

Social Media in the Learning Process of Nigerian Students of Mass Communication

Aisar Salihu Musa

Department of Arts and Humanities, Kano State Polytechnic, P.M.B 3348, Kano State, Nigeria

Abstract

Studies on social media among students in higher institutions are now becoming global phenomena. However, majority of these studies are based in Europe and America with Africa having the least. Similarly, there are limited studies on integrating social media in the student learning process. The objective of this study is to investigate the use of social media among the students of mass communication and its relevance in their study. The study used mixed research method and collected the data through survey questionnaire and focus group discussion. Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis were used to analyse the data. The result reveals that some of the respondents (37.8%) used social media to report and share news or information to the online communities. Similarly, majority of them (75.7%) used data subscription to access social media, which in turn poses a threat to the internet café businesses. Qualitative findings indicate that participants agreed that courses on social media should be introduced in their classes, but educators should not over rely on online teaching using social media platforms as that would make both students and educators lazy.

Keywords: Social Media, Uses and Gratification Theory, Students' Learning Process, Student-Centred Learning

1. Introduction

The emergence of social media changes the way students communicate, interact, and develop academic skills. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube have become an important part of students' life of entertainment, socialization, and classroom activities. As a result of this development, studies on social media among the students in higher institutions is gathering momentum and receiving attention from scholars and classroom teachers alike. In the beginning of social media popularity, scholars wrote about their negative impact and for that many school authorities banned their usage in their schools as they are seen as elements of distraction. However, recent studies (Choi and Kang, 2014; Hodgson and Wong, 2011; Ma and Yuen, 2008) revealed their positive impact. That is why institutions such as Harvard and Oxford introduced courses on social media.

Some researchers (Yunus, Salehi, and Chenzi, 2012) lamented that the frequent use of "teacher-centred pedagogy" prevents students from interacting among themselves and their educators. This method affects the students' learning performance and confidence. However, integrating social media in the students' learning process gives them an opportunity to take control of their learning activities and this boost their confidence. This student-centred learning approach is what is changing the culture of many of today's learning classrooms. An ongoing debate divides that social media platforms support students' learning performance and also affect their academic skills as they waste too much time on them (Kirschner and Karpinski, 2010, Yoo and Kim, 2013). For this reason, it is worth to investigate the usage of social media among students of mass communication as Balaban-Sali (2012) supported that they (students of communication) supposed to know the existence of social media and know how to use them better than students from other disciplines. In addition to this, although, studies on students' use of social media are establishing ground, Bosch (2009) complained that most of these studies are based in Europe and the US. This shows that, there are limited studies on them in Africa. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to contribute to the dearth of literature on social media in Africa by investigating the social networks the students use and why. The study also intends to inquire about the educational stance of social media among them.

2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

The theory that guides the discussion of this study is Uses and Gratifications Theory (U&G) of Katz et al. 1974. The theory provides a systematic explanation of why people use mass media and what benefits they derive after. The main argument of U&G theory is that people select, prefer, and use a particular medium of communication at the expense of many at his disposal with the hope of satisfying his ultimate needs which in turn lead to some gratifications. However, the emergence of social media transforms media users from passive into active 'prosumers' (Anaeto, Onabajo and Osifeso, 2008; Asemah, 2011) and thus open a new wave of investigation Stafford et al. (as cited in Anaeto et al. 2008). This study focuses on students' use of social media and Whiting and Williams (2013) believed that U&G theory is relevant to social media as it helps to explain its uses. Furthermore, Gallion (n.d) supported that employing U&G in today's social media study is imperative for mass media researchers because it unravels a new ground in comparison to traditional media such as radio, television, and film.

2.1 Social Media

People are concurrently using the term ‘new media’ to refer to social media, but a scholarly work (Pridmore, 2013) distinguished their differences, though they are inseparable in some aspects (Papoola, 2014). Their major difference lies in their forms and techniques (Pridmore, 2013) for digital interactivity in sharing of content or meaning. Lewis (2009) defines social media as the platforms that link people together in order to provide a means which will allow them to create and share content with others. According to Choi and Kang (2014), social media can be categorized into two: those (Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, YouTube, Flickr) for social networking and those (Wikis, Blogs, Discussion Boards, Online Forums) for learning activities. Currently, there are over 150 social media platforms listed on encyclopedia which is also unexhausted (Lewis, 2009). Students have largely contributed to the growth of social media as Kirschner and Karpinski (2010) buttressed, the rapid growth and popularity of social networking sites in the second half of the last decade is because of their intensive usage by schools and students of higher institutions. This is because; their usage has proven to assist students to build and participate in a learning community and share their experiences (Choi and Kang, 2014).

2.2 Uses of Social Media

Social media technologies provide to their users adequate freedom (Wilson, 2012) of what they do with them. As social media platforms are many, so also their functions and uses. Osatuyi (2013) elaborated that:

Social networks are classified based on how people use them. For instance, Social Networking Sites such as MySpace, Facebook are used to share and update message, Microblogs such as Twitter is used for short messages, Wikis are mainly used for educational and informational purposes, Blogs are usually personal or collaborative online publishing diary, while Online Forums are interactive space where participants discuss issues which are posted on a discussion board.

Bilandzic, Patriarce and Traudt (2012) introduced three main “Social Use of Media” as: Interactivity, Recognition, and Participation. People use social media for either hard or soft issues or both. For instance, some people use social media to play online games, while others use it to negotiate, establish, maintain, and participate in a political and cultural issues. Therefore, the popularity, availability, and accessibility of social media technologies make their usage in almost every aspect of life. Osatuyi (2013) listed that, people use social networks to organize campaigns (political or non-political), create awareness, social interaction, sharing of information, marketing, healthcare activities. But the list of its usage goes beyond that. In institutions of learning, social media are used as tools for instructions, students’ engagement, peer review (Choi and Kang, 2014). In higher institutions in Nigeria, Edegoh et al. (2013) asserted that, many students are assumed to be using social networks.

2.3 Related Studies

The rationale behind this study is to respond to the pervasive use of social media, particularly among the students of mass communication and the gratifications they derive. Previous studies provide significant explanations about the social networks students use or prefer using, why they use them, and their benefits. The following studies are relevant to the focus of this study.

Choi and Kang (2014) examined the students’ motive of using social media in their learning process. 1010 students participated in the study and data were collected using online survey. The findings indicated that 71.2% of the respondents used social media to solve assignments with friends, 75.5% to search information, 49.3% to ask questions, 61.4% to publish contents, 39.4% to receive feedback and 44.5% to revise, edit and republish information. Similarly, Yunus et al. (2012) surveyed the strengths and weaknesses of integrating social networks in the English as Second Language (ESL) writing classroom. 15 undergraduate students were randomly selected to participate in an online discussion board. The researchers posted questions on the board and the participants responded. After posting open-ended questions about the use of social networks in their learning process, the participants stated that: using social network such as Facebook in the students’ learning process could enhance their critical thinking, confidence, motivation, interaction, writing skills and vocabulary development. Furthermore, by using Mentoring, Cultural, and Social Constructivist Theory, AlAamri (2010) studied the usage of Facebook and Blog in enhancing the students’ academic writing skills. 66 students participated in the study and survey questionnaire was used to elicit the respondents’ opinions. Findings of the study indicated that learning through Facebook and Blog was fascinating, motivating, effective, and easy. Additionally, respondents were able to think carefully, learn new vocabulary, check their spelling, and organize their sentences and paragraphs effectively.

3. Research Method

3.1 Participants

Data of the study were collected from 111 final year diploma students of mass communication, Kano State, Polytechnic. Purposive sampling was used to select the respondents of the study. According to Wimmer and

Dominick (2014), mass media researchers frequently use purposive sampling when looking for respondents to answer some designated questions on how they use a specific medium of communication. Participation in this study was voluntary. All participants were invited for the brief about the study by sending them text messages to their mobile phones. After they were briefed about the purpose of the study, questionnaires were distributed to 111 students. All the questionnaires were returned successfully. After the first analysis, some students with deeper knowledge of social media were invited for the focus group discussion.

3.2 Measurement

Mixed method research was used to collect and analyse the data of the study. In the first phase, a paper-based survey was employed to elicit the respondents' views on social media awareness. A questionnaire with closed-ended questions ranging from yes and no, never, to most often was distributed. This questionnaire was adapted from Popoola (2014) and tested for reliability and validity and has .818 Cronbach's. Descriptive statistics was used to analyse the respondents' responses using an SPSS version 20. In the second phase, in order to have an in-depth information about students' usage of social media, a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was applied. The questions asked in the discussion include, why do they use social media, its importance in their learning. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data using Atlas.ti software. Thematic analysis according to Braun and Clarke (2008), is a qualitative research method which seeks to identify, evaluate, and report pattern (theme) from the data.

4. Result and Discussion

4.1 Survey

111 respondents participated in the first phase of the study. 79.3% were males (n=88) and 20.7% were females (n=23). Their ages ranged from 18-24; 71.2% (n=79), 25-31; 12.6% (n=14), 32-38; 2.7% (n=3). 11 participants did not reveal their age. Similarly, majority of the respondents (44.1%) were self employed, 34.2% were unemployed while 18.9% were employed.

Table 1: Do you have access to social media?

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	96	86.5
No	14	12.6
No response	1	.9
Total	111	100.0

The table 1 above presents the frequency of the respondents' access of social media. The data reveal that, majority of the respondents, 86.5% (n=96) have access to social media while 12.6% (n=14) of them do not have. This indicates that, majority of the respondents have access to social media

Table 2: How do you access social media?

	Frequency	Percent
Data subscription	84	75.7
I go to café	7	6.3
Both	1	.9
No response	19	17.1
Total	111	100.0

The table 2 above presents the frequency of how respondents accessed social media. The data show that, majority of the respondents, 75.7% (n=84) used data subscription to access social media while only 6.3% went to café. This implies that majority of the respondents used data subscription to connect to social media.

Table 3: Do you report or share news on social media?

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	42	37.8
No	68	61.3
No response	1	.9
Total	111	100.0

The table 3 above presents the frequency of whether the respondents report or share news on social media. The data indicate that, only 37.8% (42) of the respondents used to report or share news on social media while 61.3% did not. This shows that majority of the respondents who use social media were not reporting or sharing news on it.

Table 4: Which of the following social networks do you prefer using?

Social networks	Frequency	Percent
Facebook	87	78.4
Twitter	23	20.7
WhatsApp	80	72.1
YouTube	26	23.4
Instagram	12	10.8
Skype	7	6.3
Blog	14	12.6
LinkedIn	0	0
Wiki	17	15.3
MySpace	2	1.8
Google	69	62.2
Others	24	21.6

The table 4 above presents the frequency of the social networks the respondents use. The data reveal that, majority of the respondents, 78.4% (n=87) preferred using Facebook while 72.1% (n=80) preferred WhatsApp. This also demonstrates that Facebook and WhatsApp were the most popularly used social networks among the students while none of them was using LinkedIn.

4.2 Focus Group

In this second phase of the study, focus group discussion was applied. Its main purpose was to give the participants an opportunity to explain deeply what they do with social networking sites and their benefits. Of the 7 participants that participated in the focus group discussion, 4 were males while 3 were females. All the participants were between the ages of 18-24 except 1 who was between 39-45. Open-ended questions were asked and the common themes that emerged from the participants' responses were on positive and negative effects of social media in learning processes.

4.2.2 Social Media for Academic Purpose

Social networks are fast becoming tools for teaching and learning. Participants used social media to promote their learning process. Some of them were of the view of introducing courses on social media but with some cautions. The following responses were made:

P 1: - 1:8 (24:24)

Social networks can make things easy for the student as well as for the lecturer. It can assist the student to be more socialize in a learning aspect. It can assist the lecturer in giving assignment and assessing the student.

P 2: - 2:12 (256:256)

They (social media) help us to make a research.

P 3: - 3:4 (36:36)

Social networking has positive and negative impact on student. The positive impact is that, is highly motivational to student, whereby teachers do send in messages, posts to their students using some certain websites. For example, assignments, home works and stuff like that can be post through that. And again, some teachers why I said negatively again is, to me it make teachers and students to be lazy in some aspect in the sense that a teacher is suppose to come to the class and digest more on the certain topic, but he will just post it online, he will just as in, he won't digest it much, he will just post it for the student to go and make a research. So I think it should be introduced to our classroom but to some certain extent.

P 4: - 4:5 (208:208)

. . . you wouldn't want to be using one word all the time, so you have to go, you have to check dictionary, you have to conduct research and get many words that you can use.

4.3 Discussion

Social networks are becoming a part of life of many students at higher institutions. Majority (98.2%) of the respondents in this study were aware of social networks. This finding was in line with Ndaku (2013) where majority of the respondents (96.2%) have access to social media. This indicates that internet penetration is very high in Nigeria. It also confirms the report that Nigeria has the highest internet users in Africa. Similarly, majority of the respondents (75.7%) used to buy data from internet service providers. Very few of them went to café. This finding was similar but higher to that of Papoola (2014) where many (32.6%) respondents used to buy data to connect to social media while very few used to go to café.

Furthermore, some social networks are more popular and functional than others. In this study, majority of the respondents (78.4%) preferred using Facebook and WhatsApp among others. This finding was also obtained in Hussain (2012), Omekwu et al. (2014), and Papoola (2014). This also buttresses the notion of Uses and Gratification theory stated by Bubas (2001) that people prefer using of some media outlets at the expense of

others at their disposal. The emergence of social media allows people doing the journalists' work. That is reporting and sharing news and information on the pages or walls of their social media. In this study, many of the respondents used social media to conduct research, and share news or information. This finding was similar with the assertion made by Osatuyi (2012) that social media technologies are fast replacing traditional media as a means of sharing information. Many people are now using social media platforms to share information. Vis-à-vis, this confirms the postulation of U&G theory in Whiting and Williams (2013) that some of the reasons why people use new media is to communicate and share information. In addition to this, as social media are establishing ground in some higher institutions of learning, particularly in the students' learning process, participants of this study believed that learning through social media is motivational, easy, and could help them in writing assignments. The same finding was stated in AlAmri (2010), Choi and Kang (2014), and Yunus et al. (2012).

5. Conclusion

This study focuses on the usage of social media among Nigerian students of mass communication. Use of social networks among students in higher institutions Nigeria is becoming pervasive as Omekwu et al. (2014) claim that they are the major means of collective and interpersonal communication. Nowadays, it is very difficult to find a student without using either one or many social networking sites as the findings of this and also previous studies (Edegoh et al., 2013; Omekwu et al., 2014) revealed. This indicates that these social networks have established a big space in the life of students. The results of this study contribute to both theoretical framework and literature review. The study shows that Uses and Gratification theory is valid and relevant to social media study as the respondents of this study use social networking sites to make friends from far places, report and share information, conduct researches and socialize themselves in the learning aspect. It also implies that social networks can be used in a beneficial way as the respondents also used it to support their academic activities. For this, the study suggests that educators of mass communication should introduce courses on social media in teaching mass communication as these social networks are being used in the aspect of news reporting, strategic communication and advertising (Lewis, 2009), public relations, marketing research among others that combined to make mass communication. This action will usher in a student-centred approach which will supplement the aging practice of teacher-centred technique so that to meet the demand of computer savvy students. Preference of social networks such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and YouTube over the rest also demonstrates the functionality (Osatuyi, 2013), benefits and the freedom users have in selecting and using the social networks at their disposal. Furthermore, The priority given to some social networks over others has to do with their availability and popularity in a particular place. In the present study, social networks such as Badoo and 2go were also popular among the respondents which were not found in other studies. The study also discovered that the economy of internet service providers is booming while the market of café business is in crisis as many of their customers are not patronizing them. Hence, their business will soon collapse. Therefore, a drastic action need to be taken otherwise many people will soon lose their jobs and contribute to the number of millions unemployed youth in the country which according to some reports are responsible for the country's insecurity. Finally, as there is dearth of social media studies in Africa and especially among students of mass communication in Nigeria (Papoola, 2014), this study adds to the limited literature which is the main objective of the study.

References

- AlAmri, K. S. (2010). Using web 2.0 technologies to enhance academic writing proficiency among ESL students in Sultan Qaboos University. An example of Facebook and Blogs. A paper presented at the International conference on the future of education, 2nd edition. Florence, Italy. Retrieved on October 27th, 2015 from <http://www.pixel/online.net>
- Anaeto, S. G., Onabajo, O. S., & Osifeso, J. B. (2008). Models and theories of communication. African Renaissance Books Incorporated.
- Asemah, E. S. (2011). Selected mass media themes. Jos University Press.
- Balaban-Sali, J. (2012). New media literacies of communication students. *Contemporary Educational Technology*, 3(4), 265-277.
- Bilandzic, H., Patriarche, G., & Traudt, P. J. (2012). The social use of media: Cultural and social scientific perspectives on audience research. Intellect Ltd.
- Bosch, T. E. (2009). Using online social networking for teaching and learning: Facebook use at the University of Cape Town. *Communicatio*, 35(2), 185-200.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2008). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Choi, J. & Kang, W. (2014). A dynamic examination motives for using social media and social media usage among undergraduate students. A latent class analysis. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 131, 202-2010.

- Edogoh, L. O. N., Asemah, E. S., & Ekanem, I. B. (2013). Facebook and relationship management among students of Anambra State University, Uli, Nigeria. *International Review of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 6(1), 205-216.
- Ezeah, G. H., Ph, D., Asogwa, C. E., & Obiorah, I. (2013). Social media use among students of universities in South-East Nigeria, 16(3), 23-32.
- Gallion, A. J. (n.d). Applying the uses and gratifications theory to social networking sites: A review of related literature. Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/1077670/Applying_the_Uses_and_Gratifications_Theory_to_Social_Networking_Sites_A_Review_of_Related_Literature
- Hussain, I. (2012). A study to evaluate the social media trends among university students. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 64, 639-645.
- Hodgson, P., & Wong, D. (2011). Developing professional skills in journalism through blogs. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 36(2), 197-211.
- Kirshner, P. A., & Karpinski, A. C. (2010). Facebook and academic performance. *Computers in Human Behaviour*, 26, 1237-1245.
- Lewis, B. K. (2009). Social media and strategic communication: Attitudes and perceptions among college students (Published doctoral dissertation, University of Oklahoma, USA). Retrieved from https://shareok.org/bitstream/handle/11244/7479/schoolofteachingandcurriculumleadership_191.pdf?sequence=1
- Ndaku, A. J. (2013). Impact of social media on the students' academic performance (Degree research, University of Abuja, Nigeria).
- Omekwu, C. O., Eke, H. N., & Odoh, J. N. (2014). The use of social networking sites among the undergraduate students of University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Retrieved from <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3114&context=libphilprac>.
- Papoola, M. (2014). New media usage for communication and self concept among journalism and mass communication students in Oyo State, Nigeria. *New Media and Mass Communication*, 26, 22-34.
- Osatuyi, B. (2013). Information sharing on social media sites. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 29(6), 2622-2631.
- Pempek, T. A., Yermolayeva, Y. A., & Calvert, S. L. (2009). College students' social networking experiences on Facebook. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 30(3), 227-238.
- Pridmore, J (2013). New media & social media: what's the difference? Working paper for use in CM 2550 New Media and International Business1 Department of Media and Communication, Erasmus University.
- Swanson, D. J. (2012). Turning in and hanging out: a preliminary study of college students' use of podcasts for information, entertainment, and socializing. Retrieved from: <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0362331911001157>
- Whiting, A., & Williams, D. (2013). Why people use social media: a uses and gratifications approach. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 16(4), 362-369.
- Wilson, T. (2012). Community Reporting and Citizens Journalism: A Venn Diagram. Discussion Paper from the Institute of Community Reporters- June 2012 Part of People's Voice Media Charity No: 1059681 Company No: 3083575.
- Wimmer, R. D., and Dominick, J. R. (2014). *Mass media research: An introduction* (10th ed.). Belmont C.A Wadsworth Cengage Learning.
- Yunus, M. M., Salehi, H., & Chenzi, C. (2012). Integrating social networking tools into ESL writing classroom: Strengths and weaknesses. *English language teaching*, 5(8), 42-48.
- Yoo, S. J., & Kim, S. (2013). How and why college students use Web 2.0 applications: The role of social media in formal and informal learning. *International Journal of Web Based Communities*, 9 (2), 174-187.