

Social Network Sites Utilization by University Students: A Case Study of University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Ekwelem, V. O.; Chigbu, E. D. & Dim, C.L.

Nnamdi Azikiwe Library

University of Nigeria

Nsukka

Abstract

The rate at which students crave for access to the Internet access has increased dramatically. The purpose of the study is to ascertain the level of awareness and use of social networking sites by students of university of Nigeria, Nsukka. Specifically, the study sought to determine the benefits of SNS to students and also examined the problems encountered by these students, on their uses. Descriptive survey was adopted for the study. Questionnaire and a follow-up interview were used to collect data from the student respondents. The population of the study consisted of 350 students randomly selected from different departments and fields of study as sample for this study. Out of this number, 301 or 86 percent of the responses were found usable for the study. The mean result indicated that Face book (3.6), SMS (3.5), U. Tube (3.4), Chat (3.4) and Twitter (3.1) are the most popular SNS known by the students. Similarly the respondents used the service to a great extent to download materials relevant to their studies (3.6), the benefits derived by the students are mostly to increase the resources gathering (3.5). The negative effects include exposure of adolescents to illegitimate sexual knowledge (3.3). Recommendations were also made on acceptable use of SNS by students.

Keywords: Social, Network, Sites, Information, Communication, Technologies, Awareness.

Introduction

Social networking sites (SNS) are websites offering information services giving people opportunity to interact with other users. Ahlquist *et al* (2008) defined SNS as an interaction of people, creating, sharing, exchanging and commenting contents in virtual communities and networks. SNS offer

new ways of interaction and information distribution virtual time with little delay. It is one of the services with direct social and communication impact on the people. A social networking site helps millions of its clientele to express themselves and establish their social networks by maintaining connections with one

another in the cyber world (Chai, Kim, 2012). Studies have revealed that SNSs has helped students network with friends all over the world. There are various benefits of SNS. Klein (2008) noted that one of the key reasons for establishing SNSs is to improve communication processes and establish a sense of community. As a result many institutions now have effective vehicle for delivering news, update forms and staff files are now easy to use, flexible, timely, and more effective when compared to traditional paper work. Most studies agree that SNSs can be a valuable source of information for communication (O'Hanlon, 2007; Farkas, 2007; Mazer, *et al* 2007) SNSs are an inseparable part of today's university students. University of Nigeria has invested a good deal of resources in providing ICT facilities to both students and staff .According to Google Fan (2011) Facebook with a total users of 750 million is the most commonly used SNS in 2011, followed by Twitter with 250 million. LinkedIn is third with 115 million; fourth is MySpace with 50 million and fifth is Google plus with 25 million. More recent studies continue to confirm the increasing popularity of SNSs among students. The results of a study conducted by Fogel and Nehmad (2008) indicated that more than three-quarters of the student's respondents have created a social Networking profile; Facebook had greater representation when compared with MySpace. As Madhudham (2012) writes, social Networking sites have become a part

of university students lives as it helps them build their online social connections with others. Similarly, Barkhuus & Tashiro (2010) in a study "notes that university students are heavy Facebook users who access it between one and twenty times a day, an average of 5.3 times a day for all participants".

A lot of criticisms have been levelled at social media and its negative impact on student's academic performance and social life. It is well known that many students use SNSs to watch movies and pornographic movies, in particular, instead of concentrating on their studies. For example in the United States a study found that 2322 arrest were made for internet sex crimes against minors involved SNS in some ways (Mitchell, Finkeihor and Wolak, 2010). Another negative criticism derived from SNS, is lack of privacy and respect to tradition of the people. It is a taboo in Igbo land to announce the dead of a prominent person without getting clearance from the family involved, but contrary is the case these days. SNSs help to spread such news throughout the world to the embarrassment of the affected family. Another worrying trend about SNS is the incidence of cyber bully. University is a fertile ground for such activities. Students use SNSs to target and spread dangerous rumours against their fellow students. It can have serious consequences on the affected students. A study by Fogel and Nehmad (2008) found that those with social networking profiles had

greater risk taking attitudes when compared with those who did not have social networking profiles. It is important to note that SNSs are being embraced overwhelmingly by the students. Literature suggests that SNSs are not only for social and communication activities but also for academic activities, and can become a contributor to successful marketing of themselves as well.

There are numerous recent studies that described the uses of SNSs among university students all over the world. These studies were conducted to ascertain the positive and negative impacts of student use of SNSs. Weisgerber and Butler, (2010) asserts that social Network revolutionized the way people interact, the way they communicate, and even the way they think. In the words of Blocher and Roberts (2008) web 2.0 technologies is shaping human communications and is impacting how people present themselves in their interaction between students. SNSs interaction ties among individuals lead to creating trust, and wider communication, producing positive effects on sharing knowledge (Chen and Huang, cited by Chai and Kim, 2012). Use of SNSs such as blogs leads to instant online community in which people communicate rapidly and conveniently with each other and also provide rich information about the person and his network, which can be utilized for various business purposes (Ahmad,2011). Thus, allowing individuals to construct relationships with other individuals with similar

attentiveness and interests. Hussein (2005) indicated that SNSs formulates communities and interact freely with each other, students exchange their learning experiences, research findings and academic opportunities. In the University of Nigeria Nsukka, Internet access has been made available to staff and students at the payment of a token sum. The scenario on campus shows students clustering at the different spots where the Internet receptions are greater, with their laptop computers, handsets and android phones. They stay hours accessing the Internet for their various uses. The present survey is an attempt to ascertain the uses and usefulness of SNS on students and to verify the role it plays in their overall development.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the study were to determine the:

- 1) The level of awareness of existence of social network services by UNN students.
- 2) The purposes of using SNS by students of UNN
- 3) The extent of use of SNS by students of UNN on Campus.
- 4) The benefits UNN students derive from the use of SNS
- 5) Perceived harmful effects of the uses of SNS on the social life of students of UNN.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of awareness of social Network Services among UNN students?

2. What are the purposes of using SNS by students of UNN?
3. To what extent do students of UNN use SNS on campus?
4. What benefits do students of UNN derive from the use of SNS?
5. What harmful effects do the uses of SNS have on the social life of students of UNN?

Methodology

Area of Study – The area of study was the University of Nigeria Nsukka campus. There exist nine faculties offering different courses in arts, humanities, social sciences, agricultural sciences, science and technologies and medical sciences in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Design of the Study– Descriptive survey design was used in carrying out the study. The justification of this design was informed by fact that the study's purpose was descriptive on social network sites utilization by university of Nigeria, students.

Population of the Study–Population of the study was 350 students selected randomly to participate in the study.

Sample for the Study– Random sampling technique was used to select 350 students from the 9 faculties in the Nsukka Campus. 301 respondents completed and returned the survey instrument, giving a response rate of 86 percent.

Instrument for Data Collection: The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled "Use of Social Network Services Questionnaire" (USNSQ). The

questionnaire was developed by the researchers through an extensive review of literature based on the objectives of the study. The questionnaire had six clusters with a total of 73 items mounted on a four point scale of Strongly Agree (SA) 4, Agree (A) 3, Disagree (D) 2 and Strongly Disagree (SD) 1. The instrument was validated by two members of staff from Management and Information Services (MIS) and two Library and Information Science Professionals. The reliability coefficient was 0.89 which shows that the instrument was highly reliable.

Data Collection and Analysis

Technique: The instrument used for the study was administered and retrieved personally by the researchers with the assistance of three students on Industrial Attachment in the University Library. A total of 350 questionnaires were distributed. Out of this number 301 questionnaires were properly filled and returned, giving a response rate of 80 percent (80%). Data were analysed using mean. A mean score of 2.5 and above were accepted while below 2.5 were rejected. Data collected was analysed using a descriptive, statistics.

Results

Male and female student were used for the study. The male students constituted 51% while female students constituted 49%. The age bracket of majority of the students ranged: 20- 24 and 25-30.

Table 1: Awareness of social Network services.

S/N	Social Media	Mean	Decision
1	Blogs	2.8	Low awareness
2	Polkasts	1.9	No awareness
3	Wikis	2.4	Low awareness
4	Dirgo	2.0	No awareness
5	Flicker	2.2	No awareness
6	Delicious	2.4	No awareness
7	Slide share	2.6	Low awareness
8	LinkedIn	3.5	High awareness
9	Face book	3.6	High awareness
10	U tube	3.4	High awareness
11	Newsgroup	2.9	Average awareness
12	Twitter	3.1	Average awareness
13	Sms	3.5	High awareness
14	Chat	3.3	High awareness
15	My space	2.2	No awareness
16	Library thing	2.5	Low awareness

Data in Table 1 above shows student's awareness of different social network services available in the net. The mean result shows that: Facebook; SMS, U tube; Chat; Twitter; are the most popular social network services known and used by UNN students. Others perhaps not so popular are:

Newsgroup; Blogs; LinkedIn; and the Library thing. The mean scores of these ranges between 3.6 to 2.5. The students are not familiar with: Wikis, Slide Share, Flicker, Delicious, My space, Dirgo and Polkast social media. The mean scores of these were below 2.5 mean.

2: Mean Response on Purposes of using social media

S/N	Items	Mean	Decision
1	Uploading photos	3.1	Highly used
2	Downloading music, videos and films	3.3	Highly used
3	Uploading profile information in the net	3.0	Highly used
4	Searching for job	2.9	Moderately used
5	Giving feedback to friends	3.3	Highly used
6	Circulating information on current events	3.2	Highly used
7	Interaction with friends and associates	3.2	Highly used
8	Lurking	2.4	Not used
9	Keeping update with current happenings	2.4	Not used
10	Participating in group research	2.9	Moderately used

11	Making foreign friends	2.6	Moderately used
12	Creating self awareness in the web	2.5	Moderately used
13	Participating in professional activities	2.5	Moderately used
14	Identifying with social groups	3.0	Highly used
15	Information gathering and dissemination	3.4	Highly used

Data in Table 2 shows that, there are several purposes for which the students of UNN use social network services. Major among these are for: information gathering and dissemination; downloading music; video and films; giving feedback to friends; circulating information on current events; interacting with friends and associates; uploading photos; uploading profile information

in the net and identifying with social groups. These items were rated 3.4; 3.3; 3.3; 3.2; 3.2; 3.1; 3.0 and 3.0 mean respectively on the scale. Items 10, 11, 12 and 13 scored between 2.9 and 2.5 respectively. The students did not agree that they use the social network services (SNS) for lurking, and keeping update with current happenings. These items scored below the acceptable mean (2.4) respectively.

Table 3: Mean Response on Extent of use of SNS by Students of UNN

S/N	Items	Mean	Decision
1	Downloading materials relevant for my studies	3.6	High ext.
2	Partnering with students both inside and outside the campus to provide materials to perform assignment and examination	3.0	High ext.
3	Surfing through the internet to provide relevant and up-to-date materials in my area of study	3.3	High ext.
4	Getting information from family and relations who are far and near	3.0	High ext.
5	Provides opportunity of browsing licensed databases through the library website	2.9	Moderate
6	Opportunity to access different databases such as OARE, Ebscohost etc, AGORA, Hinari to obtain literature on my area	2.5	Moderate
7	Provides opportunity for monitoring people	2.3	Very low
8	Opportunity for creating content	2.5	Moderate
9	It provides opportunity for socialization	3.0	High ext.
10	It provides opportunity for interacting and collaborating with people around the world	3.3	High ext.
11	Getting information on global events	3.4	High ext.
12	Gathering new experiences for global events	3.4	High ext.

The extent of use given by the respondents to various SNSs services are as follows, given in increasing

order: downloading materials relevance for my studies (3.6), getting information on global events and

gathering new experiences for global events (3.4), it provides opportunity for interacting and collaborating with people around the world and surfing through the internet to provide relevant and up-to-date materials in my area of study (3.3), getting information from family and relations who are far and near and partnering with students both inside and outside of the campus to provide materials to

perform assignment and examination(3.0), provides opportunity of browsing licensed databases through the library website (2.9), opportunity to access different database such as OARE etc, and opportunity for creating content (2.5). Only item 7- provides opportunity for monitoring people with a mean score of 2.3 was rejected by the respondents.

Table 4: Mean Response on Benefits of SNS to UNN Students

S/N	Items	Mean	Decision
1	To increase my self-esteem	3.1	High
2	For collaborative and peer-to-peer learning	3.2	High
3	For the gathering of resources for study	3.5	High
4	To help my research and learning	3.5	High
5	To develop an e-portfolio for future employment	2.9	Moderate
6	Actualizes virtual meeting with co-researchers and scholars	2.9	Moderate
7	Develops my internet and web surfing skills	3.3	High
8	It bridges the learning gap informally between "Digital native" students and "digital immigrants".	3.1	High
9	Collation of resources for study	3.3	High
10	It connects one with people that would have been impossible to meet	3.4	High

From the scores in Table 4, the benefits students of UNN derived from using SNS are that it increases their resource gathering (3.5); assisting their research and learning (3.5); connecting very distant people that would have been impossible to reach (3.4); increases their internet surfing skill (3.3); collation of resources for study (3.3);

increase their self esteem (3.1). By these mean scores the student shows that they derive benefit from these items, to a great extent. They also derive benefit in virtual actualization in meeting co- researcher and scholars (2.9) and in the development of e-portfolio for future employment (2.9), to a less extent.

Table 5: Mean Response on Negative effects of SNS on Students of UNN

S/N	Items	Mean	Decision
1	Exposure of adolescents to illegitimate sexual knowledge and behaviours	3.3	High
2	Leading students to fraudulent behaviours	3.0	High
3	Leading students to disorderly conducts	2.9	Moderate

4	Eroding cultural norms and traditions of the people	3.1	High
5	Inciting students to civil disobedience	2.6	Moderate
6	Acquainting students with outrageous behaviours	2.7	Moderate
7	Leading students to promiscuous life styles of corrupt cultures	2.9	Moderate
8	Leading to the spread of HIV/AIDS	2.2	Very low
9	Teaching students extraneous cultures	2.9	Moderate
10	Child disorientation	2.9	Moderate

From Table 5, indicates that students of UNN experience the following negative effects on the use of SNS. These include: exposure to illegitimate sexual knowledge and behaviour (3.3); it erodes their cultural norms and traditions (3.1); and teach the students some fraudulent behaviours (3.0). These affect the students to a great extent. To a less extent though the

students experience disorderly conducts (2.9); promiscuous life styles; extraneous corrupt culture (2.9); child disorientation (2.9); acquaintance with outrageous behaviours (2.7) and inciting students to civil disobedience (2.6). However the students did not agree that SNS leads to the spread of HIV/AIDS by the mean score of (2.2).

Table 6: Mean Response on Physical effects of Constant use of SNS on the students of UNN

S/N	Items	Mean	Decision
1	Eye defects due to longer use of computer or cell phones	3.0	High
2	Occupation of excessive time for studies during the semester	3.2	High
3	Prying into the privacies of peers	2.8	Moderate
4	Cyber bullying	2.8	Moderate
5	Physical problem like backache, fingers joints etc.	2.8	Moderate
6	Data security (e.g.) hacking, identity theft	3.0	High
7	Lack of information literacy skill to use various services and facilities of SNSs available via the internet	2.5	Moderate
8	Dry face	2.1	Very low
9	Sex abuse	2.6	Moderate

Data in table 6 shows that student's suffer eye defects (3.0) in the course of their use of SNS. It occupies excessive time of their study period (3.2); there is the problem of hacking and identity theft (3.0). Other effects of SNS are

prying into the privacies of their peers (2.8); cyber bullying (2.8); aches on their backs and finger joints (2.8); sex abuse (2.6). The respondents did not accept that they experienced dry face (2.1) as a result of frequent use of SNS.

Discussion of Findings

The study revealed that the SNS sites regularly used by the students of UNN were Face book, SMS, U-tube, Chat, Twitter, others are: Newsgroup, Blogs, LinkedIn and the Library thing. Students use the first group to a great extent while the later group were used to a less extent as shown in the survey. This is consistent with the finding of Bridges (2009) that Facebook has become part of educational discourse on many colleges and university campuses due to its widespread use among students. In the University of Nigeria, Nsukka the internet is made accessible freely to all staff and students within the library, residential areas and student hostels.

Our study found that the students have various purposes for using SNS. Many among these are for information gathering and dissemination, downloading music, videos and films linking friends and peer groups. They also use them to uphold pictures, their profile, identifying social groups, and making friends locally and worldwide. Students use SNS to the extent of assisting their academics. It assists them to: gather information for their studies; collaborating with people in other institution to solve academic problems, assignment and examination questions. They also use SMS to visit library web sources/resource for creating content for their academic assignments and projects. Similar results can be seen in the study of Asabere (2012) who found that students mostly used SNSs for a

variety of purpose other than education. Also, teachers are using the site's blogging feature to engage their students in numerous academic activities such as science and literature (o'Hanlon, 2007)

Our study found that the students of UNN use SNS, to a great extent, both for academic and social purposes. For example, loading materials relevance for their studies and, getting information on global events and new experiences from global events. Dwyer, Hiltz, and Passerini (2007) agreed with the findings when they noted "that social networking is a new way of communication on the internet to find, help, advise, assist or get information in research work, and enable communication between groups where members are made aware of what other groups are doing, benefitting the whole group. Also these allow for the gathering and sharing of resources to inform others and receive feedback".

In our study we found that Social network services are beneficial to students in diverse ways. It improves students academic and social activities in diverse ways, It improves their information resource gathering in their respective area of study, .it assist their research and learning among others. These are in consistent with the literature on the benefits of SNSs (Karlin, 2007, Lenhart, madden, Smith+ & Macgill, 2007).

The study found many negative implications of student's use of SNSs in the access of information domain. This conclusion is similar to what;

Kuss & Griffiths (2011) found in their recent study that “negative correlates of SNSs usage include the decrease in real life social community participation and academic achievement, as well as relationship problems, each of which may be indicative of potential addiction”.

Male and female students of University of Nigeria Nsukka plays active part in the use of Social Network Services (SNS) hence in the sample population used for this study; the two genders (male and female) were almost at par. This result is in line with the finding of Abdelraheem (2012) when he stated that there is no difference in using social networks sites between female and male students. The age bracket of the respondents who play the most active part was those between ages 20 and 30 years.

Conclusion

No doubt the changing information communication systems all over the world needs to be admitted and its full potential enjoyed in our universities. SNS has intrinsic value for students information needs. In this era of instant global communication and access to the world wide information, the growth of the student’s expectations is inevitable. The SNSs are being embraced and adopted overwhelmingly by the students and research scholars of academic institutions; and experiences shows that SNSs are not only a tool for “friendship “but also a strong medium for parallel journalism and a tool to

mobilize a new generation students. SNS may become yet another technology that had great potential for improving the higher education experience but the only danger lies in being a field for all players and in availing information and knowledge that may be considered unethical in some communities.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are put forward to improve the use of the SNS by students.

- 1) Students should be educated via lectures, workshops and seminars on the importance of being cautious when using social media.
- 2) Universities should develop a policy guideline for students SNS uses taken into cognizance the importance of SNS as a variable communication instrument.
- 3) Students should be encouraged to respect the right of other users in this case media literacy is advocated. It is important that procedure safeguards are respected by the users.
- 4) Most importantly, parents should play a very prominent role in working with their children to ensure that they use SNS services in the most appropriate manners.
- 5) The SNS providers should protect users from harm associated with SNS use, without limiting their freedom of access to information.

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