

Perceived Influence of Online Social Networks on Academic Performance: A study of Undergraduates in Selected Universities in Ogun State, Nigeria.

by

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Abstract

This study investigated the perceived influence of online social networks on undergraduates' academic performance using data from a descriptive survey of 402 respondents from Babcock University, Federal University of Agriculture Abeokuta, and Olabisi Onabanjo University. Questionnaire was used for data collection. 402 copies of the questionnaire were distributed and a total of 282 were recovered giving a response rate of 70.15%. Data collected were analysed using frequency and percentage counts. Results revealed that majority of the respondents make use of online social networks even though motivation for use is more for social interaction than academic purposes. Most of the respondents, however, agreed that the use of online social networks have positive influence on their academic performance. Based on these findings, the study concluded by recommending, among others, that time spent on online social networks should be devoted more to academic than social activities in order to maximize its education potentials.

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a rapid growth in the use of online social networks (Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, etc) mainly for communication, social, recreational, and entertainment purposes (Smith, Salaway, & Caruso, 2009). According to Alexa (2011), Facebook is the second most frequented site (just after Google) in North America and claims over 750 million members (Facebook, 2011). comScore (2011), also affirms that MySpace.com attracted more than 114 million global visitors aged 15 and older in June 2007, representing a 72% increase in just one year (2006-2007). A study by researchers at the University of Minnesota (*ScienceDaily*, 2008) affirmed that 94% of the study respondents aged 16 - 18 used the Internet and 77% had a profile on a social networking site. In another study at the University of North Carolina Stutzman (2006) found out that 90% of undergraduates surveyed used Facebook. Though the use of online social networks cuts across all ages, Cyber Safety Glossary (2011), notes that it is more predominant amongst the younger generation. The frequent involvement of undergraduates who constitute a huge percentage of young people in online social networking has, however, led to deliberations on how their academic performance could be affected due to their taking part in this activity.

Statement of Problem

The emergence of online social networks has become a major trend over the years with growing popularity amongst the younger generation. As online social networking becomes more popular, literature, however, suggests that there is an ongoing debate on the role of online social networks in the academic performance of users. While many researches claim they can be tempting and addictive with the use of features such as dating, photo and video-sharing,

instant messaging, e.t.c., others claim they can be advantageous as they lead to better interaction and cooperation among users. While this debate goes on, there is still lack of strong empirical evidence to show how the use of these tools affect academic performance especially for undergraduates in Nigerian universities, hence, the need to clearly establish how these tools relate to undergraduate academic performance which is the focus of this study.

Objectives of The Study

The main objective of this study was to investigate the perceived influence of online social networks on undergraduates' academic performance in the selected universities in Ogun State, Nigeria. In order to achieve this objective the following research questions were raised for the study:

Research questions

- a. To what extent do undergraduates of the studied universities make use of online social networks?
- b. What are the motivations behind undergraduates' use of online social networks?
- c. What is the perceived influence of online social networks on the academic performance of undergraduates in the studied universities?

Scope of the study

This study was restricted to 200 level and 300 level undergraduates of Babcock University, University of Agriculture Abeokuta and Olabisi Onabanjo University. The basis for using undergraduates in the second and third year was as a result of their availability to participate in the study unlike 100 level students, who were new to the university environment and busy with registration and 400 level students, who were busy with their final year projects. The three universities (Babcock, University

of Agriculture Abeokuta and Olabisi Onabanjo University) were chosen to represent private, federal and state universities in Ogun State so that the result of this study may be generalized thereof.

Literature Review

Use of online social networks has become a fad among teenagers and young adults. The result of a study by Pew Internet & American Life Project (2009) as cited by Lenhart, Purcell, Smith and Zickuhr (2010), affirmed that 73% of teens (ages 12 -17) and young adults (ages 18-29) in the United States use online social networks. Although this may include some percentage of high school students due to the age range, it is also reasonable to state that some of them are in higher institutions of learning. The rationale for use of online social networks among undergraduates may be found in McLoughlin and Lee's (2008), assertion that online social networks allows learners to access peers, experts, and the wider community in ways that enable reflective, self-directed learning. In line with this, Kimberly et al (2009) argue that the involvement of a student in activities such as making friends on online social networks should be seen as a way of having access to up to date information that can be channeled towards improving academic performance which they described as how students cope with or accomplish different tasks given to them by their teachers. According to Kazmer (2006), students expect their careers to benefit from the social ties they make during their times as members of learning communities. Joinson (2008) provided a list of factors that motivate people to join online social networks that included social connection, shared identities, content, social investigating, social network surfing, and status updating.

In a study carried out by students of Whittemore School of Business and Economics, University of New Hampshire, Martin (n.d.), reported that majority

of the study respondents use Facebook (96%), YouTube (84%), Blogs (20%), Twitter (14%), MySpace (12%) and LinkedIn (10%). Likewise, the study of Hargittai (2007) revealed that Facebook was the most popular online social network among students, with almost four in every five respondents using it. In one such study, Santos, Hammond, Durli and Chou (2009) studied students in Singapore and Brazil, and discovered that many of the Brazilian students used online social networks to socialize and discuss their studies while the Singaporean students used them for social interactions only.

While discussing the effects of "Facebooking" on academic performance in his article; Social Networks in Nigeria, Oche (2010), stated that the recently released results for the National Examination Council (NECO) showed that 87 % of the candidates failed English Language and Mathematics which the author attributed to use of Facebook. Vanden Boogart (2006), in a similar study also found out that lower GPAs is associated with heavy use of Facebook (i.e., more time spent on Facebook). In contrast to these findings, Kolek and Saunders (2008) in a study of students from a public Northeast research university found out that there was no correlation between Facebook use and GPA. Likewise, the study carried out by Whittemore School of Business and Economics student researchers, as reported by Martin (n.d.), affirmed that no significant difference was found between the grades of those considered to be heavy users of online social networks and those considered to be light users.

Methodology

The descriptive survey was used for this study. The population was made up of 20350 (200 level & 300 level) undergraduates from; Babcock University, University of Agriculture Abeokuta, and Olabisi Onabanjo University. The table below shows a breakdown of the population.

Table 1: Study Population by Universities (200L-300L)

LEVELS	BABCOCK	UNAAB	O.O.U	TOTAL
200	1250	2350	6250	9850
300	1200	2200	7100	10500
TOTAL	2550	4700	13,700	20350

Source: Field Survey, 2012

Multistage sampling technique was used in choosing the sample for this study. Purposive sampling technique was used first for selecting one faculty from each of the universities. This was done as a result of the inconsistency of faculties found across the three universities. The only faculty found to be uniform in all the three universities was Faculty of Science and Technology; thus, the justification for a purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling technique was also used for selecting three departments from each of the faculties, namely: Department of Computer Science, Department of Biochemistry, and Department of Microbiology. These departments were chosen because they were found to be present in all three universities. Proportional random sampling technique was thereafter used for taking 402 (30% of the total

population) respondents who formed the sample for the study.

A questionnaire titled “Perceived Influence of Online Social Networks (OSNs) on Academic Performance Questionnaire (PIOSNAPQ)”, was used for data collection.

Presentation of findings

Out of 402 copies of the study questionnaire distributed, 282 were returned. From Table3, University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (UNAAB) had the most respondents with a frequency of 110 out of a total of 282 respondents and a percentage of 39.0 with Olabisi Onabanjo University (OOU) following closely behind 94 respondents and a percentage of 33.0.

Table 2: Sampling Size

UNIVERSITY	DEPARTMENTS	LEVEL	POPULATION	30% FOR SAMPLE
BABCOCK	COMPUTER SCIENCE	200	105	32
		300	101	30
	BIOCHEMISTRY	200	45	14
		300	40	12
	MICROBIOLOGY	200	50	15
		300	55	17
UNAAB	COMPUTER SCIENCE	200	75	23
		300	65	20
	BIOCHEMISTRY	200	75	23
		300	80	24
	MICROBIOLOGY	200	85	26
		300	90	27
OOU	COMPUTER SCIENCE	200	83	25
		300	80	24
	BIOCHEMISTRY	200	74	22
		300	80	24
	MICROBIOLOGY	200	74	22
		300	73	22
TOTAL			1343	402

Source: Field Survey, 2012

Table 3: Return rate by universities

UNIVERSITIES	RETURNED
BABCOCK	78 (65%)
UNAAB	110 (77%)
OOU	94 (68%)

Source: Field Survey, 2012

Demographic Characteristics

Table 4: Distribution of Respondents by Department, Age, and Level

DEPARTMENT	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
COMPUTER SCIENCE	108	38.3
BIOCHEMISTRY	88	31.2
MICROBIOLOGY	86	30.5
TOTAL	282	100.0
AGE	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
13-19 YRS	107	37.9
20-26 YRS	165	58.5
27 YRS & ABOVE	10	3.5
TOTAL	282	100.0
GENDER	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
MALE	162	57.4
FEMALE	120	42.6
TOTAL	282	100.0
LEVEL	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
200 LEVEL	133	47.2
300 LEVEL	149	52.8
TOTAL	282	100.0

Source: Field Survey 2012

Table 5: Undergraduates' use of online social networks

Undergraduates' use of online social networks	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Yes, I use 1 - 3 online social networks at least once a week.	202	71.6
No, I don't use online social networks at all.	21	7.4
Yes, I use 1 - 3 online social networks at least once a month.	18	6.4
Yes, I use 4 or more online social networks at least once a week.	17	6.0
Yes, I use 1 - 3 online social networks at once in two weeks.	10	3.5
Yes, I use 4 or more online social networks at least once a month.	8	2.8
Yes, I use 4 or more online social networks at least once in two weeks.	6	2.1
Total	282	100.0

Source: Field Survey 2012

The department with the most respondents is Computer Science with 108 respondents and a percentage of 38.3. There is no much difference between the number of respondents from Biochemistry and Microbiology with 88 and 86 respondents respectively. The age bracket with the most respondents is 20-26 years with a response rate of 165 as compared to 107 and 10 for the 13-19 and 27 & above age brackets respectively. Male respondents were 162 in contrast to 120 female respondents while the frequency of 200 level students is lower to that of 300 level with 133 and 149 respondents respectively.

Table 5 presents the findings to research question 1 which asked the extent to which undergraduates of the studied universities make use of online social networks. Finding revealed that most of the respondents admitted to use 1-3 online social networks at least once a week with a frequency of 202 and a percentage of 71.6. The closest to this are respondents who claimed not to use online social

networks at all with a total of 21 and a percentage of 7.4. A total of 18 students admitted they use 1-3 online social networks at least once a month while 17 respondents said they use 4 or more online social networks at least once a week with a percentage of 6.0. This shows that the frequency of use of online social networks amongst undergraduates is very high.

From Table 6, it was affirmed that motivation for use of online social networks ranges from: connecting with old friends (81.2%), making new friends (65.6%), using messaging system such as blogs, chat rooms (56.7%), participating in academic group discussion/activities (48.9%), participating in non-academic group discussion/activities (47.5%), sharing documents, etc (42.2%) and connecting with scholars to benefit from their knowledge (41.1%). This indicates that motivation for undergraduates' use of online social networks is mostly social rather than academic.

Table 6: Motivations for use of online social networks

S/N	Motivation for using online social networks	Yes	No
A.	To connect with old friends	229 (81.2%)	53 (18.8%)
B.	To make new friends	185 (65.6%)	97 (34.4%)
C.	To use the messaging system (blogs, chatrooms, e.t.c.) to communicate with users within the online social network.	160 (56.7%)	122 (43.3%)
D.	To participate in group discussions and other group activities (academics).	138 (48.9%)	144 (51.1%)
E.	To participate in group discussions and other group activities (non-academics).	134 (47.5%)	148 (52.5%)
F.	To share documents, music, pictures, and videos with friends.	119 (42.2%)	163 (57.8%)
G.	To connect with scholars in order to benefit from their knowledge	116 (41.1%)	166 (58.9%)

Source: Field Survey 2012

Table 7: Perceived influence of online social networks on undergraduates' academic performance

S/N	Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Negative influence of online social networks on undergraduates' academic performance					
1	Addiction to online social networks is a problematic issue that affects my academic life.	41 (14.5%)	67 (23.8%)	116 (41.1%)	58 (20.6%)
2	Online social networks distract me from my studies.	38 (13.5%)	72 (25.5%)	117 (41.5%)	55 (19.5%)
3	I find it hard concentrating on study knowing that I can visit online social networking sites to play games.	34 (12.1%)	58 (20.6%)	124 (44.0%)	66 (23.4%)
4	Online social networking sites cannot be used for educational purposes.	34 (12.1%)	41 (14.5%)	115 (40.8%)	92 (32.6%)
5	Online social networking is a waste of time which would negatively affect my academic life.	28 (9.9%)	89 (31.6%)	111 (39.4%)	54 (19.1%)
6	When I compare my grades before I became engaged in online social networking and after I became involved. I see a fall in my academic performance.	19 (6.7%)	60 (21.3%)	116 (41.1%)	87 (30.9%)
Positive influence of online social networks on undergraduates' academic performance					
7.	The usage of online social networks is useful in higher educational institutions, because they are an effective communication application.	112 (39.7%)	142 (50.4%)	24 (8.5%)	4 (1.4%)
8.	Group discussions can be arranged with my classmates using online social networks.	108 (38.3%)	151 (53.5%)	17 (6.0%)	6 (2.1%)
9	I use online social networks to facilitate academic activities and coordinate with friends.	95 (33.7%)	160 (56.7%)	20 (7.1%)	7 (2.5%)
10	Online social networks help in my studies because I can discuss my assignments with friends.	88 (31.2%)	167 (59.2%)	21 (7.4%)	6 (2.1%)
11	Online social networks are helpful in my studies because I can receive announcements from lecturers and faculty.	75 (26.6%)	141 (50.0%)	52 (18.4%)	14 (5.0%)
12.	Using online social networks improves my interaction with classmates and lecturers.	67 (23.8%)	168 (59.6%)	37 (13.1%)	10 (3.5%)
13.	An appointment can be fixed with my lecturer through SNSs.	67 (23.8%)	134 (47.5%)	64 (22.7%)	17 (6.0%)

Source: Field Survey, 2012

Table 7 presents the findings of the third research question which asked “what is the perceived influence of online social networks on the academic performance of undergraduates in the studied universities?”. Findings from the table indicates a positive perception as most of the respondents, 168 (59.6%) affirm that the use of online social networks improve their interaction with classmates and lecturers as against 37 (13.1%) who disagreed. 167 (59.2%) also agreed that online social networks help them in their studies because they can discuss their

assignment with friends while 21 (7.4%) disagreed. Negative worded questions, even though accepted by some of the respondents, also affirmed more positive perception as most of the respondents tend to disagree with them.

Summary of Findings

From the findings, it is obvious that majority of the study respondents use up to three different social networking sites at least once a week. Reasons for this may be associated with the fact that registration

is free in most online social networks, hence, undergraduates can afford to join as many as possible. The frequency at which the sites are visited can also be attributed to the fact that applications such as mobile phones and ipads can be used for online social networking making it easy for students to go online at any time of the day. The findings corroborates the findings of Pew Internet & American Life project (2006) that more than half of all online American youth use online social networking sites.

Motivations for using online social networks were found to be both social and academic in nature. While connecting with old friends was a major motivation for using online social networks as affirmed by 81% of the respondents, participation in group discussions and other group activities that involve academics was the primary motivation for just 48.9%. These clearly suggest that while socialization may be the primary motive for undergraduates' use of online social networks, they still find a way of using them for academic purposes. The finding supports Joinson (2008) which found social connections as a major motivator for joining online social networks.

Results from the study indicated a positive perception of the influence of online social networks on students' academic performance even though few respondents affirmed a negative influence on academic performance. The high positive perception is, however, not surprising considering the fact that online social networks enable users to connect and engage in different activities irrespective of time or distant. The findings support Kimberly et al (2009) assertion that making friends on online social networks is a way of having access to up to date information that can be channeled towards improving academic performance. It partially supports the study carried out by Whittemore School of Business and Economics student researchers (Martin, n.d.), which found out that there was no significant difference in the grades of those considered to be heavy users of online social networks and those considered to be light users. By implication, the use of online social networks may not necessarily lead to higher academic performance, but can facilitate academic activities. The finding, however, is in contrast with the assertion of Oche (2010), who attributed failure in the National Examination Council (NECO) to use of Facebook. It is also in contrast with the finding of Vanden Boogart (2006), who found out that lower GPAs is associated with heavy use of Facebook.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study concludes by affirming that undergraduates are indeed users of online social networks. Although the primary motivation for using online social networks may stem from the desire to maintain old friendship or develop new relationships, undergraduates are taking advantage of the time spent on online social networks to participate in academic activities. Despite the fact that some of the respondents had negative perception of the influence of online social networks on their academic performance, majority of the respondents affirmed otherwise. Based on the findings, the study recommends that:

- There is need for non users of online social networks to join these networks as they can be useful for academic activities
- For undergraduates who find the use of online social networks distracting to academics, there is need to reduce the time spent on these networks
- Time spent on online social networks should be devoted more to academic than social matters in order to make maximal use of its education potentials.

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