

Internet Use among Undergraduates in Nigeria: The Role of Policy

J. I. Ogungbeni^{1*}, A.O. Adekanye², A. A. Bamigbose³ M. A. Sulaiman⁴.

1. Systems Librarian, Lagos State University, Nigeria

2. Principal Librarian, Lagos State University, Nigeria

3. Librarian II, Lagos State University, Nigeria

4. Librarian II, Lagos State University, Nigeria

Abstract

This study investigates appropriate and inappropriate use of Internet among undergraduates in Nigeria. There is a growing concern that the amount of time spent on Internet by undergraduates does not translate to effective use. The instrumentality of policy could be used to ensure that undergraduates make the best use of internet. Two universities, Lagos State University and Babcock University were chosen as case study. A total of one hundred and twenty (120) questionnaires were administered to final year students in four faculties common to both universities. Ninety-seven (97) questionnaires were completed and returned. Simple percentages were used to analyse data and answers were provided to five research questions. T-test was used to test the only research hypothesis raised. The Study showed that there are many advantages brought by the advent of Internet into learning and research by undergraduate students in Nigeria. There is need for a comprehensive national information policy to address the abuse of Internet by undergraduates.

Keywords- Internet, Addiction, Undergraduates, User studies, Libraries, Information policy,

1.Introduction

The opportunities and challenges associated with using the Internet by students have come to the fore front of debate with the rapidly increased awareness and use of this technology (Jones and Madden, 2015). Academic researchers commonly use the Internet for electronic mail (e-mail) communication, electronic document transfer, or remote computer access. Similarly, the World Wide Web has emerged as a significant Internet based research tool for accessing and disseminating information. In addition to sending text-based messages, sharing files, or displaying Web pages, the Internet can broadcast audio and video content and support virtual electronic conferencing.

The use of internet for educational purposes has increased many folds among Nigerian youths. Online access to e-journals and e-books are the emerging trends among learners. The birth of high speed internet access and its availability on recently evolved smart phones has opened several new avenues for learning. The growing popularity of these smart phones among the youth can potentially revolutionize the way they learn. The introduction of 4G technology is already being pinned as the next big thing in the mobile internet revolution. The Internet is one of the defining technologies of the digital age. The Internet, which is a global system of interconnected computers, provides many benefits to its users, including access to information from distant documents and databases that can be read and studied to improve knowledge. The Internet combines and presents through the same medium the virtues of print and multimedia resources. With the Internet, students can improve their learning by gaining access to information and materials available online, which they might read online or download and print to read later. The Internet is also not just a passive medium that students might explore to obtain information on their own. It is increasingly also being used by education institutions and teachers as a flexible medium for delivering online education to distant or on-campus students. According to Omogbemi et al (2004) internet connectivity is no longer a luxury but a necessity. Typically, in most university environments, students have access to the internet almost any time and almost anywhere on campus. Wireless connections now allow internet access from lap-top computers and other hand-held devices, within the library, the dormitory and the classroom.

In spite of the benefits of the Internet for education and learning, there is a growing concern as to whether the increasing number of hours spent by students browsing the Internet limits the amount of time and effort devoted by them to the actual reading and study of the materials obtained from or outside the Internet. This concern is similar to the motivation for a study, by Bussi re and Gluszynski (2004), of the patterns and interrelationships

between the computer use and reading behaviour of 15-year olds in Canada. The study found that promoting effective access to computer among such teenagers may not guarantee the use of computer for serious educational purposes by them, and that policy should also address the latter objective

Most students and many academics see the Internet as a some-what magical font of wisdom. So much is "out there" that one may deceive him or herself into thinking that everything is, indeed, "out there." Of course this is not true. Moreover, search engines, the most popular means of interfacing with the vastness of the Internet, fail to un-cover some forms of data. A percentage of students overuse and even abuse the Internet, such abuse include watching pornographic films and engaging in plagiarism. Policies are the instrumentalities with which students' interaction with the internet can be guided so that their use of internet will be of optimal benefit to them. Institutional and national policies are needed in this regard. This study seek to examine how undergraduate students in Nigeria are taking advantage of the resources on the Internet, determine if students abuse the use of Internet and suggest ways by which existing policy, if any, can be strengthened to reduce internet abuse.

2. Objectives of the Study

The main aim of this study is to investigate the use of internet by undergraduate students in Nigerian universities with a view to ascertaining the level of its abuse in order to advocate for appropriate policy to minimize the abuse. Specifically, the study is to:

- (i) Identify means of access to Internet by undergraduate students in Nigeria.
- (ii) Examine positive use of internet by undergraduate students in Nigeria.
- (iii) Examine the pattern of internet use among undergraduate students in Nigeria.
- (iv) Identify abuse of Internet use by undergraduate students.
- (v) Identify information policies in existence for Internet usage.
- (vi) Advocate for appropriate policies for use of Internet by students.

3. Research Questions

The study is to provide answers to the following research questions.

- (i) What are the means of access to the Internet by undergraduate students in Nigeria?
- (ii) What are the positive uses of Internet by undergraduate students in Nigeria?
- (iii) How frequent do undergraduate students have access to the internet?
- (iv) Do undergraduate students use the internet for wrong purposes?
- (v) Are there information policies that regulate internet usage in Nigerian universities?

4. Research Hypothesis

- (i) Internet use is a negative influence on knowledge acquisition by undergraduate students in Nigeria.

5. Literature Review

5.1 Internet use and the potential for positive educational outcomes

Internet can broadly be defined as worldwide network of computers communicating via an agreed upon protocol (rules for exchange of information). It provides access to the most diversified source of information hosted by individuals and various organisation worlds wide on a vast network of servers. Oketunji (2001) states that internet gives us access to vast amount of resources that enhance research. The Internet serves as a forum to promote group discussion, which is time and distance independent. There are many forms this group discussion can take. These include video conferencing and chat room. Osunade and Ojo (2006) submit that, in Nigerian tertiary institutions, students use the Internet as an alternative to scarce and outdated library resources. They evaluated the behaviour of tertiary level students in the use of the Internet and library at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. Their results indicate that the Internet is fast becoming a source of academic information among students due to easy access, correctness, availability and up-to-datedness. Adegoke (2009) affirms that, "Indeed, the internet is also a virtual library which is seen as virtual space containing a vast amount of information and documents including books, pictures, video, graphs and musical sounds that can be consulted."

Bamigboye and Agboola (2011) posit that internet has fostered a collaborative approach to learning that differs from the more solitary learning of traditional method. Ray and Day (1998) surmise that the Internet has greater potential for desirable information, is a faster means of accessing information, provides access to a wider range of information; provides access to electronic journals, enables access to multiple files at once; provides access to information from home, and gives more satisfactory answers to queries than library staff. .

5.2 Internet use and the potential for adverse educational outcomes

Internet usage has increased tremendously over the last few years, with continued growth expected. According to Jones and Madden (2015) one-fifth of today's college students began using computers between the ages of five

and eight. By the time they were sixteen to eighteen years old all of today's current college students had begun using computers – and the Internet was a commonplace in the world in which they lived. Like any other technology, the use of the Internet has both beneficial and negative consequences. Bargees and Suhail (2006) distinguish between healthy and unhealthy Internet use, positing that excessive time spent on the Internet in purposeless activities can often take people away from their actual goals. The amount of information available on the net means that users tend to be side-tracked with a lot of unnecessary useless information (Barberio, 2004). As the Internet is not owned by any one there are no checks or censorship of information available. The upside to this is that information is freely available to everyone without restriction but the downside to this is that information can be placed into the wrong hands. Also as there are no checks on the information on the net this may lead to inaccuracies and misleading information being published. Oji (2007) considers Internet use to be one of the causes of the decline in the reading culture of Nigerian youths. She posits that, some youths are often seen in cybercafés browsing the Internet and engaging in activities that entertain rather than educate, adding that perhaps some of the ills of today's society could be attributed to wrong use of information gotten from websites. Suhail and Bargees (2006) posit that the misuse of the Internet often leads to unhealthy consequences, while heavy Internet use leaves little time for anything else. They investigated the positive and negative effects of excessive Internet use among undergraduate students in Pakistan and found positive associations between time spent on the Internet and the various dimensions of the Internet Effect Scale (IES), indicating that excessive Internet use can lead to a host of problems of educational, psychological, physical and interpersonal nature. Sahin et al (2010) found out that access to internet does not translate to effectiveness and efficiency on the part of the user. The Internet does not contain everything and, increasingly, information is walled off behind subscriptions and other barriers. Conversely, in some instances, so much information is available that it can overwhelm student researchers. Also, the ways students use the Internet necessarily limits the type and amount of information they will get on a subject. There is the "hidden" Internet, which is not accessed by most popular search engines. Some students find a strong temptation to use the Internet in academically questionable ways, such as the many forms of plagiarism. The convenience of Internet-based research takes a toll on traditional library-based resources, making these long-established tools underutilized by student researchers. The budgets for materials acquisition seem to get tighter every year, making it harder to expand collections while, at the same time, the slackening use of these resources under-cuts arguments for their continued expense. Sadly, students may see hard-copy and other more traditional research materials as less worthy of their attention, robbing them of excellent resources already in the collection of a campus library. Such is the aura of the Internet to award legitimacy.

5.3 The Need for National and Institutional Information Policies

Information policy can be defined as a set of rules, laws, and guidelines guiding the processing, organization, storage, retrieval and dissemination of information. According to Opeke (2012), a comprehensive national information policy is important to the survival of any country in today's Information Age. This is because every sector of the society is influenced by the application of information and communication technology – a key factor in an information society. With the emergence of globalization, there has been gradual transformation of the nation's information sector to have easy access to foreign agencies which makes it possible for information resources and facilities find their way into the country, sometimes unsolicited (Uhegbu, 2008). This has continued to undermine the development of the sector because resources from overseas are cheaper.

A national information policy will help ensure proper packaging of information by determining the nature and format of information resources to meet local needs. Book and non-book material that violates local content specifications will no longer be allowed into the country. Internet service providers could no longer expose young Nigerians to inappropriate content. One way of ensuring maximum use of information is by packaging it in a form that the target audience will appreciate (Chen, et al, 2010). This involves understanding the literacy level of the country, its ethics, norms, and values, gender and age composition, and numbers and kinds of physically-challenged persons (Nwokocha, 1998).

6. Methodology

Descriptive research design was adopted for this study. A public university, Lagos State University and a private university, Babcock University were chosen as case studies. Lagos State University was chosen because it is one of the earliest universities in Nigeria that made internet connectivity available to their students. Lagos State University is also situated in metropolitan city of Lagos where the newest internet technology in Nigeria is readily available. Babcock University was selected because it is a foremost private university in Nigeria with a strong flair for information technology. The major instrument used for data collection was questionnaire. Observation was also carried out to determine the level of information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure development in the two universities. Fifteen (15) questionnaires were administered to students in

each faculty. Four faculties common to both universities were selected for the study. These faculties are Arts, Social Sciences, Management Sciences and Science. The number of questionnaires filled and returned for each faculty is shown in table 1

Table 1: Sample of the study

Faculty	Number of questionnaires filled and returned		Response rate in %	
	LASU	BU	LASU	BU
Arts	13	10	86.7	66.7
Social Sciences	12	11	80.0	73.3
Management Sciences	10	14	66.7	93.3
Sciences	14	13	93.3	86.7
Total	49	48	81.7	80.0

6.1 Data Analysis and Interpretations

6.1.1 Internet Access by Undergraduate Students

Respondents were asked to indicate their main source of connection to the internet. The result (table 2) shows that 84.5% of the respondents connect to the internet through their telephone network service provider. Respondents who connect to the internet through the library are 8.2%. Just 3.1% of the respondents access internet through their university information and communication technology (ICT) center. These results show that access to the internet through mobile devices is the trend among undergraduate students.

Table 2: Internet sources

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid phone provider	82	84.5	84.5	84.5
university library	8	8.2	8.2	92.8
university ict	3	3.1	3.1	95.9
home	2	2.1	2.1	97.9
others	2	2.1	2.1	100.0
Total	97	100.0	100.0	

6.1.2 Positive use of Internet by Undergraduate Students

Respondents were asked if they use internet for reading and downloading e-books, e-journals and e-dictionary (Table 3). The results show that majority of the respondents (57.7%) agreed that most journal articles they access are from the internet. 67.0% of the respondents read dictionaries on the internet. However, only 41.2% agreed that they download electronic books from the internet. These results from Table 3 show that undergraduate students in Nigeria use the internet for their academic development.

Table 3: E-book Download Reading Dictionaries E-journal Download

		E-book Download		Reading Dictionaries		E-journal Download	
		Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Valid	SA	13	13.4	19	19.6	19	19.6
	A	27	27.8	46	47.4	37	38.1
	D	46	47.4	30	30.9	34	35.1
	SD	6	6.2	2	2.1	3	3.1
	Total	92	94.8	97	100.0	93	95.9
Missing	System	5	5.2	0	0.0	4	4.1
Total		97	100.0	97	100.0	97	100.0

6.1.3 Frequency of Internet use by Undergraduate Students

Results from Table 4 shows that most of the respondents (75.3%) use internet every day. 19.6% of the respondents use internet two days per week and only 3.1% don't access the internet. These results show that internet has become part and parcel of most Nigerian undergraduate students.

Table 4: Access rate

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Everyday	73	75.3	76.0	76.0
	Two days/week	19	19.6	19.8	95.8
	One day/month	1	1.0	1.0	96.9
	No access	3	3.1	3.1	100.0
	Total	96	99.0	100.0	
Missing	System	1	1.0		
Total		97	100.0		

6.1.4 Negative use of Internet by Undergraduate Students

Respondents were asked if they engage in plagiarism (copying and pasting) and pornography using the internet. Results in Table 5 show that 72.1% of the respondents admitted that they copy from files and documents on the internet and paste it into their assignments. Only 13.4% of the respondents visit pornographic web sites on the internet. These results indicate that a major negative influence of the internet on undergraduate students is plagiarism.

Table 5 Coping and Pasting Pornographic sites

		Coping and Pasting		Pornographic sites	
		Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Valid	Rarely	32	33.0	8	8.2
	Often	38	39.1	5	5.2
	Never	22	22.7	77	79.4
	Total	92	94.8	90	92.8
Missing	System	5	5.2	7	7.2
Total		97	100.0	97	100.0

6.1.5 Information Policies on Internet use in Nigerian Universities

Respondents were asked if they are aware of existence of policies on internet use in their university student's handbook and their university library guide. The results in table 6 show that 49.5% of the respondents agreed that they are not aware of policy regulating the use of internet in their university student's handbook. For library guide, 64.0% of the respondents agreed that there is no policy on the use of internet in their library guide. These results coupled with the personal observation of the authors are pointers to the fact that there are no enough policies to regulate the use of internet in Nigerian universities.

Table 6 Policy in Handbook Policy in Library Guide

		Policy in Handbook		Policy in Library Guide	
		Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Valid	SA	18	18.6	18	18.6
	A	30	30.9	44	45.4
	D	34	35.1	22	22.7
	SD	9	9.3	7	7.2
	Total	91	93.8	91	93.8
Missing	System	6	6.2	6	6.2
Total		97	100.0	97	100.0

6.1.6 Test of Hypothesis

One sample t-test was used to test the null hypothesis that says Internet is a negative influence on knowledge acquisition by undergraduate students in Nigeria.

Table 7 : Hypothesis One-Sample Test

	Test Value = 1					
	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Internet on Knowledge	10.439	96	.000	.58763	.4759	.6994

From Table 7, t calculated 10.439 at 5% level of significance is greater than t table 1.69 therefore the null hypothesis is rejected. This means that internet is a positive influence on knowledge acquisition by undergraduate students in Nigeria.

7. Conclusion

Some of the notable negative uses of internet are: 1. Financial crimes – the major tool for advanced fees fraud otherwise known as 419 in Nigeria is Internet. 3. Pornography – adolescents use the internet to watch nude pictures and sex. This act (pornography) is a abomination in Nigerian culture. The internet also provides an avenue for intellectual laziness as students may engage in plagiarism otherwise known as “copying and pasting” in Nigeria.

An innovative policy framework that enables the adolescents of today to live in dignity is much needed. Although there is controversy on the ‘changing times’, yet there is clear direction to frame policies to ensure the dignity of adolescents of the developing nations in the emerging world. Librarians, who are major stakeholders in the information society, are to ensure that national and institutional information policies are in place to regulate the Nigerian information space. In addition to this, we are also to ensure that university managements come out with policies that will address the abuse of internet on our campuses.

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