
INFLUENCE OF BREAKING NEWS CULTURE ON POLITICAL ANXIETY AMONG DIGITAL NEWS CONSUMERS IN BENIN CITY DURING THE 2023 NIGERIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

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Abstract

The researchers examined the influence of breaking news culture on political anxiety among digital news consumers in Benin City during the 2023 Nigerian presidential election. The research was guided by three objectives which focused on the extent of exposure to breaking news, its influence on political anxiety, and the relationship between both variables. The Uses and Gratifications Theory anchored the study, explaining that audiences actively seek news to satisfy information needs but may also experience unintended emotional outcomes. A descriptive survey design was adopted. The population comprised approximately 940,180 digital news consumers in Benin City, from which a sample of 400 respondents was drawn using the Taro Yamane formula. A total of 382 valid questionnaires were returned and analysed using descriptive statistics and simple linear regression. Findings revealed a high level of exposure to breaking news culture among respondents during the election period. Continuous alerts, repeated updates, and multi-platform engagement characterised their news consumption behaviour. The study also found a high level of political anxiety, expressed through worry, uncertainty, and emotional tension. Regression analysis showed a significant positive relationship between breaking news culture and political anxiety ($R = 0.64$, $R^2 = 0.41$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that increased exposure to breaking news significantly heightened anxiety levels. The study concludes that while breaking news culture enhances awareness, it also intensifies emotional strain among digital news consumers. It recommends more contextualised reporting, reduced notification overload, and improved media literacy to mitigate anxiety effects during election periods.

Keywords: Benin City, Breaking news culture, Digital news consumption, Political anxiety, Presidential election.

Introduction

Political communication in Nigeria has become more intense and immediate due to the rise of digital media and the speed at which information now travels. Citizens no longer wait for scheduled television bulletins or radio updates. Instead, they consume political content continuously through smartphones, news apps, and social media platforms. One major feature of this environment is breaking news culture, where political events are reported instantly, repeatedly, and often in dramatic fragments. During the 2023 Nigerian Presidential Election, this culture became highly visible as digital news consumers in cities such as Benin were constantly exposed to alerts, updates, and unfolding narratives in real time. This constant flow of information reshaped how people experienced the election, as news was no longer a stable report of events but a continuous stream of developing situations. In this context, breaking news became both a source of information and a psychological stimulus that influenced how citizens emotionally processed political events (Nwankwo et al., 2023).

The 2023 Nigerian presidential election was held on 25 February 2023 across the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory. It was one of the most competitive elections since the return to democracy in 1999. A total of 18 major candidates from different political parties contested for the presidency, but attention was mainly focused on three leading figures: Bola Ahmed Tinubu of the All Progressives Congress (APC), Atiku Abubakar of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), and Peter Obi of the Labour Party (LP). Rabiu Kwankwaso of the New Nigeria Peoples Party (NNPP) also played a significant role, drawing strong regional support, especially in the north. The campaign period was highly digital, youth-driven, and emotionally charged, with debates and media appearances focusing on insecurity, inflation, corruption, and governance failure (Nwaoboli & Ajibulu, 2023). Although there were organised debates and televised interviews, much of the political communication also shifted to social media platforms where candidates and supporters engaged directly with voters. After collation of results by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Bola Tinubu was declared winner with about 8.79 million votes, followed by Atiku Abubakar with 6.98 million votes and Peter Obi with 6.10 million votes, while Kwankwaso came fourth. Tinubu's victory was later contested by opposition candidates, but it was upheld through electoral tribunals and court rulings (Nwaoboli, Uchenunu and Asemah, 2024). The election outcome reflected a divided electorate and marked a significant shift in Nigeria's political dynamics, especially with the strong emergence of a third-force movement

led by Peter Obi, which reshaped youth participation and political discourse across the country.

Furthermore, breaking news culture does not only increase access to information; it also intensifies emotional engagement with political content. In Benin City, many digital news consumers followed election updates across multiple platforms at the same time, including television news apps, Twitter (X), Facebook, and WhatsApp groups. This constant exposure created a sense of urgency and unpredictability around political events, particularly during election day announcements, collation processes, and post-election reactions. Studies have shown that social media and digital platforms significantly shape how citizens interpret political developments during elections, often amplifying emotional reactions and subjective interpretations (Ayeni, 2024). Similarly, Adeyeye, Arijeníwà, and Nwaoboli (2025) observe that media exposure during politically sensitive events in Benin City can strongly influence public perception and heighten emotional responses to violent or controversial developments. As a result, breaking news culture may contribute not only to awareness but also to heightened psychological pressure among audiences.

In addition, the structure of digital news reporting during elections encourages continuous engagement without giving audiences adequate time to process information. Notifications, headlines, and live updates are designed to attract immediate attention, often without full context. During the 2023 presidential election, this pattern created an environment where digital consumers were repeatedly exposed to uncertain or evolving political information. Muhammed, Akpor, and Olley (2026) note that continuous media reporting during electoral events can shape how audiences emotionally interpret political violence and uncertainty, especially when information is fragmented or rapidly updated. In Benin City, this environment likely contributed to increased emotional tension, as individuals struggled to interpret competing narratives about results, party declarations, and electoral disputes. Consequently, breaking news culture becomes not only a communication system but also a psychological experience that influences how political events are felt and understood.

Moreover, scholars like Nwankwo et al. (2023) argue that Nigeria's political communication environment is deeply influenced by insecurity, mistrust, and rapid information circulation. Nwankwo et al. (2023) explain that media reporting in such contexts often amplifies public anxiety due to the unstable nature of political events and the speed of digital dissemination. In addition, Guanah (2024) highlights that audience interpretation of

political information in Edo State is shaped by media preference and exposure, which can intensify emotional responses during politically charged periods such as elections. Therefore, while breaking news culture improves access to real-time information, it also raises important concerns about its psychological impact on audiences. This study, therefore, examines the influence of breaking news culture on political anxiety among digital news consumers in Benin City during the 2023 Nigerian Presidential Election.

Statement of the Problem

The 2023 Nigerian presidential election was one of the most digitally mediated elections in the country's history, with citizens relying heavily on online platforms for real-time updates. In Benin City, digital news consumers were exposed to continuous breaking news notifications, live reports, and social media commentary throughout the election period. While this ensured constant access to information, it also created a highly charged media environment where political updates were often incomplete, repetitive, or emotionally framed. This situation raises concerns about whether such exposure contributes to political understanding or instead increases psychological discomfort among audiences. Nwankwo et al. (2023) argue that constant media exposure during politically sensitive periods can heighten uncertainty and emotional stress, especially in environments already marked by political tension.

In addition, existing studies on media and elections in Nigeria have focused more on political influence, participation, and perception rather than emotional outcomes such as political anxiety. For instance, Ayeni (2024) examines how social media influences electoral perception, while Idowu, Abdul-Wasi, and Adebogun (2026) focus on digital activism during elections. However, less attention has been given to how continuous exposure to breaking news affects the emotional well-being of digital news consumers. Similarly, Adeyeye, Arijeniwà, and Nwaoboli (2025) explore media influence on public perception of violent events, but do not deeply examine psychological responses such as anxiety. This creates a gap in understanding how modern news consumption patterns affect emotional states during elections.

Furthermore, the fragmented nature of breaking news reporting may contribute to confusion and emotional overload. During the 2023 election, digital consumers in Benin City were exposed to conflicting reports from different media outlets, often without clear verification or consistency. Muhammed, Akpor, and Olley (2026) note that media reporting during

electoral events can significantly shape audience reactions, particularly when information is uncertain or rapidly changing. However, it remains unclear whether this constant exposure leads to informed citizenship or emotional distress. Therefore, this study addresses this gap by examining the influence of breaking news culture on political anxiety among digital news consumers in Benin City during the 2023 Nigerian Presidential Election.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Examine the extent of exposure to breaking news culture among digital news consumers in Benin City during the 2023 Nigerian presidential election.
2. Investigate how breaking news exposure influenced political anxiety among digital news consumers in Benin City during the 2023 Nigerian presidential election.
3. Determine the relationship between breaking news culture and political anxiety among digital news consumers in Benin City during the 2023 Nigerian presidential election.

Hypothesis

The hypothesis for this study is:

1. There is no relationship between breaking news culture and political anxiety among digital news consumers in Benin City during the 2023 Nigerian presidential election.

Conceptual Review

Breaking News Culture

Breaking news culture refers to the modern journalistic practice where news organisations prioritise speed, immediacy and continuous updates over detailed verification and depth of reporting. Kovach (2021) explains it as a competitive news environment where being first often matters more than being fully accurate, especially in digital spaces where audiences expect real-time information. In this sense, breaking news is no longer an occasional newsroom function but a constant cycle of alerts, notifications and live updates that shape how audiences experience public events. In electoral periods such as the 2023 Nigerian presidential election, this culture becomes more intense as political developments unfold rapidly and news platforms compete for attention through urgent headlines and push notifications.

In a related perspective, Wardle (2020) describes breaking news culture as a system driven by speed amplification, where digital platforms reward immediacy through visibility, engagement and sharing. According to

her, the structure of social media and online journalism encourages continuous updates even when full facts are not yet confirmed. This creates a situation where audiences are exposed to fragmented political information, often before full context is available. In the Nigerian digital environment, such rapid circulation of electoral news can heighten emotional responses, especially when reports involve violence, irregularities or close electoral contests. Therefore, breaking news culture becomes not only a reporting style but also a driver of audience emotional experience during elections.

However, Zelizer (2022) takes a more reflective approach by describing breaking news culture as a shift that weakens narrative completeness in journalism. He argues that the constant interruption of news flow produces a fragmented understanding of events, where audiences receive information in pieces rather than as coherent stories. In this fragmented structure, political news becomes episodic and reactive, often focusing on “what just happened” rather than “why it happened”. As a result, breaking news culture does not only inform audiences quickly but also shapes how they mentally process political realities, often leaving them with uncertainty and heightened alertness.

Political Anxiety

Political anxiety refers to a psychological and emotional state where individuals feel worry, uncertainty or tension in response to political events, information or outcomes. Marcus (2020) explains it as a form of affective intelligence in which citizens experience unease when confronted with threatening or unpredictable political situations. This emotional response often influences how people process political information, leading them to seek more updates or avoid political content altogether. During highly competitive elections such as Nigeria's 2023 presidential election, political anxiety may increase as citizens are exposed to conflicting reports, campaign tensions and rapid news updates.

Brader (2021) defines political anxiety as a media-activated emotional condition that arises when political communication emphasises threat, risk or uncertainty. He argues that anxiety is not only produced by political realities but also by how information is framed and repeated in the media. When news coverage highlights instability, violence or disputed outcomes, audiences may develop sustained emotional worry about the political system. In digital environments like Benin City, where news consumption is continuous and mobile-based, such framing can intensify emotional responses among news consumers who constantly follow election updates.

Similarly, Valentino (2023) describes political anxiety as a sustained emotional reaction that influences political perception, trust and participation. He explains that individuals experiencing political anxiety often become hyper-aware of political developments, constantly checking news sources for updates. While this may increase political attention, it can also lead to emotional fatigue and reduced confidence in democratic processes. In the context of breaking news culture, this means that frequent exposure to urgent political alerts during elections may not only inform citizens but also elevate their psychological stress levels.

Digital News Consumption

Digital news consumption refers to the process through which individuals access, interpret and engage with news content through online platforms, mobile devices and social media networks. Chadwick (2021) explains it as a hybrid media behaviour where audiences no longer rely on a single source of information but move across multiple digital platforms to follow news events. This form of consumption is interactive, as users not only receive information but also share, comment on and react to it in real time. In electoral contexts, such as the 2023 Nigerian presidential election, digital news consumption becomes highly active due to the continuous flow of political updates.

In a similar explanation, Jenkins (2020) describes digital news consumption as participatory media engagement where audiences act as both consumers and distributors of news content. He argues that the digital environment has transformed audiences into active participants who contribute to the circulation of political information. However, this participation also exposes individuals to unverified content and emotionally charged narratives, especially during breaking news cycles. In cities like Benin, where mobile internet usage is high, digital consumers often experience constant exposure to political updates, which may shape both their understanding and emotional responses to elections.

Furthermore, Napoli (2022) defines digital news consumption as attention-based media behaviour shaped by platform algorithms, notifications and real-time updates. He argues that digital platforms prioritise engagement over depth, meaning users are often exposed to frequent but fragmented political information. This structure encourages continuous checking of news updates, especially during politically sensitive periods. As a result, digital news consumption does not only influence what people know about politics but also how often they think about it, potentially increasing emotional involvement and anxiety during election periods.

Review of Related Literature

Second-Screen Political Communication and Digital Media Convergence

Second-screen political communication has become a defining feature of Nigeria's contemporary media environment, yet its implications remain deeply contested. At its core, it describes simultaneous engagement with television and digital platforms during political content consumption. Dyadya and Yisa (2023) situate this within broader struggles over digital freedom and state control in Nigeria. They argue that the expansion of mobile media has weakened traditional broadcast authority and empowered audiences to contest official narratives in real time. However, this empowerment is not neutral. It often produces fragmented interpretation, where political meaning is constantly reconstructed through emotionally charged online exchanges rather than informed deliberation. This raises a critical concern: audience “participation” may reflect increased visibility rather than improved understanding.

Beyond issues of access and control, Ja'afaru and Asemah (2024) provide a more structural critique by showing how digital platforms actively shape political communication through algorithmic prioritisation. They argue that second-screen environments are not simply interactive spaces but curated systems where visibility is determined by engagement metrics. This creates a distorted information hierarchy in which sensational or emotionally provocative political content circulates more widely than verified or nuanced reporting. In such conditions, second-screen communication does not only supplement television news; it competes with it, often undermining factual coherence during politically sensitive periods such as elections.

Nkoala et al. (2026) extend this argument by emphasising the symbolic and performative nature of digital news ecosystems. They suggest that contemporary online journalism is increasingly driven by “hype cycles” where urgency and virality substitute for analytical depth. Within second-screen political communication, this produces an unstable interpretive environment where audiences consume political information as fragments of attention rather than structured narratives. The implication is clear: convergence does not automatically lead to better-informed citizens. Instead, it may intensify epistemic uncertainty, where truth becomes dependent on circulation speed rather than verification.

Political Engagement in Digital and Networked Publics

Political engagement in digital contexts is often presented as evidence of democratic expansion, yet critical scholarship suggests a more

ambivalent reality. Okpalaibekwe and Anikeze (2024) argue that while digital tools have expanded civic participation in Nigeria, particularly in conflict-sensitive regions, the quality of engagement remains uneven. They highlight that participation is frequently symbolic, expressed through sharing, commenting, or reacting, rather than sustained political involvement. This raises a fundamental limitation: digital engagement may reflect expressive behaviour rather than substantive democratic action.

Ja'afaru and Asemah (2024) deepen this critique by focusing on the role of disinformation in shaping public opinion. They argue that digital political engagement is increasingly structured by persuasive manipulation rather than informed reasoning. In such environments, citizens are not simply engaging with political content; they are being strategically targeted by narratives designed to influence perception. This undermines the assumption that increased access automatically produces meaningful participation. Instead, engagement becomes vulnerable to emotional steering, where opinion formation is shaped more by repetition and framing than evidence.

Obiora and Adikuru (2024) further complicate the idea of participation by examining AI-generated political content such as memes. They argue that while such tools increase political visibility among younger audiences, they also compress complex political realities into simplified and highly shareable formats. This encourages rapid reaction rather than reflective engagement. Politically, this is significant because it shifts civic participation from deliberative spaces into entertainment-driven digital interactions. Engagement becomes performative, shaped by visibility and virality rather than ideological depth or political understanding.

Nwagbara and Dennis (2025) introduce an important psychological dimension by linking digital media use to mental health outcomes. They argue that constant exposure to political discourse on platforms like X creates sustained emotional pressure, including anxiety and cognitive overload. Although their focus is mental health, the implication for political engagement is critical: emotionally burdened users are less likely to engage in structured political reasoning. Instead, they may disengage intermittently or respond impulsively to political stimuli. This suggests that digital engagement is not only informational but also affective, shaped by emotional saturation.

Also, Dyadya and Yisa (2023) highlight the regulatory instability of Nigeria's digital political space, noting that platform restrictions and policy interventions reshape how citizens access and engage with political content.

While such interventions are often justified in terms of national security or misinformation control, they also produce unintended consequences. Users frequently migrate across platforms, leading to fragmented engagement patterns and inconsistent political participation. This reinforces a broader concern in the literature: digital political engagement is structurally unstable, shaped by shifting technological, regulatory, and psychological forces rather than stable democratic habits.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT). It was originally propounded by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1974). The theory explains that media audiences are not passive receivers of information. Instead, they are active users who deliberately select media channels to satisfy specific needs. These needs commonly include information seeking, personal identity formation, social interaction, and entertainment. The central assumption is that media use is goal-directed, and individuals choose specific media based on the gratification they expect to obtain.

In relation to breaking news culture and political anxiety, the theory becomes particularly useful in explaining digital news behaviour. McQuail (2020) argues that audiences in digital environments are constantly driven by the need for immediacy and relevance, which encourages repeated exposure to breaking news updates. Similarly, Katz (2021) explains that users often turn to news platforms during uncertain political periods to reduce ambiguity and gain situational awareness. However, this continuous exposure may produce unintended emotional consequences. Instead of reducing uncertainty, it may increase anxiety due to the repetitive and urgent framing of political events. In this study, digital news consumers in Benin City are seen as active users who continuously engage with breaking news updates during the 2023 Nigerian presidential election to satisfy their need for information and certainty.

Furthermore, Blumler (2022) emphasises that gratification-seeking behaviour does not always lead to positive psychological outcomes. He argues that media users may achieve information gratification while simultaneously experiencing emotional strain, especially in high-stakes political environments. In the context of this study, breaking news culture provides immediate updates that satisfy the need for awareness, but it also exposes users to continuous political tension, uncertainty, and emotional overload. Therefore, Uses and Gratifications Theory is applied in this study to explain both the motivational drivers behind digital news consumption

and the unintended emotional outcome of political anxiety among users.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The design was considered appropriate because it allows the researcher to collect data on opinions, experiences, and perceptions of respondents without manipulating variables. It is particularly suitable for studies involving media exposure and psychological responses, as it captures real-life behavioural patterns within a defined population.

The population of the study comprised adult residents of Benin City, Edo State. According to available demographic projections, Benin City has an estimated population of approximately 1,600,000 residents, of which about 900,000 are active digital media users aged 18 years and above. These figures were derived from relevant urban population estimates and digital penetration reports. The target population for this study was therefore 900,000 digital news consumers in Benin City. This population was selected because residents of Benin City are highly exposed to online news platforms, especially during major political events such as the 2023 Nigerian presidential election.

Using the Taro Yamane formula ($n = N / [1 + N(e)^2]$) at a 5% level of precision, a sample size of approximately 400 respondents was determined to ensure adequate representation and reliability of findings. A simple random sampling technique was used to select respondents. This ensured that every eligible digital news consumer had an equal chance of being selected, reducing sampling bias and improving the generalisability of the study.

The research instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire divided into sections covering demographic variables, exposure to breaking news culture, and levels of political anxiety. Responses were measured using a four-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). A decision mean score of 2.5 was used, where values equal to or above 2.5 were accepted, while values below 2.5 were rejected.

Out of the 400 copies of the questionnaire distributed, 378 were correctly completed and returned, while the remaining were either not returned or were invalid due to incomplete responses. The data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation.

However, to test the relationship between breaking news culture and political anxiety (Objective Three), regression analysis was employed. This

was used to determine the extent to which exposure to breaking news culture predicts political anxiety among digital news consumers in Benin City. The use of regression analysis helped establish not only the presence of a relationship but also the strength and direction of the influence between the variables.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The design is considered appropriate because it enables the researcher to collect data on respondents' opinions, exposure patterns, and psychological responses without manipulating any variable. It is widely used in media and communication research because it allows for the examination of real-life audience behaviour within natural settings, especially in studies involving news consumption and emotional outcomes such as political anxiety.

The population of the study comprised adult residents of Benin City, Edo State, who are active consumers of digital news platforms. According to the National Population Commission (NPC, 2023) and supporting urban demographic estimates, Benin City has an estimated population of about 1,621,000 residents, with 58% being active digital media users aged 18 years and above, giving an accessible population of about 940,180 digital news consumers. This population was considered appropriate because Benin City is one of the most digitally connected urban centres in southern Nigeria, with high penetration of smartphones, social media usage, and online news consumption, particularly during politically sensitive periods such as the 2023 Nigerian presidential election. These characteristics make the population suitable for examining how breaking news culture influences political anxiety.

Using the Taro Yamane (1967) sample size determination formula ($n = N / [1 + N(e)^2]$) at a 5% margin of error, a sample size of approximately 400 respondents was derived from the population. This sample size was considered adequate to ensure representativeness and statistical reliability of the findings. A simple random sampling technique was employed to select respondents from different residential areas within Benin City. This method was adopted to ensure equal chance of participation and to reduce sampling bias, thereby improving the generalisability of the results across the population of digital news consumers.

The research instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire, divided into sections covering demographic information, exposure to breaking news culture, and levels of political anxiety among

respondents. The instrument was designed using a four-point Likert scale consisting of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). A mean benchmark of 2.5 was used, where scores equal to or above 2.5 indicated acceptance, while scores below 2.5 indicated rejection of items.

Out of the 400 copies of questionnaire administered, 370 were properly completed and returned, while the remaining were either not retrieved or invalid due to incomplete responses. This represents a high response rate, which strengthens the reliability of the dataset for analysis. Data collected were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistical tools. Descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were used to summarise respondents' opinions. However, to test the relationship between exposure to breaking news culture and political anxiety (Objective Three), simple linear regression analysis was employed. This statistical method was used to determine the extent to which breaking news exposure predicts political anxiety among digital news consumers in Benin City during the 2023 Nigerian presidential election, as well as the direction and strength of the relationship between the variables.

Data Analysis

Table 1: Extent of Exposure to Breaking News Culture among Digital News Consumers in Benin City during the 2023 Nigerian Presidential Election (n = 370)

Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD	Decision
I frequently received breaking news alerts about the 2023 presidential election on my phone.	140 (37.8%)	110 (29.7%)	70 (18.9%)	50 (13.5%)	2.92	1.08	Accepted
I constantly refresh news apps or social media for election updates.	130 (35.1%)	115 (31.1%)	75 (20.3%)	50 (13.5%)	2.88	1.09	Accepted
I encountered repeated breaking news notifications within short time intervals.	125 (33.8%)	110 (29.7%)	85 (23.0%)	50 (13.5%)	2.84	1.10	Accepted
I followed multiple digital platforms simultaneously for breaking political news.	120 (32.4%)	105 (28.4%)	90 (24.3%)	55 (14.9%)	2.78	1.12	Accepted
I felt pressured to stay constantly updated due to breaking news alerts.	115 (31.1%)	100 (27.0%)	95 (25.7%)	60 (16.2%)	2.70	1.14	Accepted

Aggregate Mean = 2.82 | SD = 1.11 | Accepted

The data in Table 1 indicate a high level of exposure to breaking news culture among digital news consumers in Benin City during the 2023 Nigerian presidential election. Respondents consistently agreed that they received frequent breaking news alerts and actively refreshed digital platforms for updates. This suggests that election communication was highly

real-time and notification-driven. Furthermore, the repeated exposure to alerts within short intervals reflects a saturated information environment where political updates are delivered continuously rather than periodically. Although all items were accepted, the slightly lower mean for feeling pressured to stay updated suggests that not all users experience equal psychological intensity from breaking news exposure.

Table 2: Level of Political Anxiety among Digital News Consumers in Benin City during the 2023 Nigerian Presidential Election (n = 370)

Statement	SA	AD	SD	Mean	SD	Decision
I felt worried when I repeatedly saw breaking news about the election.	135 (36.5%)	110 (29.7%)	75 (20.3%)	50 (13.5%)	2.89	1.09 Accepted
Frequent election updates made me feel uncertain about political outcomes.	130 (35.1%)	115 (31.1%)	75 (20.3%)	50 (13.5%)	2.88	1.10 Accepted
I experienced emotional tension due to continuous political news exposure.	120 (32.4%)	110 (29.7%)	85 (23.0%)	55 (14.9%)	2.79	1.12 Accepted
I became anxious when breaking news contradicted earlier reports.	125 (33.8%)	105 (28.4%)	80 (21.6%)	60 (16.2%)	2.80	1.11 Accepted
I often felt overwhelmed by the volume of election-related news updates.	118 (31.9%)	112 (30.3%)	80 (21.6%)	60 (16.2%)	2.78	1.12 Accepted
Aggregate Mean = 2.83 SD = 1.11 Accepted						

Table 2 reveals a generally high level of political anxiety among digital news consumers in Benin City during the 2023 presidential election period. Respondents reported consistent emotional responses such as worry, uncertainty, tension, and feelings of being overwhelmed. These responses suggest that breaking news culture did not merely inform audiences but also shaped their emotional and psychological experiences of the election. Notably, anxiety increased when news reports conflicted or changed rapidly, indicating that inconsistency in election reporting may have intensified public unease. Although all items were accepted, the relatively close mean values suggest that anxiety levels were widespread but moderately stable rather than extreme.

Table 3: Regression Analysis of the Relationship between Breaking News Culture and Political Anxiety among Digital News Consumers in Benin City (n = 370)

Model	RR ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of Estimate	F	Sig.	Predictor	B	Std. Error
(Constant)	1.120	.08	—	14.000	.000			
Breaking News Culture	0.580	.040	.641	5.940	.000			

The regression result shows a strong positive relationship between breaking news culture and political anxiety among digital news consumers in Benin City during the 2023 Nigerian presidential election. The model indicates an R value of 0.64 and an R² of 0.41, meaning that 41% of the variation in political anxiety is explained by exposure to breaking news culture.

The F-value (254.18, $p < 0.05$) confirms that the model is statistically significant. The beta coefficient ($\beta = 0.64$) further shows that breaking news culture has a strong and positive influence on political anxiety. This implies that increased exposure to continuous political updates significantly heightens anxiety levels among respondents. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Discussion of Findings

The findings show that breaking news culture is highly present among digital news consumers in Benin City during the 2023 presidential election. Respondents reported constant exposure to alerts, repeated updates, and continuous checking of digital platforms. News consumption in this period was fast and unbroken. Information moved in real time. This reflects how election communication now operates in a highly immediate digital environment. Nkoala et al. (2026) explain that digital journalism increasingly relies on speed and repetition. They note that “breaking” news has become a dominant form of communication that signals urgency even when developments are small. This study reflects that reality. Respondents did not just receive news; they lived within it as it unfolded.

The findings also show a clear rise in political anxiety among respondents. Many felt worried, uncertain, and emotionally strained during the election period. Some described feeling overwhelmed by the volume of updates. This suggests that constant exposure to political news affects emotional stability. Ukponahiusi and Ohikhueme (2026) argue that heavy digital media exposure can trigger stress and emotional fatigue, especially when users are exposed to continuous updates without breaks. That pattern appears in this study. The more respondents followed breaking news, the more anxious they became. The election environment became emotionally charged, not just informational.

The regression result confirms a significant positive relationship between breaking news culture and political anxiety. This means that increased exposure leads to higher anxiety levels. The relationship is not weak. It is strong and consistent. From a Uses and Gratifications perspective,

this makes sense. People actively choose media to satisfy their need for information and updates. They want to stay informed. But the outcome is not always what they expect. Gratification turns into tension. Nwaoboli and Ojete (2025) explain that digital content, especially algorithm-driven political material, shapes how people interpret events and even how they see themselves within political narratives. In this study, constant exposure to breaking news shaped how respondents emotionally responded to the election.

The findings also show that breaking news culture creates a sense of instability. Events feel unresolved. Updates keep changing. Information often contradicts earlier reports. This creates doubt. Udeagha (2025) explains that repeated exposure to emotionally charged narratives can strengthen fear-based interpretation of events, especially when cultural and social beliefs already support heightened sensitivity. In this case, respondents did not only consume information. They interpreted it through a lens of urgency and concern. Each new update added pressure. The election felt less predictable and more stressful.

Uses and Gratifications Theory helps to explain this pattern clearly. Respondents used digital platforms to stay informed. They sought speed and relevance. They wanted to follow events as they happened. But the same behaviour that gave them information also increased emotional strain. Ukponahusi and Ohikhueme (2026) describe this as a paradox of digital media use. More access does not always mean better outcomes. Sometimes it leads to overload. In this study, that overload became anxiety. The need for constant updates removed emotional distance from political events.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that breaking news culture strongly influenced political anxiety among digital news consumers in Benin City during the 2023 presidential election. Exposure was high and anxiety was also high. The link between both was clear and statistically significant. Constant updates shaped how people felt about the election. It created urgency, but it also created tension. Based on the findings, the study recommends the following:

1. Digital news platforms should reduce unnecessary repetition of

- breaking news alerts to avoid information overload.
2. News organisations should provide clearer context alongside updates to reduce uncertainty.
3. Media users should be encouraged to take breaks from continuous news consumption during high-pressure political periods.

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