

# Use of Social Networking Sites for Academic Research and Collaboration: A Survey of Covenant University Academic Staff

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## Abstract

This study focuses on Use of Social Networking Sites for Academic Research and Collaboration: A Survey of Covenant University Academic Staff. Social Networking Sites makes research and collaboration with other academics in other parts of the world very easy. The purpose of this study is to find out if Covenant University academic staff has accounts with any of these sites and to find out if they use such platforms as avenues to collaborate or share academic research with their counterparts in other parts of the world. The study finds out that majority of the academic staff are familiar and have accounts with different social networking sites. It was also found out that the academic staff uses these sites for academic research although just a few use it for collaboration with other academic colleagues. The paper concludes that using Social Networking Sites should be seen as a non negotiable avenue for research and collaboration with other academics in other parts of the world.

## INTRODUCTION

Social networks are a social structure of nodes that represent individuals (or organizations) and the relationships between them within a certain domain. The 21st century continues to usher in technological advances that change the nature of communication, socialization, and private versus public information. One such change is the prominence that social networking web sites currently enjoy, especially among the younger generations. Social networking software has been defined as “online spaces that allow individuals to present themselves, articulate their social networks, and establish or maintain connections with others. (Cain, 2008)

A social network service focuses on building online communities of people who share interests and activities, or who are interested in exploring the interests and activities of others. Most social network services are web based and provide a variety of ways for users to interact, such as e-mail and instant messaging services. (Susilo, 2008)

Studentspoll (2009) reported that in only a few short years, the popularity of social networking sites (SNS) such as Facebook and MySpace has skyrocketed, with tens of millions of teenagers and adults using these sites as their social communications vehicle of choice. The rise of social networking sites have been phenomenal partly due to the immense freedom it affords. While the internet made the world a global village, the social networking sites brought the world within the four walls. You can make friends, interact with them, and get to know the various cultures and places through them and more while sitting at the same desk ( Pros and Cons Of Social Networking Sites, 2013).The web has emerged as a very powerful platform with tools that supports all manner of information sharing Withsites such as facebook, Myspace, Flickr, Twitter, blogs, Youtube etc. you can expect nothing but a world of reaching out to people and sharing knowledge.

Redmond (2010) averred that Social Networks Sites(SNS) are settled into the market and public; they can be expanded on and developed further because they offer new ways for researchers to run surveys quickly, cheaply, and single-handedly. He further reiterated that Facebook is currently an ideal SNS for survey research, due to its size (currently exceeding 500 million users worldwide), intensive use, and continuing growth. Social Networking Sites (SNS) provides a platform whereby a user is directly linked to his or her personal friends and friends of friends and also having the opportunity of access to membership in one or more of the 900 million Facebook groups and pages that links millions of other users throughout the world. These groups are virtual communities that link people with some shared interest, attribute, or cause. This makes the work of a researcher very easy as he/she can readily sample populations of interest by working through existing groups or creating new ones. Haythornthwaite (2008) posited that successfully maintained learning communities share information, resources, methods and practices through conversation and reflection with colleagues and as part of a co-learning

community of scholars.

Armstrong (2009) in her article titled: Should Academics Use Social Networking Sites in Their Professional Lives? posited that there are many opportunities for the academic scholar offered by social networking technology. Most of these could be viewed as an extension of face-to-face networking. Social networking offers another type of forum for researchers to forge connections with scholars around the world. She gave this example to further buttress her point “a conference that you attend in person might also have a web page on Facebook or a similar site. Materials such as paper proposals and posters can be posted on that site in advance and people can ‘meet’ each other ahead of time in a secure online environment”.

#### PURPOSE

- (1) To find out if Covenant University academic staff are familiar with social network,
- (2) To determine if they have accounts with any social network
- (3) To find out if they use any of these social networksites for academic collaboration.

#### METHODOLOGY

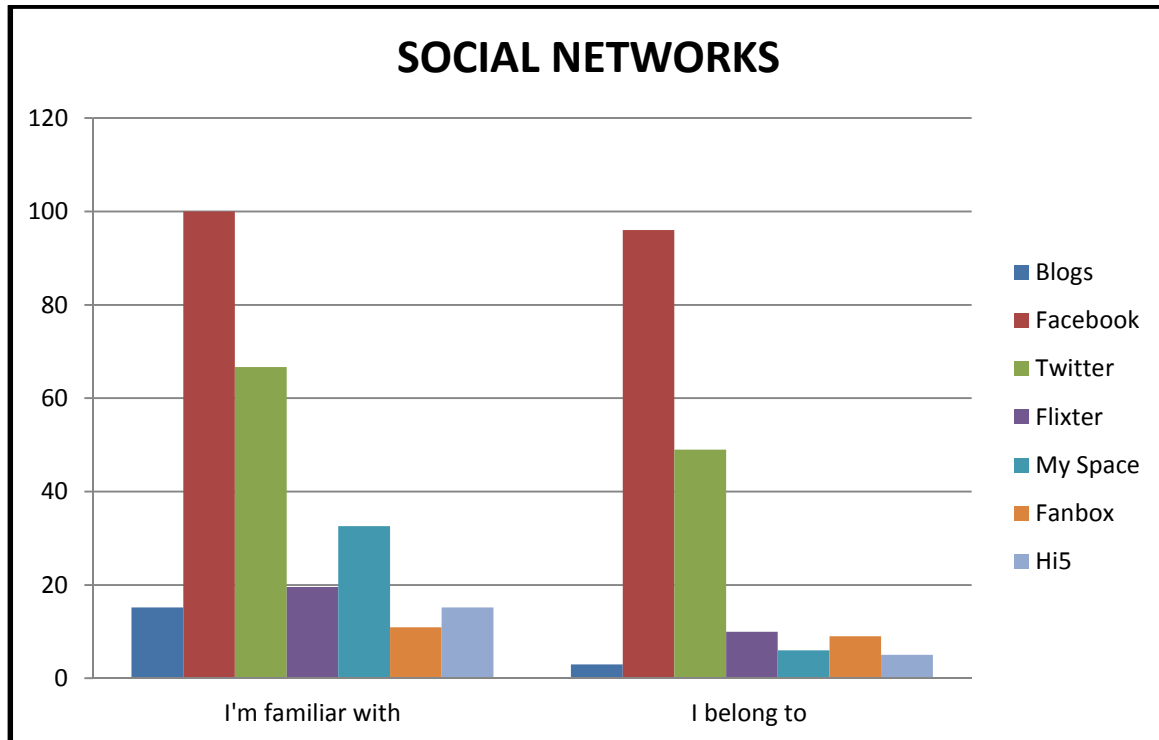
This research was carried out using the random sampling technique and survey method. A questionnaire was designed and distributed to two hundred academic staff. One hundred and forty were filled and returned out of which one hundred and thirty eight were found usable for this research. This brings the response rate to 69%. The data analysis is presented in tables and charts using simple percentage.

#### DATA ANALYSIS

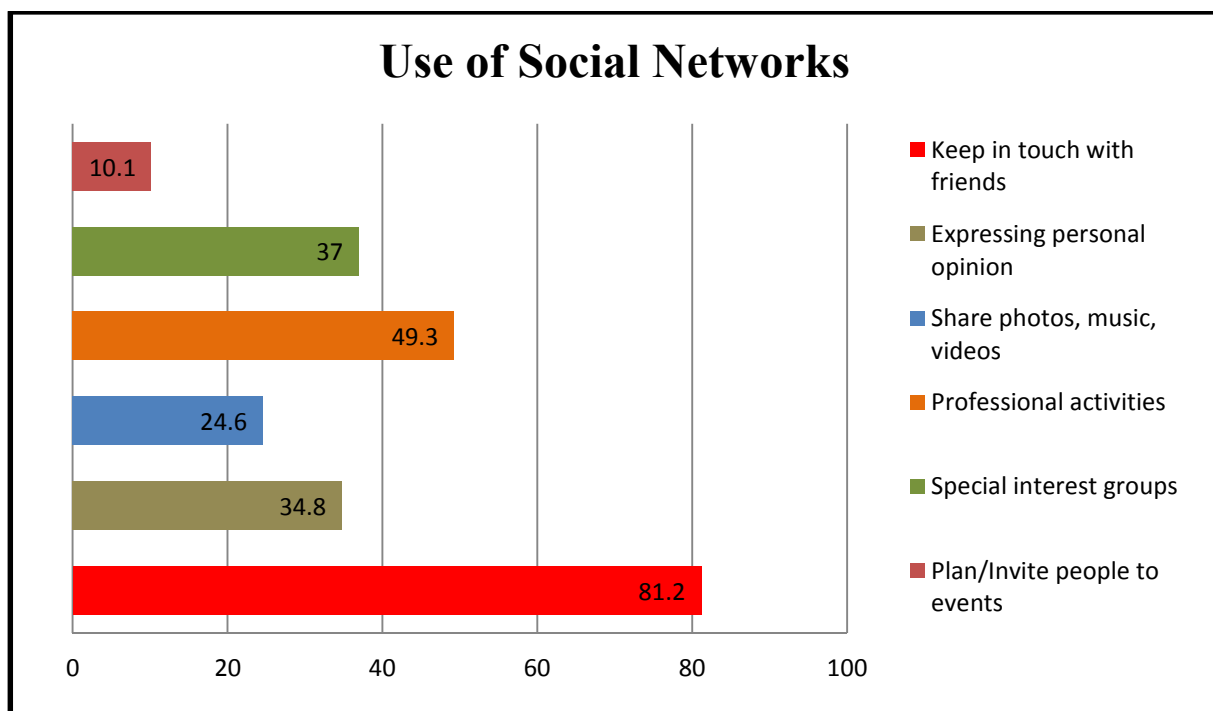
**Table1. Biodata of respondents**

	Age range	NO.	%
AGE	25 – 35	54	39.1
	36-46	66	47.8
	47-57	11	8
	58-68	4	3
	Above 70	3	2.1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>100</b>
SEX	Male	78	56.5
	Female	60	43.5
	<b>Total</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>100</b>
DESIGNATION		<b>NO.</b>	<b>%</b>
	Graduate Asst.	24	18
	Asst. Lecturer	35	26
	Lecturer I	35	26
	Lecturer II	19	14
	Senior Lecturer	22	16
	<b>Total</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>100</b>

The table above represents the biodata of the respondents.



From the table above, it is shown that 21 (15.2%) academic staff are familiar with blogs but only 4 representing 3% actually make use or have blogs. Facebook is the most popular and most used as all the respondents are familiar with it and 132 representing 96% of them are on facebook. This confirms the words of Susilo (2008) that the use of Facebook has sky rocketed in recent times. 92 respondents representing 66.7% are familiar with twitter and 67 (49%) are on it. 45(32.6%) respondents are familiar with My space while only 8 (6%) actually make use of it. Fanbox appears to be the least popular as it has 15 (10.9%) respondents who are familiar with it and just 12 (9%) actually make use of it. 21 (15.2%) respondents are familiar with Hi5 while only 7 (5%) make use of it. This is in consonant with literature Redmond (2010).



The chart reflects what the social networks are being used for by various respondents. It is clear that 112

respondents representing 81.2% use these SNS sites to keep in touch with friends, 48 (34.8) respondents use them to express personal opinion, 34 (24.6%) use them to share photos, music and videos, 68 (49.3%) use them for professional activities, 51 (37%) use them to participate in special interest groups while 14 (10.1%) use them to plan or invite people to events. This is in consonant with literature Huggett (2010).

<b>SOCIAL NETWORKS</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>NOT YET</b>	<b>%</b>
Used Social Network For Academic Purpose	80	58	57	41.3	-	-
Collaborate with other academics	43	31.2	42	30.4	42	30.4

It can be deduced from this table that 80 (58%) respondents have used SNS for academic purpose while 57 (41.3) have not used SNS for academic purpose. it can also be deduced that 43 (31.2%) have used SNS to collaborate with other academics in different parts of the world, 42 (30.4%) have not used SNS for collaboration with other academics and 42 (30.4%) are yet to decide if they want to collaborate with other academics using SNS. It is of utmost importance for academics to collaborate with one another on social network sites because social networking supports Research and Development (R&D). Researchers create new knowledge while using existing knowledge. Their activities often take place in a social context made up of informal exchanges, brainstorming, idea exploration and cross-fertilisation. Social networking allows researchers to draw from a social network of information and people outside of their traditional circle of friends. (Schlenkrich and Sewry, 2012).

<b>BEST DESCRIBES YOU</b>	<b>NO.</b>	<b>%</b>
skeptical of new technologies	9	6.5
usually use new technologies	126	91.3
Missing (not specified)	3	2.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>100</b>

This table shows that 9 (6.5%) of the respondents are skeptical of using new technologies 126 respondents representing (91.3%) enjoys using new technologies while 3(2.2%) did not respond to any of the options made available. Making vital information available on social network sites has many issues attached to it such as Privacy issues and security issues (Dwyer, Hiltz and Passerini, 2007). Despite this fact, it is evident that the respondents still use these new technologies.

## CONCLUSION

For effective information and knowledge sharing among academics here in Nigeria and in the Diaspora, the use of Social Networking Sites is non-negotiable. It is imperative for academics to get acquainted with various social networking sites and take full advantage of the possibilities that such sites carry. The use of platforms such as social networking sites is always a plus for institutions as it will help boost their Web ranking.

## RECOMMENDATION

1. Trainings, workshops and seminars should be organized as it will help the academic staff keep abreast of various social networking platforms available for academic and research use.
2. It important to for parent institutions to give full support of the usage of Social Networking Sites. It has been observed that some institutions do not permit the use of these networks most especially during working hours.
3. Institutions should also get bandwidths that will be sufficient for the use of these social networking sites.
4. Provision of facilities such as wireless connection to laptops and computers all around the institution will be an added advantage as this will ensure connection to the internet at any point.

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