such as too time-consuming etc)?

    h. What aspect of the site generates the most traffic from users? Why do you think this is?

11. What sort of issues do users debate/discuss in your chat room?

    a. Do you think these discussions are useful?

    b. What kind of effect (if any) do you think these discussions have on the governance of the country and do they play a role in citizens affecting governance/democracy in the country?

12. Is copy for the site obtained from the print edition? If yes, does it undergo editing and/or re-writing for the web before it is put on the site?

13. A major problem in the world of online journalism today is that staff tend to fall into one of two categories: either web/technical experts who have no background or training in journalism OR trained journalists with no background or training in technical aspects of the web. Would you say this is the case with your website?

    a. Do you see a need for online journalists to be trained and competent in both journalism and the web? If so, what steps is your organisation taking to see this achieved?

14. What have been the major successes in running the site?

15. What have been the major problems in running the site?

16. What training could assist in developing the site/what skills are most needed to run the site?

17. In terms of complexity of choice available to users, does your site offer (or plan to offer in the near-future) any of the following?

    a. A choice of language? If yes, how many and which

    b. A search engine or search engines?

    c. News stories prominently placed on the home page?

    d. Links from the first page of the site?

    e. Links within news stories?

    f. Hyperlinks?

    g. Take into account users' browsers and connection speeds?

    h. A choice of frames or non-frames?

18. In what ways does your site practice or uphold the ideals of civic/public journalism?

2.54MB / 20.00MB (12.69%)

Date:	Tue, 6 Jan 2004 03:59:30 -0800 (PST)
From:	idowu joshua <idowuabe@yahoo.com>
To:	o.folayan@ru.ac.za
Subject:	questionaires

```
rom; Idowu Ajanaku, The Guardian Newspaper
To; Seyi Folayan at ru.ac.2a
Pls find the attach answers to the questionaries you sent to me.
I wish you best of luck.
1. The Guardian Newspapers was established 20years ago to promote
and defend the truth. It is a
liberal paper which does not own an obligation to any group, but
the entire society.
2. The Guardian Newspapers went online about five years ago and the
purpose is to enable Nigeria
and  indeed Africans outside the continet to have assess to
information about Nigeria and the entire
Africa.
3. It went through re-design about two years, in other to allow
more people to have assess to the website
against the background of the large nunnbers of people visiting the
website. This has to a large extent
reduce the number of people visiting our newsroom.
4. It take care of the adult, most especially the intelletuals.
a. Yes
b. It is news only.
5. No
6. This is done almost the same time we are producing the paper.
7. No
8. It has given Nigeria outside the country the opportunity to know
what is happening in the country and
their response in letters we publish in our letter page.
9. Nothing
10. It is run in house.
11. Yes,because it allow more people to read The Guardian
12. It gives The Guardian managment the opportunity of getting
feedback on how the paper is doing
13. NO
14. Yes. It is necessary
15. It allows more people to have assess to The Guardian.
16. None
17.It should be undergoing re-design very often to meet the modern
day challenges in the industry
```

```
18. a. No
    b. Yes
    c. Yes
    d. Most likely
19. Very high The Guardian tries as much as possible to reply to
queries from users of its web
20.Yes
21. Yes. This is done by publishing letters and articles sent by
the users of the site
22. It does because it affords the readers and writers in The
Guardian to share ideas on issues
    of public interest.

b.Yes
--------------------------------
Do you Yahoo!?
Yahoo! Hotjobs: Enter the "Signing Bonus" Sweepstakes
```

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