

USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLS AMONG NIGERIAN UNDERGRADUATES IN THREE SELECTED TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN IMO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the use of social media tools amongst Nigerian undergraduates in two tertiary educational institutions in Imo State. The survey design was adopted for the study. The questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection. The findings of the paper reveals that Nigerian undergraduates have knowledge of social media tools and are using the tools majorly for communication with friends and information sharing among fellow students. Facebook was discovered to be the mostly utilized social media tool among the undergraduates in the institutions studied. The position of the paper is that though undergraduates make use of the social media, they are not directing it towards their academic pursuits. In the light of this proper orientation, introduction of ICT literacy courses and subsidized internet access rate were recommended as possible solutions. The implication of the paper is that our various institutions of tertiary education have to play a significant role in re-directing the mind-set of the students to the fact that the various social media can be optimally utilized to actualize the academic goals which is the primary reasons why they are in higher institution.

Keywords: social media, undergraduates, tertiary education, Imo State.

Introduction

Academic institutions all over the world are leveraging on social networks which has transformed the landscape of our tertiary educational institutions. The educational community apparently is caught in the web of technological development. With advances in technology, more information becomes available to the public through a wide range of channels and users can access information not only through the traditional, printed sources, but also sources in various formats via the Internet (Kim, Yoo-Lee & Sin, 2011). Social networks today are being used by teachers, lecturers and students as communication tool (Surawera et al, 2011).

Social networking service, also known as social media, is an online platform that focuses on building social relations among people, who share interests, background or activities. The use of social media is growing in importance among undergraduates in our tertiary institutions. Social media therefore has opened up a whole new world of social interaction in the educational sector. It has transformed the way and manner with which undergraduates communicate and interact in a global world.

Social media is the use of electronic means to communicate and interact. Social media, as buttressed by Sokoya, Onifade and Alabi (2012), is popular because it allows people to connect in the online world to form a group, a forum and community where ideas and information can be exchanged without geographic barrier. Apparently, there is a shift from the conventional meaning of communication to a more globalized approach of communication. The explosive

growth of web service apparently have changed the way web users interact giving them a new power to create, publish and promote their own content (Rees & Hopkins, 2012).

In the various educational tertiary institutions in Owerri, the use of social media obviously cannot be said not to be in existence. However, the use of social media tools amongst the undergraduate is a function of the extent to which they are aware of the relevance of these tools to their academic pursuits. Observation have shown that students do use their mobile phones to sources for information, whether this information are being sourced for using social media tools is not yet ascertained hence it has become the basis for this research since no study was conducted on use of social media tools amongst Nigerian undergraduates of the institutions being studied, before.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

Do the undergraduates have knowledge of social media tools?

Which of the social media tools is mostly utilized by the undergraduates?

Are there specific reasons for utilization of social media tools by the undergraduates? What are the benefits associated with undergraduates' use of social media tools?

What are the challenges to effective utilization of social media tools among undergraduates?

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are to:

- i. Ascertain if the undergraduates in tertiary educational institutions studied have knowledge of social media tools,
- ii. Determine the specific social media tools mostly utilized by the undergraduates in the institutions studied,
- iii. Investigate their reasons for utilizing the identified social media tools,
- iv. Establish the benefits associated with the undergraduates' use of social media tools and
- v. Identify the challenges to effective utilization of social media tools amongst undergraduates and recommends possible solutions to the identified problems.

Brief Literature Review

Social media according to Onuoha, Unegbu and Lasisi (2012) creates an avenue for undergraduates to network with one another irrespective of time or space. The introduction of Facebook, twitter and other digital media, according to Levine (2012), has opened up a whole new world of social interaction, and potential distraction in the office environment. Kim, Yoo-Lee and Sin (2011) in their study pointed out that as social media are gaining popularity, and some of them seem to be playing an important role as an information sources, it is crucial to understand what kinds of social media are used as information sources.

Ezeani and Igwesi (2012) observed that with the exponential growth of the use of social media such as the Facebook, MySpace, twitter, YouTube, it is now inevitable that librarians must learn the use of these tools to be able to keep their ever growing and sophisticated patrons. Collins and Quan-Haase (2012) in their study observed that the manner of use and levels of application for specific social media formats differed greatly throughout the province of

Ontario; their findings revealed that the interests, demands, needs and practices of a repetitive institution largely dictate the adoption and subsequent role of social media within that setting. Rogers (2012) in his study discovered that many respondents' use social media for various reasons. According to survey respondents, libraries are using social media tools to provide "technical instruction/ library/Skype with authors, and "advocacy" as well as recruiting and managing volunteers. Characteristically, Rees and Hopkins (2009) articulated the common features of emergent social media systems to include: Tagging user generated meta data for organizing and navigating content, RSS and other output for syndicating and re-use of content; high level of interactivity for commenting, rating, voting, tagging and contributing; ease of use, low cost, multi-media content etc. Also, Ezeani and Igwesi (2012) articulated the following important characteristics of social networking (SN): It is participatory, educative, collaborative, fascinating and flexible.

Suraweera, Razah, Chouham, Tamang, Hubilla, Ratnayake, Rubosa, Malik and Mahesaa (2011) categorized social networking services into two board categories namely: Internal Social Networking (ISN) and External Social Networking (ESN). Kim, Yoo-lee and Sin (2011) in their study noted that information professionals and educators acknowledged the appeal and value of social media to users as alternative information sources, and that how to evaluate and use information from social media should be included in information literacy education programs. Rees and Hopkins (2009) opined that social media systems are inexpensive and can be deployed quickly in an externally hosted environment without technical staff involvement and can run alongside existing information systems, at least during initial pilot periods.

Research Method

The design adopted for this investigation was the descriptive survey method. A structured questionnaire was used for data collection. The target population for the study comprised of undergraduates from Imo State University, Owerri (IMSU), Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri (AIFCE) and Federal Polytechnic Nekede, Owerri (FPN). A simple random sampling technique was used to select three hundred students from the institution studied. Data obtained in this research were analyzed using simple frequency counts and percentages. The data generated were analyzed and presented in tables.

Data Analysis and Discussion of Findings

An equal number of 100 students were selected from each of the three (3) selected tertiary educational institutions that took part in this study. Out of the number, only 263 copies (87.7%) were recovered and used. Further analysis showed the institutional distribution of the returned copies of the questionnaire, thus: IMSU =79 (79%), AIFCE =100 (100%) and FPNO =84 (84%). However, only 240 (91.3%) copies were found usable as 23(8.7%) of the respondents admitted of not having knowledge of social media tools.

Research objective 1: The undergraduates' knowledge of social media tools.

Table 1 seeks to know the undergraduates' knowledge of social media tools

Table 1: Knowledge of social media tools N= 240

	IMSU	AIFCE	FPNO	Total (%)
Yes	71	93	76	240 (91.3%)
No	8	7	8	23 (8.7%)

Table 1 above shows that 240 (91.3%) of the total respondents have knowledge of social media tools while 23 (8.7%) do not.

Research objective 2: The social media tool mostly utilized by the undergraduates. Table 2 seeks to determine the specific social media tools mostly utilized by the undergraduates in the institutions studied.

Table 2: **Social media tools utilized** **N=240**

	IMSU	AIFCE	FPNO	Total (%)
Face book	68	70	76	214 (89.2%)
Twitter	47	40	24	111 (46.3%)
Blog	5	19	3	27 (11.3%)
LinkedIn	1	6	3	10 (4.2%)
MySpace	9	18	7	34 (14.2%)
Online Professional Group	3	10	6	19 (8%)
Wikis	1	11	7	19 (8%)
RSS feeds	-	10	3	13 (5.4%)
Flicker	-	9	2	11 (4.6%)

Note: Multiple Responses

Table 2 above, shows that Facebook ranked highest (89.2%) in the list of social media utilized by undergraduates. This was closely followed by twitter (46.3%)

Research objective 3: Specific reasons for utilization of social media tools by the undergraduates of the Institution covered in the study.

Table 3 presents data on reasons for utilizing the identified social media tools by the undergraduates.

Table 3: Reasons for utilizing social media tools N = 240

	IMSU	AIFCE	FPNO	Total (%)
Sharing information with fellow students	62	36	59	157 (65.4%)
Solving my assignment/academic problems	14	32	31	77 (32.1%)
Just to stay away from idleness	43	32	20	95 (39.6%)
Communications with friends	67	37	65	169 (70.4%)
Establishing relationship with students from other institution	50	57	36	143 (59.6%)
Marketing of personal goods and services	13	40	11	64 (26.7%)

Note: Multiple Responses

Table 3 above reveals that majority of the undergraduates utilized social media tools to share information with fellow students 57 (65.4%), communication with friends 169(70.4%) and establishing relationship with friends from other institution 143 (59.6%).

Research objective 4: The benefits associated with undergraduates' use of social media tools.

Table 4 reveals benefits derived from use of social media tools by the undergraduates.

Table 4: Benefits derived from use of social media tools

	IMSU	AIFCE	FPNO	Total (%)
It has helped me in establishing new friends	61	30	44	135 (56.3%)
It has help men in disseminating reliable information to my friends with ease	53	32	39	124 (51.7%)
Just to stay away from idleness	43	32	20	97 (32.1%)
I have been able to connect to students in related departments from other institutions	47	23	27	97 (40.4%)
I have been able to use it to obtain information about assignment given to us when I am out of school premises.	31	21	32	84 (35%)
I have been able to find relevant information related to my research topic	59	22	28	109 (45.4%)
I have been able to connect with students with similar interest in social life	48	29	26	103 (43%)
I have been able to know date and time for social activities within the campus	12	18	17	47 (19.6%)
It has exposed me to the latest information in our society	66	34	58	158 (65.8%)

Note: Multiple Responses

Table 4 above reveals the benefits the undergraduates derived from using social media tools. For instance, it exposed the undergraduate to the latest information in the society 158(65.8%), it helped them in disseminating reliable information to their friends 124 (51.7%) and helped in establishing useful friends 135 (56.3%).

Research objective 5: the challenges to effective utilization of social media tools among undergraduates.

Table 5 presents data on the challenges to effective use of social media.

Table 5: Challenges to Effective use of Social Media

	IMSU	AIFCE	FPNO	Total (%)
Lack of privacy	-	9	16	25 (10.4%)
Lack of ICT Skills	42	61	38	141 (58.8%)
Lack of knowledge of how to use it effectively	16	38	29	83 (34.6%)
Lack of time to use it	25	13	16	54 (22.5%)
Availability of too many social media tools	12	14	19	45 (18.8%)
Low bandwidth in cybercafes centres	-	14	11	25 (10.4%)
Lack of access to computers / other ICTs	06	14	34	54 (22.5%)
Incessant breakdown of ICT facilities	21	26	15	62 (25.8%)
High cost of internet access (subscription)	49	42	45	136 (54.8%)
Posting of rumours and lies on the web	63	24	26	113 (47.1%)

Note: Multiple Responses

Table 5 reveals that the most serious challenges to effective use of social media are lack of ICT skills and high cost of internet access (Subscription).

From the above analysis it is crystal clear that the undergraduates have knowledge of social media tools. The advent of mobile phones with wireless connectivity makes it for undergraduate students to utilize it in social networking. It was observed that with the

proliferation of compatible mobile technologies, undergraduates now have access to internet connectivity, it is no longer as usual when they have to visit cyber cafes before they could access internet. They can use their mobile phones on the spot, anywhere, anytime. This must have been the reason why knowledge of social media tools has become common.

Undergraduates who make use of social media tools seem to have a strong fondness for Facebook as shown in Table 2. It is quite interesting that a good number of undergraduates across the three institutions studied had preference for Facebook. It could be established from Table 3 that majority of the undergraduates do use social media tools in tertiary educational institutions to communicate with friends, and share information with fellow students. It is disheartening to note that majority of the undergraduates hardly used the social media for educational purposes. The undergraduate's concept of social media is all centred on socialization.

The findings in Table 4 clearly revealed that use of social media has helped to expose the undergraduates to the latest information in the society and has well helped them to establish and interact with friends. This further supports the earlier findings/observation that undergraduate students are not using the social media tools as channels for improving their academic pursuits. The bottom line is that undergraduates are more interested in using social media tools for socialization than using it to enhance their academic performance. Table 5 portrays the challenges to effective utilization of social media tools among the undergraduates. The fact that lack of ICT skills and high cost of internet access have been identified as the major challenges is a clear indication that most students would still patronize cybercafés even though there is a proliferation of highly sophisticated mobile phones.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings in this study, one can conclude that undergraduates have knowledge of social media tools but are not exploring them to the advantage of their academic career; rather they are manipulating them for socialization purposes. It is amazing that in spite of all the social media tools in existence, Facebook is still on the lead. In the light of the findings, the following recommendations were made:

- i. ***Proper Orientation of the Undergraduates:-*** There is need for proper orientation of the undergraduates by the library in particular and other university authorities in general, so that they will be duly informed that social media is not just for making friends and social interactions, that they can effectively use it solve their academic problems.
- ii. ***Introduction of ICT Literacy Courses:-*** It is important that ICT literacy courses should be made compulsory in all the disciplines of study in our educational institutions and by this, the undergraduates will be empowered with the required skills that will enable them to access the internet using the various social media tools available.
- iii. ***Subsidized Cost of Internet Access:-*** The rate for subscribing to the various network by Internet service providers should be subsidized bearing in mind that the users are majorly students.

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