

Personal Factors As Predictors of Content-Specific Use of the Internet by Ajayi Crowther University Students in Nigeria

Alabi, Oluwole Folaranmi (Ph.D.)

Department of Communication and Media Studies

Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo

E-mail: wole4helpzycom@yahoo.co.uk

Tel. (+234) 7066 662 503

Abstract

The individual interest of the internet users on the content depends solely on some factors that are personal to users. These factors are the suspected drives that determine their choice of internet content. It is in this regard that this study examines the composite and relative contributions of personal factors (age, gender, religious background, socio-economic status and; academic level) to the choice of internet content. The survey method was employed in this study. The subjects of the investigation were drawn from the three faculties of Ajayi Crowther University using stratified sampling. Based on student enrolment in each of the Faculties, 10% (200) of the entire student population (2000) was selected. Purposive sampling was used in selecting 100 students from the Faculty of Social and Management Sciences, 70 students from the Faculty of Natural Sciences and 30 students from Humanities. Data were generated with the Undergraduates Personal Factors and Internet Content Preference Questionnaire (UPFICPQ) which yielded reliability co-efficient of .79 (Cronbach Alpha). Data were analyzed with frequency count, percentage, and regression analysis. Findings of the study show that 79 (40.5%) of the undergraduates use the internet for social networking, 64 (32.8%) use it for news and information while 36 (18.5%) use it for entertainment. While all the considered personal factors accounted for 67% (R square =.67) of the variation in students' choice of internet content, it was found that only academic level, religion and socio-economic background of the students made significant contributions to the choice of internet content.

Key Words: Personal factors, Predictors, Content-specific, Internet

Introduction

The Internet has remained pivotal to progress in communication, exchange of information, goods, services and technologies. It has created a broad range of opportunities for advancement in the developing and the developed nations. (Firas,H. Alhammadany and Alimas Heshmati 2011). The Internet is a powerful instrument for global connectivity. The powerfulness of it resides in the fact that it is the largest information resource in the world today and it also provides people access to interactive mechanism to directly communicate with each other. Social network, virtual worlds or services built on existing communication/ social protocols and services on the internet provide attractive tools for human social activities on the Web. As a sharing tool around the world, Internet can be regarded as a huge development in human civilization.

Many people use the World Wide Web to access news, weather, pornography, sports reports, plan and book vacations and find out more about their interests. According to Heinz (2002), between 40% and 60% use the Internet to consult daily news, weather forecast, electronic banking and many more. Advertisers have also taken

advantage of the the growing number of internet users by bombarding the cyberspace with numerous advertisements (Alabi, 2012). Content –specific use of the internet is obvious if one looks at the way young adults that are connected to the Internet make use of it. The almost unlimited amount of content made available by the internet together with the requirement of active selection by the users obviously produces a great variety of individual content specific usage patterns. The World Wide Web has become a main source of social and economic development (Crandall and Jackson, 2003). Young people and the highly educated are the highest users of the Internet. Several studies in the area of Internet use have also discovered that social, demographic characteristics, personal factors, attitude and social support determines to a large extent, the Internet use and content preference among users. Young adults generally select among the contents presented to them by the Internet via their interest. In actual fact, it is assumed that university undergraduates prefer a particular content to the other because of what it can offer and how what is offered could be serviceable to their cultural, social, political, and economic development.

In Nigeria, internet use is prevalent among youths, particularly, students in tertiary institutions. Each undergraduate also appears to have content preference when it comes to the use of Internet. However, it is not clear what inform the content specific preference among Internet users, particularly, university undergraduates. The individual interest of Internet users on the content depends solely on some personal factors. These factors are the drives that determine the choice of Internet content.

There are not only psychologically-based gaps in access to the Internet but also demographic differences like income, sex, age. These factors that are personal to users could determine the specific content being used with varying degrees. This constitutes the focus of this study. That is, to find out the extent to which personal factors such as gender, age , religion, academic level and socio-economic status when taken together and when considered individually predict the content of the internet that Nigerian university undergraduates in Ajayi Crowther University in Oyo, Oyo state make use of.

Young People, Digital Divide and Determinants of Internet Use

Internet usage is more likely to expand among younger people who are the main participants in it. In the process of socializing, young people are commonly exposed to new technologies and tools which they can easily assimilate for their own various purposes (Jiang, 2009). The younger generations with better learning capability are the main consumers of most of the online services (Alabi,2013). Social, demographic characteristics, attitude toward internet and social support have also been reported to affect Internet use (Cukier,2007; Jiang ,2009; Kraidy,2007). Studies have found vast differences in the types and nature of population groups of users and non-users of internet services. Users and non-users of internet may be differentiated according to their social, demographic, attitudes toward the internet and the social support they receive (Rhes and Kim, 2004). According to Zhu and He (2002), critical to the Internet use are: Individual economic characteristics, perceived attributes of innovation, social factors and the characteristics of innovation that influence its adoption.

At the early stage of diffusion, the young educated and affluent were the typical adopters of the new information and communication technology (Busselle et al, 1999). According to Rogers (1995), demographics tend to be less important when innovations have reached a critical mass on their diffusion curve. Evident in the past empirical studies is the fact that the adopters of new communication technologies are more fashionable, better-educated and young than non-adopters (Consoli,2008; Mohit,2009; Dimaggio et al, 2001).

Among other reasons for the expanded demand for the new internet technology are higher education and higher income. Higher education is known to bring about responsiveness of benefit from the use of the new technology while higher income enhances people's purchasing power for the new technological devices. More significant about young people and adoption of new technology, particularly, internet technology is their 'adventuresomeness'. Also critical to individual's decision to use the internet is economic factor. Economic factors such as income level, availability and price structure of services, bandwidth and supporting infrastructures. (Kshetri,2001). In the developing nations, bandwidth price is an important determinant of internet adoption. According to Frontline.net (2001)50% of the worldwide bandwidth capacity is in North America, while only 3% is in Middle East and Africa. One can then conclude that increase in bandwidth and reasonable price is a driver for internet diffusion.

Social factor is also germane. Examination of values inherent in internet helps to predict the degree of acceptance or rejection of the Internet. Critical to the values system are the related skills required for the use of the Internet. Computer literacy is a necessary prerequisite to the Internet use. There is high proportion of illiterates among African population and many of the literate ones do not have computer skills. Studies have shown that many young adults who have computer skills go online to socialize.

Overview of Internet content and Personal factors

The Internet is a social force influencing how, when and why people communicate. It is an economic force changing the mode of interaction between users. The Internet has made an adequate supply of contents (different contents that attracts different users). The level at which a particular content serves as a means of gratifications to an individual determines the rate of interest attached to such content. Also the compilation of opportunities or advantages in different contents determines the level at which such content is preferred by a particular class of users. The appeal that a particular content has and the level of exposure of individuals to the content depend on personal factors. Personal factors are peculiar characteristics of individuals. The personal factors of university undergraduates include: age, gender, religious affiliation, socio-economic class, academic qualification or level. As widespread use of and dependency on the Internet increase, it has been discovered that not everyone has equal opportunity or access to its usage. Factors such as educational level, class, gender, race and geographical location have been attributed to this disparity. Of all these factors, gender issues have gained the uttermost attention of researchers (Wong et al, 2008). Many arguments underlying gender disparity in online use and access stem from gender disparities in computer access and usage. Some scholars believe that Internet access and usage have mainly been dominated by males. The study by Moiduser and Shemla (2010) for instance, suggested that gender differences exist in the use of the Internet with a higher and more extensive usage by males when compared to females. Males were also found to spend more of their time on the internet, indicating preferred locations for use, resource downloading, website creation and participation in discussion groups. A study by Madell and Muncer (2004) and Sherman et al (2000) supported the bias towards males. 'More males tend to use the Web; they are also more likely to have their own e-mail addresses and web pages and spend longer hours than females surfing the internet'. Sherman et al (2000) further reported that males, other than females use the technology more often and had more positive attitudes than females. The bias is seen even though both girls and boys are equally comfortable and show positive feelings toward the Internet. Most studies indicated male domination in terms of usage of and attitude towards the internet while fewer studies showed otherwise. A study

by Shaw and Gant (2002) showed that no difference was detected when participants were involved in various online activities (Odell et al (2000)).

Age is another crucial factor in Internet use and content preference. Internet is an open sphere where a lot of information are being disseminated and whoever can handle or use it can be exposed to any information. Age creates difference in the internet content people tend to use. In general, estimated Internet use tends to decline with age (Robinson and Godbey, 1999). However, Schubert (2009) reported that the reason why people go online do not vary much with age.

Furthermore, another personal factor that is germane to internet access and uses is social and economic status. Economic and social status are closely linked. Since the society is stratified into the categories of 'haves' and 'have nots', it is generally believed that the affluent have access to every good things of life while the poor or 'have nots' lack equal access to essential things of life, the Internet inclusive, due to their economic incapability. Also, people of different status have different tastes. The ways they consume certain media content differ, hence, it could be assumed that there will also be a difference in their pattern of internet content usage. This assumption is in line with the position of Bogart (1964) that there is affinity between preference and social status.

Religious affiliation and beliefs play important role in the lives of people and touch many aspects of the society. Internet users also put religious materials on the internet and interested people go online to get spiritual materials. This applies to all religions. In this wise, religion, one way or the other, can be predicted to affect the type of internet content that different religious faithful will go for. For example, a Christian would be interested in religious materials related to Christianity, and probably avoid pornographic stuff on the Internet.

Theoretical Framework

The study is based on two theories- Uses and gratification and media dependency. Uses and gratification is concerned with what people (audiences) do with the media. It was an attempts to determine the function that mass communication is serving for audience members.. The theory posits that people are not passive receivers of media messages but active influencers of the message effect. That is, the consumers of media messages have the freewill to decide how they will use the media and how it will affect them. As actively influencing the effect process, media audiences selectively choose, attend to, perceive and retain media messages. The focus is thus, not on media production and transmission functions, but, on media consumption functions. Rather than asking "what kinds of effects occur, under what conditions?" the question becomes "who uses which content, from which media, under which condition, and; for what reasons?"(Folarin,1998).Uses and gratification was first described in an article by Elihu Katz in 1959 and employed in a research by Blumberg and McQuail in 1969. The theory indicates a positive relationship between social media usage and the level of gratification derived from such activity. Generally, users of the internet are motivated by similar intrinsic and extrinsic factors (Amarasinghe, 2010). The motivation inadvertently dictates the content- specific preference.

Media dependency theory attempts to explain the relationship between the content of the mass media, the nature of the society, and the communication behavior of audiences. This theory which was propounded by Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur in 1976 postulates that people are dependent on the mass media for information needs. Now that the internet has become part of people's daily life, addiction to it has become the resultant effect of over-dependency on it for information, sensation, entertainment, satisfaction etc. Besides, there seems to be a relationship between the desire for gratification and dependency. As submitted by Sung and LaRose et al (2004)

internet addictions in general are “habits” that begin when the “gratification sought”, become a conditioned response to negative effect, then such behavior then becomes a goal in itself, thus leading to preoccupation with it.

The Problem

The unlimited amount of content made available by the internet together with the requirement of active selection by the user obviously produces a great variety of individual content-specific usage patterns. The individual interest of the internet users on the content depends solely on some factors that are personal to users. These factors are the suspected drives that determine their choice of internet content. It is in this regard that this study examines the extent to which the personal factors (Age, gender, religious background, socio-economic background, type of institution, and; academic level) when taken together (composite) and when taken individually (relative) contribute to the choice of internet content.

Based on the foregoing, the study addresses the following research questions:

RQ 1: What is the pattern of internet content usage among undergraduates of Ajayi Crowther University?

RQ 2: What is the composite contribution of the users’ personal factors (age , gender, religious affiliation, socio-economic background and academic level) to undergraduates’ choice of internet content?

RQ 3: What is the relative contribution of the users’ personal factors (age, gender, religious affiliation, socio-economic background and academic level) to undergraduates choice of internet content?

Method

The survey method was employed in this study. The subjects of the investigation were drawn from the three faculties of Ajayi Crowther University using stratified sampling based on student enrolment in each of the Faculties. 10% (200) of the entire student population (2000) was selected. The sample was drawn proportionate to the number of students in each of the faculties. Purposive sampling was used in selecting 100 students from the faculty of Social and Management sciences, 70 students from the Faculty of Natural Sciences and 30 students from Humanities. The selected students were those who were computer literate and who also use the Internet regularly.

Data were generated with the Undergraduates Personal Factors and Internet Content Preference Questionnaire (UPFICPQ). The UPFICPQ was developed and validated by the researcher. The first section of the instrument focused on the personal factors of the respondents while the second section (ten items) focused on students’ favourite internet content and its frequency of usage. Data were analyzed with frequency count and percentage for research question one (1), and regression analysis for research questions two (2) and three (3)

Results

RQ 1: What is the pattern of internet content usage among undergraduates of Ajayi Crowther University?

Table 1: Pattern of Internet Content Usage by Undergraduates

Content	Frequency	%
News/Information	64	32.8%
Pornography	8	4.1%
Social Networking	79	40.5%
Reservations	6	3.1%
Services	2	1.0%
Entertainment	36	18.5%
Total	195	100

Table 1 reveals the pattern of internet content usage among Ajayi Crowther University Undergraduates. The table shows that majority of the university undergraduates (40.5%) use the internet for social networking. This is closely followed by News and Information (32.8%). 36 students, constituting 18.5% use internet for entertainment. This is further illustrated in figure 1 below

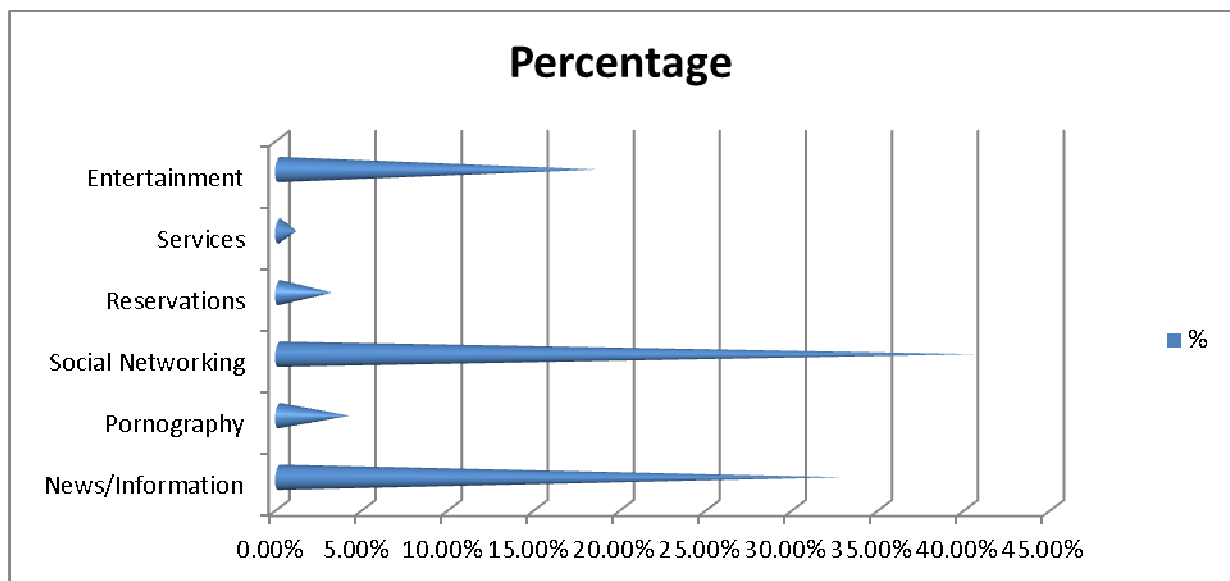


Fig. 1: Chart showing Pattern of Internet Content Usage by Undergraduates

RQ 2: What is the composite contribution of the users' personal factors (age, gender, religious affiliation, socio-economic background and academic level) to undergraduates' choice of internet content?

Table 2: Regression Summary of Choice of Internet Content used by University Undergraduates

Multiple R	.258
R Square	.67
Adjusted R Square	.37
Standard error of the estimate	1.727

Table 3: Analysis of Variance of Multiple Regression Data

Source of Variation	Sum of Square	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig. of F
Regression	40.041	6	6.674	2.239	.041
Residual	560.297	188	2.980		

Table 4: Co-efficient of Personal Factors

S/N	Personal Factors	Beta	T	Sig. of T
1	Gender	-.012	-.162	.871
2	Age	-.187	-2.574	.011
3	Religion	.079	1.081	.281
4	Socio-Economic Background	.032	.453	.651
5	Academic Level	.100	1.364	1.74

The regression summary in table2 above shows R square of .67, meaning that the combination of the five personal factors accounts for 67% of the variation in Undergraduate students' choice of internet content. By implication, the remaining 33% can be accounted for by other factors outside the focus of this study.

RQ 3: What is the relative contribution of the users' personal factors (age, gender, religious affiliation, socio-economic background and academic level) to undergraduates choice of internet content?

Table 4 above shows the relative contribution of each of the factors to observed variation (67%) above. The table shows that only 'academic level' 'religion' and 'socio-economic background' contributed positively to the observed variation. 'Academic level' followed by 'religion' made significant contributions. The meaning is that the choices of internet content that undergraduates make are largely determined by the academic level of the students, religious beliefs and their socio-economic background.

Discussion of findings

Evident in the findings of this study is the fact that many undergraduate students of Ajayi Crowther University make use of the internet for social networking. This finding affirms the finding of Kuss and Griffith (2011) that between 55% and 82% of young adults use social network sites, Facebook in particular, on regular basis. As observed in the findings, personal factors (age, gender, religion, socio-economic background and academic level) account for 67% (R Square=.67) of the variation in undergraduates' choice of the internet content. This means that only 33% of the variation in the choice of internet content is accounted for by other variables outside this study, hence, personal factors are germane to the choice of internet content made by University undergraduates. It is worthy of note in the findings also that of all the personal factors, only academic level, religion and socio-economic background determine the choice of internet content they made. Observations have shown that as Nigerian university undergraduates move higher in their academic levels, the less emphasis they place on some frivolous activities, including the amount of time they spend using internet. Nigerians are also highly religious. From the findings, undergraduates' choice of internet content is likely to have positive relationship with their religious beliefs. It also follows common observation that students from high socio-economic background are likely to have greater access to internet facilities and thus, spend more time on internet

than students from low socio-economic background. As noted by Zhu and He (2002), critical to individual's internet use is his or her economic characteristics, perceived attributes of innovation, social factors and characteristics of innovations that influence its adoption.

Conclusions and recommendations

It is a common knowledge that internet is becoming more and more accessible in the once alienated regions of the world, the sub-Sahara in general and Nigeria in particular. With this expansion come various shades of complexities. It is not an innuendo to say that the internet is more of asset as much as it is of liability to the world. Young adults in particular use the internet for a range of good and evil activities, with many tending toward content-specific usage pattern. As evident in this study, undergraduates in Ajayi Crowther use internet for social networking. This finding is not a surprise when one considers the fact that social media enhance human social capital. As identified by Nyland (2004), the motives why people use social media include: meeting people, entertainment, social events, maintaining relationships and media creation. There is no doubt that the young adults are in pursuit of these objectives than other internet users. The findings of this study is an eye-opener to the possible areas through which possible interventions aimed at curbing excessive internet usage among university undergraduates can be introduced. Since students' academic level, religion and socio-economic background prove as potent predictors of internet specific content undergraduates use, these same factors are likely to contribute to the amount of time they spend on the internet, hence, the problem of excessive use of internet and other problems associated with internet uses can be controlled by controlling the identified personal factors that contribute significantly to the choice of internet content.

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