

Social Media and Social Capital: The Role of National Open University of Nigeria

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Abstract:

Within the last half decade Social Networking Sites (SNSs) like Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, Twitter, Second Life, NigeriaDotCom, and host of others are widely used among students nowadays. Social Capital (SC) reflects those intangible resources embedded within interpersonal relationships or social institutions. In a mixed method approach, this study investigated and reported on the SNSs usage and its relevance on social capital as well as the role plays by the National Open University Nigerian (NOUN) system in catalyzing the latter. The qualitative and quantitative method employed interviews and questionnaires on 50 and 300 subjects respectively. The subjects from Open University centres in the Nigeria's six (6) geo-political zones were selected. This is by snowball for the focus group interview and purposive randomization for the questionnaire. The results indicated the extent of SNS usage and its influence on social capital among the students of the Open University Education System in Nigeria. It also reported of significant influence of the Open University System on the use of Social Networking Sites among the NOUN students which as well leads to social capital.

Key words: Social Capital, Social Networking Sites, Qualitative, Nigeria, NOUN

1 Introduction

Social capital as developed by James Coleman in the 1980s refers to the social relationships between people that enable productive outcomes (Szreter, 2000). It can be seen as the glue that holds together social collectives such as networks of personal relationships, communities or even whole nations (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Sum et al, 2008). It is pronounced in terms of whom you know and who knows you. It can be seen from the theoretical perspective as being the micro (individual) or the macro (collective). Whereas, Flap (2001) sees it as a pool of resources for the individual that may be helpful for the individual's goals attainment; Coleman (1990) views it as a collective produce and own entity from which the whole community may benefit. There are two complementary uses of the 'social capital' (Quan-Hass & Wellman 2002) concept:

1. *Social contact*: Interpersonal communication patterns, including visits, encounters, phone calls, and social events. 2. *Civic engagement*: The degree to which people become involved in their community, both actively and passively, including such political and organizational activities as political rallies and sports clubs.

The main foci of this study aimed at finding the degrees of SNSs usage among Open University students in Nigerian and how this enhances their social capital. It also seeks to investigate on the extent of influence of the Open University system has on these two dimensions. To this end and against this background the study anchored some questions.

1.1 Questions

1. What is the extent of SNSs usage among Open University students?
2. Is there any significant relationship between SNSs usage and social capital among Open University students in Nigeria?
3. What factors of Open University system influence the SNSs usage and social capital among Open University students in Nigeria?

2 Literature

A social network service focuses on building online communities of people who share interests and/or activities, or who are interested in exploring the interests and activities of others. From 1997 to 2001, a number of community tools began supporting various combinations of profiles and publicly articulated friends. Boyd and Ellison, (2007) defined social network sites as "web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public profile within a bounded system and articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection. There is no set or single definition commonly agreed upon of social capital. However, it can be seen as any sum of resources, either actual or virtual, that accrues to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network. It can also be seen as "networks, norms, and trust that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives" (Putnam 1996). The World Bank is more expansive and suggests that "social capital refers to the institutions, relationships, and norms that shape the quality and quantity of a society's social interactions. A wider but confined definition is that of Cote and Healy, (2001) that SC is networks

together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate cooperation within or among groups. It connotes a situation when people feel bonded with one another. It could mean a norm of reciprocity or mutual aid.

Social capital involves social trust, political participation, membership in groups and associations, volunteering, and confidence in political institutions. Dekker & Uslaner (2006) opines that social capital is all about the value of social networks, bonding similar people and bridging between diverse people, with norms of reciprocity. It appears there are different ideas about the effect of using the SNSs on social capital. "Some scholars believe that cyberspace decreases social capital, in contrast, some others asserted that it transports social capital among people. (Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2008) this forms a relationship of family which may extend to the general community. It is glaring with every place such as religious places, social centers, educational institutions, working organizations to mention.

Sum, (2005) believed social capital is all about the value of social networks. "Among the undergraduates surveyed, shows that intensive use of Facebook was associated with higher levels of social capital, especially bridging social capital." (Ellison, Lampe, & Steinfield, 2009; Steinfield, Ellison, & Lampe 2008) to them also Valenzuela, et al, (2008) postulated that whatever effects social network sites may have on young adults' social capital, they may be contingent upon individuals' socialization. It leads to social selling with profit and loss because it has good bearing with economic capital and economic advantages. It is seen as that mechanism that tight up the entire node and volts that link up social network by bringing others more closely to the actors in terms of economic, political, and social as well as spiritual benefits. It enhances civic engagement and bridge social differences and exclusion including gender.

In studying social capital an exclusive quantitative survey of Facebook (Zywika & Danowski, 2008; Ellison et al. (2007) found that there was greater evidence for the Social compensation pattern, that those with lower life satisfaction and lower self-esteem reported having developed more bridging social capital on Facebook.

Sum, (2008) designed and employed a website entitled "Social Capital Online Survey" which linked to the web server of the University of Sydney. She found that those who use the Internet to meet new people for social purposes or communicate with people for the first time online and use the Internet for entertainment are more likely to have a lower degree of personal wellbeing.

Social connection between the child and the parents is sufficiently strong evidence that cultural capital and financial capital become available to the child for academic capital. That covered for both the short term and the child's lifelong education. James Coleman (1988) also argued that "as new structures of the household in modern society become more prevalent, many linkages and activities that provided social capital for the next generation are no longer present, and their absence may be detrimental to children's learning."

The disciplinary effort and the academic ethics established in the school community enhance good relation between home and school. And the mutual trust between school and home are the major forms of social capital. Such forms of social capital are found to contribute to student learning outcomes in countries like Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong and Korea of the south east region of the world. It also enhances by improving the quality of the school and reducing learning inequality among social-class groups (Ho, Sui Chu, 2000). Nigeria has numerous federal, state and privately funded universities numbered to about 106 (33 federal, 37 state and, 36 private) (FGN/NUC, 2012). Insignificant number of the Nigerian Universities are fully employing the learning management system (LSM) or implementing a viable e-learning system. The e-learning is not a new phenomenon in promoting education in some parts of the world. National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) is using e-learning to promote distance education (DE) and lifelong learning (Suleiman 2011).

Lifelong learning (LLL) is the lifelong, voluntary, and self-motivated pursuit of knowledge for either personal or professional reasons (Wikipedia, 2010). The meaning up till now seems vague because it covers a variety of dimension in contexts and its content. However our concern for now focuses on spontaneous emergence of autonomous learning groups or similar form that enhances social capital and perhaps which may boost human capital as well.

Technological innovation has brought a profound change on learning needs and styles. Learning or acquiring knowledge is no longer confined to the learning place (school) and time. It could be virtual and everywhere especially the people's places of work. It is now an on-going event through daily interactions with the world around us manually or technologically. Internet and SNSs in particular and for this matter is one of the social hubs that social and human capital is enhanced by the attributes of lifelong education the Nigeria open education system inclusive.

3 Methodology

Through a mixed approach the study obtained and analyzed the data in a cross sectional system. The qualitative and quantitative method employed interviews and administered questionnaires on 50 and 300 subjects respectively from the selected Open University centres in the Nigeria's six (6) geo-political zones. This is by

snowball for the focus group interview and purposive randomization for the questionnaires. The centres were Dutse centre, Bauchi centre, Abuja centre, Enugu centre, Calabar centre and Lagos centre. Typology style was the qualitative analysis carried out in this research from which themes emerged. Descriptive and correlation analysis were made on the quantitative data using the SPSS analysis tool.

4 Results

The qualitative findings from the interviews on the college student subjects here indicated getting connected to friends and family as the major reason for using SNSs and that they do interact with other people. It similarly reveals time they normally spend on SNSs sharing, talking and interacting with others. It suggests that the more time spend the more likely the stronger that relationship may be.

Question: What factors encourage other students of Open University to use SNSs for social capital?

The entire respondents to this question showed their overwhelming concern, motives and rationale behind using SNSs. Most of them cited using Facebook heavily and they use it for various purposes. All of them reported using SNSs to get connected to School friends and families. Others added and stated getting new friends and get in touch with old friends.

In essence using SNSs is to communicate and interact with many people as one of the respondents stated: *“it allows me to connect with different people. I am able to connect with my old friends my relatives and other people I have not seen for a very long time. I use Facebook just to interact and get communication activities easy.”*

SNSs help them connect to their people especially when the face to face interaction is not obtainable. Some opined that it allows them share feelings with others. Other responses indicated discussion on personal issues with other people on various affairs and at various situations.

Question: Why do you think SNS is related to social capital and education?

They reported using SNS like the Facebook for the purpose of knowing each other as well as communicating with many friends old and new. It also helps to know each other and get information from the old friends. She said:

“SNS helps me know others, get information from the friends of old secondary school and primary school. SNS helps generally in knowing and interacting with many people, friends and family. Those got married or are about to or not yet. You will know all. In fact social capital wise it pays”

These views above go in line with Dekker & Uslaner (2006). They postulated that social capital is all about the value of social networks, bonding similar people and bridging between diverse people, with norms of reciprocity.

They use SNSs to connect with people in other part of the world. They believed that SNSs usage is beyond their local scope. It stretches wide to a cover global perspective. One respondent sees it as an avenue to connect and interact with so many people on network across the world. She said *“it makes us meet different people from other parts of the world. And communicate, interact and have personal relationship with them. Is that not the social capital?”*

This concurs with Quan-Hass and Wellman (2002); Sum, (2006).

Question: In what areas do SNSs enhance your academic pursuance and social capital??

As a form of learning informal tool SNSs has relevance in lifelong education and social capital. To understand this when asked some stated that they used SNSs for seeking academic assistance from others thus it boost their knowledge. Six students reported using SNSs to solve academic problems. A twenty five years Muslim and Yoruba ethnic respondent, saw it as an avenue to reach other people and for seeking academic assistance. In his words he stated *“Well, I use SNSs such as Facebook because is an avenue whereby one can reach people such as friends, well wishers, and meet other people who could be of help in the area of academic research and some other things. In fact it’s a knowledge seeking tool”* Another respondent in her opinion she stated that:

“I use networking sites such as Facebook and Hi5 almost three hours every day. Just to reach my friends especially those I have not seen for a very long time and to get connected with other people from all over the world especially with people that are friends to my friends, and also to get academic assistance from people that are not necessarily my friends. I think it’s a new way or mode of learning. Because we learn a lot”

Besides solving academic problems students feel that SNSs is a socializing agent to them. One of the subjects interviewed said *“I can relate to others at any given time and they can show me their recent pictures and videos. In fact it socializes.”* This indicates that to the students the most important rationale for using SNS is

to interact with their family, friends, old relations and to some extent to make some new relations. This conformed to Valenzuela, et al, (2008).

Question: What motivates you to use SNSs?

In responding to this question two themes were extracted. It indicated that SNSs unite people this continued to encourage more people because it unites them as it allows them to interact with whoever they feel like on the network and share ideology. People can belong to various groups of interest. Many of the SNSs represent interest groups because only people with similar ideology can join while many others are general. It also becomes a phenomenon that now many things can be done with such internet facilities. More so it makes people be aware of what is happening in the society and the world at large as it is now like a global village. SNS is available to everyone in the world and it is a medium for people to chat, talk and deal with others across the globe academically, religiously, politically, socially, and economically or business wise.

The SNSs usage is encouraging because as it helps in uniting people in form of social capital. One of the respondent opined that SNSs unite people and makes them aware of what is happening in their society. She added *“Well, I think it brings people together. Nowadays there is nothing one can do without such internet facilities especially the SNSs many influential people and organizations are on it. It unites people, marking them aware of the happenings in the society and get them informed and connected.”*

Among other views is that as a result of SNSs usage factor the world is a global village where people are available to everyone within a small scope and range of time. One respondent said *“I think the world is a global village now. I mean the SNS is available to everyone in the world. It gives people who used the medium avenue to invite, chat, talk and deal with others across the global.”* Another also supported and said.

“World is one now. SNS is a modern system of communication through computer. It is one of the shortest and cheapest means of unification through communication and interaction with the love ones and the lost ones.”

The quantitative result is presented as follows:

Table 1: the frequency distribution on Faculty

		FAC			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	SCIE	46	15.3	15.3	15.3
	ARTS	75	25.0	25.0	40.3
	SOC SCI	95	31.7	31.7	72.0
	MEDI	59	19.7	19.7	91.7
	LAW	25	8.3	8.3	100.0
Total		300	100.0	100.0	

Table 2: the frequency distribution on Ethnicity

		ETHN			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	HAUSA	36	12.0	12.0	12.0
	YORUBA	61	20.3	20.3	32.3
	IGBO	102	34.0	34.0	66.3
	OTHER	101	33.7	33.7	100.0
Total		300	100.0	100.0	

Table 3: the frequency distribution on Religion

		REL			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	ISLAM	143	47.7	47.7	47.7
	CHRISTIANITY	157	52.3	52.3	100.0
Total		300	100.0	100.0	

Table 4: the frequency distribution on Gender

		GEN			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	M	180	60.0	60.0	60.0
	F	120	40.0	40.0	100.0
Total		300	100.0	100.0	

Table 5: the frequency distribution on Age

		AGE			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	>30	100	33.3	33.3	33.3
	31-45	138	46.0	46.0	79.3
	<45	62	20.7	20.7	100.0
	Total	300	100.0	100.0	

Table 6: the Correlation on relationship between Social Networking site usage and Social Capital

		Correlations	
		SNST	SCT
SNST	Pearson Correlation	1	.146*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.011
	N	300	300
SCT	Pearson Correlation	.146*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.011	
	N	300	300

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 7: the Independent sample t-test on Social networking site and social capital in terms of gender

		Independent Samples Test								
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
SNS	Equal variances assumed	1.409	.236	1.360	298	.175	.44048	.32381	-.19676	1.07771
	Equal variances not assumed			1.349	247.92	.178	.44048	.32647	-.20253	1.08348
SCT	Equal variances assumed	.846	.358	.524	298	.601	.20729	.39542	-.57088	.98546
	Equal variances not assumed			.517	242.88	.606	.20729	.40093	-.58245	.99703

Table 8: the ANOVA on SNS and Social capital in terms of Faculty

		ANOVA				
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
SNST	Between Groups	24.853	4	6.213	.819	.514
	Within Groups	2238.773	295	7.589		
	Total	2263.626	299			
SCT	Between Groups	82.234	4	20.559	1.851	.119
	Within Groups	3275.662	295	11.104		
	Total	3357.896	299			

Table 9: the ANOVA on SNS and Social capital in terms of Age

		ANOVA				
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
SNST	Between Groups	12.252	2	6.126	.808	.447
	Within Groups	2251.374	297	7.580		
	Total	2263.626	299			
SCT	Between Groups	4.222	2	2.111	.187	.830
	Within Groups	3353.675	297	11.292		
	Total	3357.896	299			

The distribution of the result (Table 1-5) in terms of faculty, ethnicity, religion and gender indicates social science participated more than other faculties with the frequency of number 95 (31.7%) while faculty of law is the lowest with only 8.3%. As for the ethnicity it shows Igbo and other carries the highest score more than Yoruba and Hausa with only 61 (20.3%) and 36 (12 %) respectively. The result further indicates more males than female respondent of 52.3% as against 47.7% respectively.

The result (6) also indicates a significant correlation between the social networking site usage and social capital of .146* at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). In terms of variation on on gender regarding the SNS usage and level of social capital the result suggests significant differences between male and female. It shows .236 (F=1.409) for SNS usage and .358 (F=.846) for the SC where $p > 0.05$ each. More on the variation, the ANOVA result (8) also suggest no significant differences $p > 0.05$ on SNS usage and SC in terms of faculty. The scores show .514 (F=.819) and .119 (F=1.851) for SNS usage and level of SC respectively. On the same trend the comparisons on SNS usage and extent of social capital in terms of age distribution was made. The result (table 9) indicates that no quite significant difference $p > 0.05$ on the extent of SNS usage and level of social capital in terms of the age level among the students of National Open University in Nigeria.

5 Conclusion

This result concludes SNSs is having relationship with social capital. This is evident from the fact that SNSs help them communicate with lost ones. And most importantly when one has a problem or uncertainty about something can discuss it with someone online which subsequently the problem will be rid of. SNS is a social environment that connects many people with old and new friends as well as family members. SNSs therefore are tools with a connection factor among the members of not only the Nigerian but the global society. It links people with each other from many angles and took many advantages from each other. It also concludes that no significant variation on the use of social networking sites and the extent of social capital in terms of faculty, ethnicity and age distribution but it indicated significant difference in terms of gender. Most of the students of the Nigerian Open education are workers and are well to do, thus have access to the mobile tools and internet connectivity. The web or internet being one of the major factor that influence the use of SNS among the students of open university system in Nigeria, has grown to have a place in schools, universities and businesses. It has been praised by educators as well as the learners as a medium of social capital which promotes lifelong learning and broadening the numbers and diversity of young people participating in education and socialization. Thereby it keeps in modifying the teaching and learning methodologies, hence the impact of SNSs on formal young people should be considered substantial at least in terms of the number of the youth involved. This one reason attracted many of the researchers toward the SNSs i.e. Facebook with focus on universities and colleges the Nigerian Open University at the point in time. It is pertinent to look back and reflect on the many changes that have taken place on professional development of human, and social capital, and education. At a time when education systems are going through some of their most dramatic changes, a focus that seems to be universal is to keep teaching, learning and training of human capital as up-to-date and relevant as possible. Higher learning

institutions are expected to adapt their own methodologies to reflect to the new reality of a world in this technological and globalization advancements. Thus to make the necessary changes along the best practices available and help to deliver the best possible educational experience and Lifelong Learning training to all human beings. Thus, at long run it is enhancing human and social capital not only in the Nigerian education system but the global community.

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