

Awareness and Usage of Social Media by Undergraduates in Selected Universities in Ogun State

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore undergraduate students' awareness and usage of social media. A descriptive survey design was adopted with the use of questionnaires as instruments for data collection. Out of one thousand, one hundred and ninety-two (1,192) questionnaires administered to the students, one thousand, one hundred and eight (1,108) were retrieved, a number that represents 93% of the total. Data were analysed using frequency counts, percentages and means. The results revealed that the respondents were aware of almost all social media platforms, with WhatsApp (99%) ranking highest, followed by Email (97.9%) and Twitter (95.3%). The most frequently utilized social media tools were WhatsApp ($\bar{x} = 2.72$), Email ($\bar{x} = 2.61$) and Facebook ($\bar{x} = 2.50$). Social media platforms were mainly used for group discussions and tutorials with course mates ($\bar{x} = 3.22$); sourcing current materials ($\bar{x} = 3.21$), and checking updates on current research ($\bar{x} = 3.18$). The study concluded that social networking is not new to most undergraduates and that they use social media for academic purposes, self-expression and in order to establish friendships with other students around the globe. It was recommended, among other things, that students should be aware of the fact that overindulgence in social media is addictive and time-wasting; moreover, lecturers should assist students in making more meaningful uses of social networking sites by incorporating them into their lessons.

Keywords: social media, Uses and Gratification Theory, usage of social media

Introduction

New technologies have radically changed the way in which people communicate (Adebayo 2015 and Balaban-Sali, 2012). With the ubiquity of platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Myspace, Skype, LinkedIn and the like, social media is quickly becoming an indispensable part of people's lives. They are used to communicate, read, comment, share, like, and create content (Chen and Sakamoto, 2013; Ma et al., 2014). These platforms are gaining popularity, and an increasing number of young people (Pempek et al. 2009), especially students, now comprise the highest percentage of social media users (Lewis, 2009; Sponcil and Gitimu 2013; Yoo and Kim, 2013). The young make use of social media primarily to meet their information needs (Rubina and Shakeel, 2012).

Moze (2012) has outlined social media benefits: they encourage greater social interaction via electronic platforms; they provide greater access to information and information sources; they encourage creativity among and between individuals and groups; they create a sense of belonging among users of common social media tools, and they increase the technological competency levels of frequent users.

Social media have a significant influence on the academic performance of undergraduate students, and their qualitative impact is determined by the type of usage (Mehmood and Taswir, 2013; Ahmed and Qazi, 2011). Students oftentimes find it difficult to concentrate and study effectively because of the time spent on social networking sites. Quan-Haase and Young (2010) found that a majority of college students login into Facebook several times a day. Younger students tended to use Facebook more frequently than older students to keep in touch with friends from high school or from their hometown (Pempek *et al.*, 2009). This kind of activity has been found to cause distraction during instructional time, resulting in a tangible negative impact on learning (Flad, 2010). Thus, it is essential to determine the intensity and current trends of social networking among students, an objective for which we'll explore the types of social networks of which undergraduates are cognizant as well as the frequency of use.

The Problem

Students' current unwillingness to read comprehensively is considered exceptionally worrisome by many educators (Trend, p. 1). It has been observed that students' reading culture has been negatively impacted by various factors, resulting in a distinct plunge in levels of literacy (Trend, p. 10). Many place most of the blame regarding falling standards on the persistent use of social media (Trend, p. 73). Furthermore, it has been observed that undergraduates spend an inordinate amount of time in front of screens and on social media platforms, which they access on their laptops, desktops, cable television, palmtops, iPods, GSM Phones, smart phones, smart television, etc. Many choose to spend their time chatting with friends instead of reading. Even when some students use social media for academic purposes, they do so because it allows them to quickly lift answers for their assignments. Despite the abundant research and analysis that scrutinises social media usage, not much of it centres on undergraduates in Nigeria's Ogun State. Hence, this study was undertaken to examine the awareness and the usage of social media by undergraduates in selected universities in Ogun State, Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. What are the demographic characteristics of the undergraduates in the selected universities?

2. To what extent are the undergraduates in the selected universities aware of social media?
3. How frequently do undergraduates in the selected universities use social media?
4. For what purposes do the undergraduates in the selected universities use social media?

Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study are to:

1. describe the demographic characteristics of the undergraduates in selected universities
2. determine the undergraduates' awareness of social media in selected universities
3. examine the undergraduates' frequency of use of social media in selected universities
4. identify the undergraduates' purposes for using social media in selected universities

Uses and Gratifications Theory

As this study is based on the undergraduates' awareness and usage of social media, the Uses and Gratifications Theory (U&G) of Katz et al. 1974 is employed, as it provides a systematic explanation of why people use and access media programmes. This theory refines the conceptual conversation, allows for a cogent and methodical identification of the critical pieces needed in data collection, and points the way to the most efficient method of analysis. Furthermore, it is not passive and does not admit contents at face value, requiring the scrutiny of key terms in the data that are grounded upon personal, social, cultural, and emotional considerations: these are instrumental in guiding people in what they choose to consume from the media.

Social Media

According to Langat (2015), social media is the interactive communication that exists between people using a specialized electronic platform such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Myspace, LinkedIn and Instagram. These provide a means that allows them to create and share content (Lewis, 2009). Scholars observe that social media facilitates the growth of interactive dialogue and communities of users, regardless of their physical location; notably, academic libraries market their products and services on social media and make users aware of what goes on in the library, providing useful information that is accessed by online users in the social network space. Social media involves technology, social interaction and the coordination of ideas for creative and scientific innovation. This interaction and the manner in which information is presented allow for the integration of diverse perspectives, as people share information freely and confer and interact with others. Through websites, individuals can create, share, connect and exchange ideas and opinions with one another and engage in person to person conversation.

Usage of Social Media

Social media allow people to easily create their own online profile and display an online network of friends. Lenhart *et al* (2010) observed that about 57% of social media users are 18–29 years old and have a personal profile on multiple social media websites. More than 50% of college students access a social networking site several times a day (Sheldon, 2008). Eberhardt (2007) opined that the culture of the student's environment is lately more socially oriented because of the emergence of online technologies. Students can use social media platforms tools to connect with other classrooms, track a word or phrase, attend lectures remotely, learn personal responsibility, find scientific research papers, create apps, classmate connections,

provide direct communication with instructors, brainstorm, and knowledge-sharing among others. Mehmood (2013) stated that students are positively affected by the informative use of the social media while at the same time there can be a drastic impact on recreational use of social media on them.

Methodology

The descriptive survey design was adopted for this study. The population was made up of undergraduates of selected public and private universities in Ogun State who are in their second to fifth years of study. The study was carried towards the close of 2017/2018 academic session. The only instrument used for data collection was the questionnaire that contained close-ended items. A multi-stage sampling technique was used for the study. This was done to obtain an even representation of the population. Ten percent (10%) of the total population (11,919) of the undergraduate students in the three faculties/schools was used as the sample size for the study. This was to ensure a fair representation of the entire population.

At the end of the administration of the questionnaire, 1108 copies of the questionnaire were found to be usable being properly filled by the respondents. This figure represents 93% of the entire number of the instrument. Frequency count, percentages and mean were used to analyse the data collected.

Results

Table 1: Gender of Respondents

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	547	49
Female	561	51
Total	1108	100

The gender of the respondents as presented in table 1 shows that the female students 561 (51%) are more than the male students 547 (49%).

Table 2: Respondents' awareness of social media platforms

S/N	Social Media	Frequency	Percentage	\bar{x}	S.D
1.	WhatsApp	1097	99.0	1.008	0.303
2.	Email	1085	97.9	1.029	0.309
3.	Twitter	1056	95.3	1.069	0.032
4.	Google+	1042	94.0	1.197	0.036
5.	Instagram	1035	93.4	1.201	0.036
6.	Facebook	1033	93.2	1.313	0.037

7.	Youtube 0.040	1026	92.6	1.412
8.	Snapchat 0.046	1016	91.7	1.537
9.	BBM 0.048	993	89.6	1.583
10.	Blog 0.051	900	81.2	1.690
11.	LinkedIn 0.053	452	40.8	1.779
12.	Myspace 0.054	356	32.1	1.807
13.	Flickr 0.056	318	28.7	1.848
14.	Friendstar 0.058	292	26.4	1.915

Weighted mean = 1.44

The result in Table 2 reveals that majority of the respondents representing 100% responded affirmatively, which indicates that they are aware of almost all social media platforms with WhatsApp ranking highest with a percentage of 99.0 followed by Email (97.9%); Twitter (95.3%) and the least was Flickr (28.7%) and Friendstar (26.4%) respectively. The inference drawn from this is that social media is not a new thing to most students in this era.

Table 3: Usage of Social Media

S/N	Social Media	Always	Occasionally	Never	\bar{x}	S.D
1.	WhatsApp	852 (76.9)	194 (17.5)	62 (5.6)	2.72	0.571
2.	Email	727 (65.6)	312 (28.2)	69 (6.2)	2.61	0.632
3.	Facebook	637 (57.5)	370 (33.4)	101 (9.1)	2.50	0.864
4.	Youtube	624 (56.3)	397 (35.8)	87 (7.9)	2.48	0.646
5.	Instagram	490 (44.2)	430 (38.8)	188 (17)	2.26	0.735
6.	Google+	409 (36.9)	557 (50.3)	142 (12.8)	2.25	0.669
7.	Twitter	481 (43.4)	412 (37.2)	215 (19.4)	2.23	0.757
8.	Snapchat	418 (37.7)	381 (34.4)	309 (27.9)	2.08	0.803
9.	Blog	152 (13.7)	524 (47.3)	432 (39)	1.75	0.689
10.	BBM	141 (12.7)	462 (42.1)	500 (45.1)	1.69	0.692
11.	LinkedIn	105 (9.5)	266 (24)	737 (66.5)	1.44	0.663
12.	Myspace	95 (8.6)	175 (15.8)	838 (75.6)	1.34	0.636
13.	Flickr	83 (7.5)	167 (15.1)	858 (77.4)	1.31	0.606
14.	Friendstar	86 (7.8)	153 (13.8)	869 (78.4)	1.30	0.613

Weighted mean = 1.90

The above table indicates the frequently used social media platforms by the respondents. The frequently used were WhatsApp ($\bar{x} = 2.72$), Email ($\bar{x} = 2.61$) and Facebook ($\bar{x} = 2.50$) while the least use social media were Flickr ($\bar{x} = 1.31$) and Friendstar ($\bar{x} = 1.30$) indicated as being used by the respondents. The inference drawn from this is that, WhatsApp, Email and Facebook were the major social media being used by the undergraduates. This was because they were the social media platforms that ranked above the weighted mean of 1.90 set for the social usage.

Table 4: Respondents' Purpose of Utilising Social Media

S/N	Utilization of social media	Always	Occasionally	Seldom	Never	\bar{x}	S.D
1.	I use social media for group discussions and tutorials with course/classmates	575 (51.9)	322 (29.1)	105 (9.5)	106(9.6)	3.22	0.974
2.	Sourcing for materials to read for examination and tests	488 (44)	420 (37.9)	118 (10.6)	82 (7.4)	3.21	1.504
3.	Check updates on current research or new developments in my field of study	482 (43.5)	418 (37.7)	143 (12.9)	65 (5.9)	3.18	0.875
4.	I use social media for finding and chatting with friends online	546 (49.3)	329 (29.7)	112 (10.1)	121 (10.9)	3.16	1.003
5.	Group socialization with peers, relating to issues like politics, education and religious matters.	422 (38.1)	493 (44.4)	126 (11.4)	68 (6.1)	3.15	0.856
6.	To share and exchange academic information	490 (44.2)	387 (34.9)	142 (12.8)	89 (8)	3.14	0.933
7.	To source for current information on my course	472 (42.6)	327 (29.5)	216 (19.5)	93 (8.4)	3.08	1.555
8.	Checking, reading and sending e-mails	474 (42.8)	360 (32.5)	115 (10.4)	159 (14.4)	3.02	1.053
9.	Research activities such as finding journal articles or publications	285 (25.7)	573 (51.7)	143 (12.9)	107 (9.7)	3.00	1.745
10.	Downloading scholarly articles for assignment or term papers	344 (31)	467 (42.1)	220 (19.9)	77 (6.9)	2.97	0.893
11.	To get relevant information related to my research or project work	305 (27.5)	502 (45.3)	201 (18.1)	100 (9)	2.91	0.910
12.	Online learning and web-seminars (webinars)	339 (30.6)	405 (36.6)	248 (22.4)	116 (10.5)	2.89	1.163
13.	To search for information on scholarship	272 (24.5)	544 (49.1)	175 (15.8)	117 (10.6)	2.87	0.908
14.	Reading of newspapers and magazines on-line	346 (31.2)	412 (37.2)	171 (15.4)	179 (16.2)	2.83	1.051
15.	Photo sharing	337 (30.4)	402 (36.3)	144 (13)	225 (20.3)	2.77	1.142
16.	To follow/learn from people who have made their marks in my chosen course/desired career	253 (22.8)	411 (37.1)	275 (24.8)	169 (15.3)	2.67	0.998
17.	To create groups of likeminded individuals	227 (20.5)	479 (43.2)	165 (14.9)	237 (21.4)	2.66	1.562
18.	To buy books or other information materials online	262 (23.6)	397 (35.8)	259 (23.4)	190 (17.1)	2.65	1.028
19.	Sharing of business or vocational ideas	206 (18.6)	484 (43.7)	188 (17)	230 (20.8)	2.59	1.021
20.	Sports and entertainment news	284 (25.6)	325 (29.3)	193 (17.4)	306 (27.6)	2.52	1.155
21.	To enrol for online certificates or professional training.	195 (17.6)	367 (33.1)	248 (22.4)	298 (26.9)	2.40	1.071
22.	Online shopping	171 (15.4)	378 (34.1)	241 (21.8)	318 (28.7)	2.37	1.217
23.	Marketing my products	263 (23.7)	253 (22.8)	179 (16.2)	413 (37.3)	2.36	1.233

24.	To publish my blog	190 (17.1)	294 (26.5)	188 (17)	436 (39.4)	2.25	1.184
25.	To communicate with my lecturers	107 (9.7)	375 (33.8)	195(17.6)	431(38.9)	2.20	1.619
26.	Betting and online money making	142 (12.8)	244 (22)	193 (17.4)	529 (47.7)	2.02	1.102
27.	Online dating	138 (12.5)	193 (17.4)	135 (12.2)	642 (57.9)	1.86	1.112

Weighted mean = 2.6

Table 4 revealed that social media tools are mainly used for group discussions and tutorials with course mates ($\bar{x} = 3.22$); they are also used to source for current materials for examinations and tests ($\bar{x} = 3.21$), used to check for updates on current research or new developments in my field of study ($\bar{x} = 3.18$), and the last two purposes were occasionally for betting or online money making ($\bar{x} = 2.02$) and online dating ($\bar{x} = 1.86$). The inference drawn from this is that, undergraduates use social media platforms tools to connect with other classroom mates, track a word or phrase, attend lectures remotely, learn personally, find scientific research papers, create apps, provide direct communication with instructors, brainstorm and share knowledge among others.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that the undergraduates in the selected universities in Ogun state have knowledge of social media and they make use of them. Also many of these students use the sites for the purpose of group discussions and tutorials, maintaining social contacts with friends/relatives and they also use them for sourcing current materials for examinations and tests. However, it was discovered that many of the students spend lots of time visiting the social media platforms. No wonder, a significant percentage of the students claimed that using social media reduces the time they spend studying, and some are distracted in the classroom.

Based on these findings, the following recommendations were made:

- The students should be sensitized on the purposive use of social media for their education.
- Students should be aware that overindulgence in social media is addictive and time wasting hence exercising self-control as early as possible.
- Time-off software should be installed to control social media use by students.
- Parents can also advice and monitor their wards especially teens to limit the time they spend on social networking. They should rather use those hours to read other academic books that will help to improve their knowledge.
- Lecturers should help the students to make meaningful use of social networking sites by incorporating them into their lessons.
- Students should be advised on the dangers of getting addicted to social networking

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