Campus Online Publications Through the Eyes of Digitally Disadvantaged Students

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Abstract

This study explored the perceptions of digitally disadvantaged students toward The Blooms online publication and identified recommendations for improvement. It employed a mixed-methods descriptive research design, integrating quantitative data from close-ended survey items and qualitative insights from open-ended responses. Specifically, the study sought to: (1) describe the demographic profile of student respondents; (2) assess their perceptions of the online publication in terms of usability, visual appeal, correctness, timeliness, and accessibility; and (3) identify suggestions to enhance the publication based on their feedback.

A total of 265 students from the School of Arts and Sciences, Aklan State University–Banga Campus, were selected through stratified random sampling. Descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, and mean were used for quantitative data, while emergent themes were identified from qualitative responses.

Findings revealed that The Blooms Publication was perceived as highly useful ($\bar{x}$ = 4.6), timely ($\bar{x}$ = 4.5), and accurate ($\bar{x}$ = 4.5). It was considered visually appealing ($\bar{x}$ = 4.4), yet accessibility remained a challenge ($\bar{x}$ = 2.0) due to digital and connectivity limitations. Thematic analysis of student suggestions highlighted areas for content enrichment, interactivity, improved design, and enhanced communication and accessibility.

The study concludes that while the online publication is well-received, targeted improvements—especially addressing accessibility and student engagement—are necessary to meet the needs of digitally disadvantaged learners.

Keywords: campus publication, student perception, digital access, online journalism, accessibility, engagement

Introduction

Print media remains one of the oldest and most influential forms of mass communication globally, including in the Philippines. Despite technological advancements, its core function of disseminating timely, credible information persists—albeit through evolving digital formats. By the late 1990s, many newspapers globally, including major Philippine dailies such as The Philippine Daily Inquirer, The Manila Bulletin, and The Philippine Star, had transitioned to online editions to reach wider audiences (Sunil, 2021).

In educational institutions, campus journalism has played a crucial role in shaping student expression and engagement. Republic Act No. 7079, the Campus Journalism Act of 1991, institutionalized student

publications in the Philippines, empowering students with a platform to inform, reflect, and participate in democratic discourse. These publications document school and community developments and help cultivate future media practitioners.

At Aklan State University–Banga Campus, The Blooms serves as the official student publication of the School of Arts and Sciences (SAS), operated by student journalists from five academic programs. Published primarily through Facebook, it seeks to deliver timely, reliable, and student-centered content.

This study investigated students' perceptions of The Blooms' online publication, focusing particularly on those who face digital limitations. It explores how students rate the platform's usability, appeal, accuracy, timeliness, and accessibility, and identifies improvement areas through their feedback.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to explore the perceptions of digitally disadvantaged students toward The Blooms Online Publication of the School of Arts and Sciences. This specifically aimed to answer the following:

1. Identify the demographic and digital access profile of the student-respondents.
2. Analyze the perceptions of digitally disadvantaged students regarding the Blooms' online publication in terms of: a. Usability; b. Attractiveness; c. Accuracy of content; d. Timeliness, and
3. e. Accessibility
4. Propose recommendations to improve the Blooms' online publication based on the students' feedback.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1974), which posits that individuals actively seek out media to fulfill specific needs such as information, personal identity, integration, and entertainment. In the context of this research, UGT helps explain how students interact with *The Blooms* online publication, the extent to which it meets their informational and emotional needs and the value they assign to its content and accessibility.

UGT emphasizes user agency, suggesting that the effectiveness of a publication is closely tied to the perceived satisfaction and utility it delivers to its audience. When students are digitally disadvantaged, their interaction with online platforms becomes even more selective and need-driven. Thus, understanding their perception and feedback is essential in refining the publication to better suit their circumstances.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods descriptive research design to examine the perceptions of digitally disadvantaged students regarding The Blooms' online publication. It combined quantitative techniques using structured surveys with qualitative thematic analysis of open-ended responses. The respondents were 265 digitally deprived students from the College of Arts and Sciences at Aklan State University–Banga Campus, randomly selected across year levels and programs including AB English, BA Communication, BAELS, BS Biology, and BS Nursing.

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Data were gathered using a validated survey questionnaire. The first part captured demographic information (age, sex, program, year level, and family income), while the second part used Likert-scale items to measure perceptions across five dimensions: usability, attractiveness, correctness, timeliness, and accessibility. The final section invited open-ended suggestions for improvement.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics: frequency, percentage, mean, and ranking. Qualitative data from open-ended responses were coded and categorized into thematic areas representing student suggestions.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the socio-demographic profile of the student respondents and their perceptions of *The Blooms*' online publication in terms of usability, attractiveness, correctness, timeliness, and accessibility.

Socio-Demographic Profile

Age. Most respondents (147 or 55.47%) were aged 15–20 years, followed by 114 (43.02%) aged 21–25, 3 (1.13%) aged 26–30, and 1 (0.38%) aged 31–35.

Sex. A majority were female (204 or 77%), while 61 (23%) were male.

Program. The largest number of participants were from the BS Nursing program (89 or 33.6%), followed by BA English (62 or 23.4%), BS Biology (37 or 14%), BA Communication (33 or 12.5%), BA English Language Studies (23 or 8.7%), and BS Applied Mathematics (21 or 7.9%).

Year Level. Most students were in their second year (81 or 30.6%), followed by fourth year (72 or 27.2%), first year (63 or 23.8%), and third year (49 or 18.5%).

Family Income. Most respondents belonged to families with a monthly income ranging from ₱10,000 to ₱19,000.

Perceptions Toward the Blooms' Online Publication

Usability. Students gave a high mean score of $\bar{x} = 4.6$, indicating strong agreement that the publication is a useful and reliable source of information.

Attractiveness. The layout, design, and visual appeal received a mean score of $\bar{x} = 4.4$, suggesting that students found the interface clean, clear, and engaging.

Correctness. The content was perceived to be appropriate and accurate, earning a mean score of $\bar{x} = 4.5$.

Timeliness. The relevance of the publication to current events also scored $\bar{x} = 4.5$, showing a strong agreement that it provides timely updates.

Accessibility. Accessibility received a low mean score of $\bar{x} = 2.0$, highlighting a key issue. Students cited limited access to digital devices, slow internet, and lack of offline formats as barriers.

Student Recommendations for Improvement

Despite the overall favorable feedback, students offered constructive suggestions categorized into the following themes:

Content Enhancement

- Include more timely and relevant news, especially on university activities and current events.
- Publish more engaging feature stories, literary works, and political content relevant to students.

- Introduce themed content like "Poem of the Week" or "Short Story of the Month."
- Provide daily updates on campus developments, not just contests and sports.

Engagement and Interactivity
- Add interactive content like polls, quizzes, trivia, and student-driven campaigns.
- Promote student involvement by allowing them to submit and share content.

Design and Presentation
- Enhance the visual appeal through improved layout and creative titles.
- Incorporate editorial cartoons to engage readers through visuals.

Promotion and Reach
- Increase online visibility through more frequent promotions and campaigns.
- Attract more followers to widen reach and boost engagement.

Responsiveness and Communication
- Improve responsiveness to student concerns.
- Share timely academic updates and relevant student life announcements.

Accessibility
- Optimize the platform for low-spec devices.
- Offer offline access options like downloadable PDFs or printed bulletins.
- Collaborate with the university to enhance digital resource access in public spaces.

These findings affirm the publication's success in delivering content but highlight the urgency of addressing accessibility and engagement gaps, particularly for digitally disadvantaged students.

Conclusion

The results of this study reveal that students generally hold highly favorable perceptions of *The Blooms* online publication. It is regarded as a useful, attractive, correct, and timely medium for student engagement and information dissemination. However, accessibility remains a pressing issue, with economically and digitally marginalized students encountering significant barriers to accessing the platform.

The participants' recommendations offer a clear roadmap for improvement. By enriching its content, boosting interactivity, improving design, strengthening promotional strategies, and addressing accessibility concerns, *The Blooms* has the potential to become an even more inclusive and empowering platform for students.

Ultimately, the study emphasizes the need for continuous improvement, innovation, and institutional support to ensure that student publications like *The Blooms* not only inform and entertain but also amplify student voices and bridge digital divides in the university setting.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, Campus Online Publications Through the Eyes of Digitally Disadvantaged Students received generally highly acceptable ratings. However, a portion of

the respondents expressed neutral or negative perceptions, highlighting areas that require improvement. In response, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. The Blooms Publication should enhance its engagement with students by actively promoting its page across all programs under the School of Arts and Sciences to ensure wider awareness and readership.

2. The publication should expand beyond school-based information to include more relatable and engaging content—such as human-interest stories, student features, opinion articles, and coverage of student-led activities—to increase reader interest and involvement.

3. Efforts should be made to maintain up-to-date, relevant content. Prompt responses to student inquiries or concerns on the platform are also encouraged to foster a more interactive and responsive communication channel.

4. Regular posting of updates and news is advised to keep students consistently informed about events, announcements, and developments within the department and the wider university community.

5. Ensure that the publication is compatible with a wide range of devices, including low-spec smartphones. Consider offering offline access options, such as downloadable PDFs or printed bulletins, to support students with limited internet connectivity. Collaboration with the university is also recommended to enhance access to digital resources in shared spaces like libraries and student lounges.

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