Use of social networking sites by undergraduate students in two African Universities

Zanele Hadebe[1], Yomi Owolabi[2], Elizabeth Mlambo[3]

[1]University of Zululand Library
[2]University of Zululand Dept. of Information Studies
[3]University of Zimbabwe

Abstract. The paper investigates the use of social networking sites (SNS) amongst undergraduate students at the Federal University of Agriculture Abeokuta, Nigeria and University of Zimbabwe, Harare. A number of 300 undergraduates were randomly selected from various Faculties in the two universities. The findings revealed that Facebook and Twitter were the most commonly used by the respondents and chatting is the main purpose of using social media. It was also revealed that the use of social media contributed to their overall academic performance. The recommendations amongst others were as follows: the need to teach the use of computers in the university curriculum, and to provide more computer laboratories for student use.

1. Introduction

The adoption and usage of SNS by undergraduate students has generated a lot of interest as evidenced by the rapidly expanding literature (Wang, 2012, Van Doorn and Eklund, 2013, Erlin et al, 2015 and Ifinedo, 2016). Since their introduction, social networking sites have been described as a "website that allows users to create a profile, connect that profile to that of other users and view and explore the connections between the profiles (Sei-Ching and Kim, 2013). Examples of these SNS include Facebook, Twitter, Myspace, and Linked In and out of all these Facebook is the most popular with 1.6 billion active users. Since their introduction, social networking sites have become a part of us, incorporated into our daily lives. They have not only changed the way we communicate but have ensured that people are not just consumers of knowledge but are creators of it as well.

The biggest uptakes of this technology have been the university students all around the world. Ifinedo (2016) stated that 97% of university students in the

United States reported being active users of an SNS daily. Although much of the research has been carried out in the West, studies of a similar nature have been done in Africa (Magogwe, J;Ntereke, B and Phetlhe, 2015); Ogbonnaya, U and Mji, A (2015), although these are few and far between

Given that SNS use by undergraduate students is a relatively new phenomenon in Africa, it is important that we examine this phenomenon further. Previous studies have applied a number of lenses to explain the uses of SNS by students in Africa. The following reasons have been proffered in explaining why students use SNS. These are for information sharing, communication purposes, for sharing ideas amongst themselves, for educational purposes or for pure enjoyment. However, there has been unconvinced and dissenting voices about the value SNS bring to academic performance, prompting some universities to resort to drastic measures like banning access to them(Nigeria) , restricting access in to them in terms of time (like some universities in Zimbabwe)or only allowing access after business hours. Some authors have even claimed that the number of hours spent on SNS have affected students' academic performance. A case in point was made by Oluwatoyin (2011) who stated that university students in Nigeria who used SNS spent less time studying which affected their grades

Although several arguments have been advanced on the value of SNS in the students's lives, both for and against, one unassailable truth is that this phenomenon is growing at an alarming rate. Given that students are a key user group of SNS, it is imperative that we examine what drives these needs. So it is for this reason that the study was undertaken: to determine the value students see in these social networking sites. The theory uses and Gratification theory was identified as providing the theoretical framework in understanding this phenome because we are interested in the perceived value rather than the experience in using the technology

2. Statement of the problem

There is no doubt that there is a growing interest in the relationship between SNS and university students. Even though there is a large body of knowledge on this topic, most of the studies have been carried out in the developed world and little has been done in Africa and more especially in the context of Nigeria and Zimbabwe. Secondly, most of the studies have focused on one SNS, especially Facebook, whereas our focus is much broader, in the sense that the study is not restricted to the study of one social site. Lastly, despite SNS's widespread use in advanced countries, based on the researchers' knowledge, little is known about its importance on academic performance of students in African universities. It is hoped that this study will contribute the ongoing conversation about SNS in tertiary institutions.

3. Research Objectives

The study was carried out to determine the following;

- The types of SNS used by undergraduate students
- To determine the uses of SNS
- To determine whether the use of SNS had an effect on students' academic performance

4. Literature Review

With the upsurge of students using SNS for various reasons, its penetration into the educational landscape cannot be ignored. Several studies have looked at the role of SNS in education especially teaching and research. Bosch (2009) discussed the use of online social networks in teaching and learning, but also pointed out the challenges that come with it .A survey done in Zimbabwe in 2013 by Zanamwe, Rupere and Kufandirimbwa, found that the topic of most conversations of on the SNS is related to education with 60% of the students agreeing to that fact, whilst 50% used it to discuss specific schoolwork. On the other hand, a surveye done of over 36000 students in the US , found that although more than 90% of them use SNS, only 30% of them use them for educational purposes. From this we can see different behavioural patterns in the use of these sites, meaning that no –one conclusive explanation can be given to why university students use SNS.

Another interesting development is that for most students, SNS are accessed on their mobile devices. A clearer picture of the proliferation of mobile phones is presented with some statistics. According to Africa Report (5th May 2014, mobile phone penetration has grown from 15 in 2000 to 54% in 2012. Nigeria boasts 7th place in the world's mobile phone penetration and students in that country have embraced this technology for both social and academic activities just like students from other parts of the world. This fact was corroborated by a report from Ericcson (Africa report, 8th September, 2014), which stated that I in 10 Africans are logging into facebook every month, and of those 100million people, 80% are accessing these platforms on their mobiles compared to 6% who use desktop computers.

5. Results and Discussion of Findings

The section presents a description of the findings and analysis of the research based on the research objectives. Descriptive analysis was used to analyse the data and the data was presented in the form of tables, graphs and charts. A total of 350 questionnaires were distributed and out of these 300 were returned representing an overall response rate of 86%

6. Methodology.

The study adopted a purely quantitative approach. A survey design was selected in the conduct of the study and the target population was undergraduate students of the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, Nigeria and the University of Zimbabwe. Similar random sampling was used to select students from the similarly faculties that are common to the two universities. These were the

Faculties of Veterinary medicine, Engineering and Management/Commerce. From each faculty, 50 students were randomly selected, giving the total number of 150 respondents from each university. The data collected instrument for the study was a self-designed questionnaire. Descriptive statistics which include percentage and frequency count were used for the analysis of the data.

4.1 Responses on whether respondents use social media

Fig 1 Percentage use of networking sites
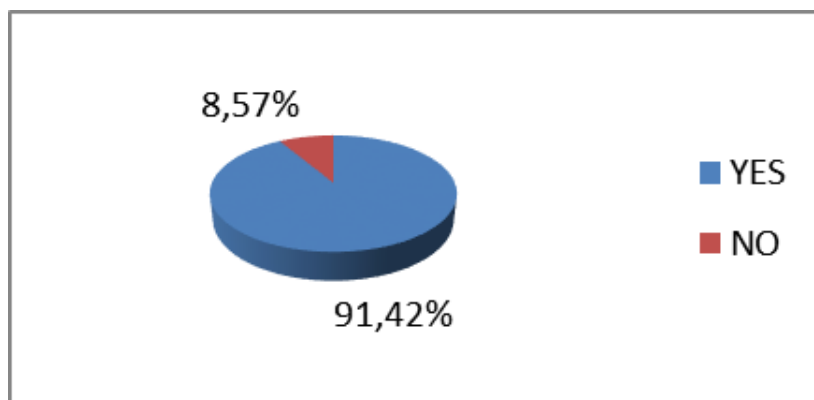
As denoted in figure 4.1 above majority (91.42%) of the respondents hinted that they use social networking sites as opposed to 8.57% of the respondents who observed that they do not use social networking sites. This therefore implies that most university students are acquainted to social networks, and possibly those that are not using social networks, might be the old aged graduates or possibly laggards.

4.2 Preferred social network site

Table 1 Most frequently used social site

Social Site	Frequency	Percentage
Facebook	90	30
Twitter	82	27
Flick	10	3
MySpace	3	1
Linkedin	13	4.3
Google+	32	11

Whassup	72	24
Total	300	100%

As shown in table 4.2 above there are mixed opinions in terms of social sites that are frequently used by respondents at the universities. However the most used site is Facebook with 90 (30%)of the population, closely followed by

As shown in table 4.5 above there are mixed opinions in terms of social sites that are frequently used by respondents at the universities. However the most used site is Facebook which claimed 90(30%) closely followed by Twittwer with 82(27%) while Whap sup was ranked third with 72(24%) Facebook is popular with respondents in that it is used on cellphones which is very compatible, since they are mobile handsets, and also the fact that it is quick cheaper and convenient than other sites such as Linkedin. Furthermore Whats up is predominantly used for social interactions

Twitter with 82 (27%) whilst Whassup was ranked third with 72 (24%). The findings confirm numerous studies that FB is the most famous SNS used by graduates worldwide.

4.3 Purpose of using SNS
Table 2.

Purpose of using SNS	Frequency	Percentage
Entertainment	67	22
Sharing information	34	11
Communicating with friends, family	55	18
Chatting	130	43
Sharing experiences	14	6
Total	300	100%

As shown in the above table 130 (43%) respondents claimed that they used SNS purposively for chatting.

4.4 Effects of SNS on academic performance

Fig 4.4 SNS and academic performance
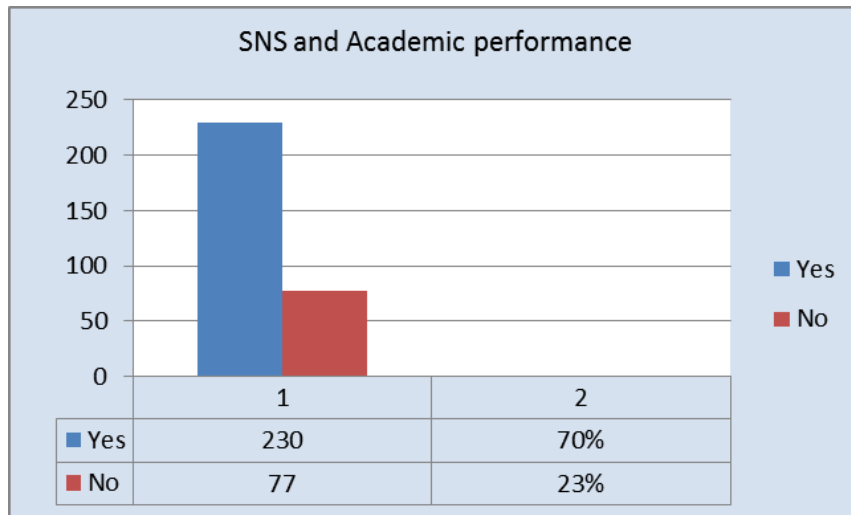
As denoted above, most respondents noted that SNS have a positive effect on their academic performance with the response rate of 230 (70%), whilst 77 (23% admitted that it had no effect on their academic performance.

7. Discussion

This section interprets and discusses the results collected. Firstly, the study findings reveal that there is a growing increase in the use of SNS by university students, with Face Book being the most popular (30%) followed by Twitter (27%). These sites are predominantly used for chatting. This result concurs with a study done by Eelin, Fitri and Susandu (2015) who concluded that the majority of students in her study used Facebook for online chatting

Although in some instances, universities have restricted access to SNS, the study revealed that most of the students access SNS from their mobile devices. These findings corroborate a study done by Fasae and Adegbilero-Iwari, (2015) who found that science students in selected private universities in Nigeria (83.7%) use smartphones for social and educational purposes.

On whether SNS had any impact on their academic performances, 70% said it enhanced their performance whilst 23% disagreed. These findings are at variance with a study done by Ogbonnaya and Mji (2015) who found that half the students in their research indicated that they did not think Facebook is a useful tool for studies

8. Conclusion

From the study it is evident that the respondents were very familiar with the use of SNS. Facebook and Twitter were cited as the most popular and these sites were mostly used for online chatting and discussion. There was an overwhelming response of students who felt that these SNS enhanced their academic performance because it allowed for more interaction and discussions with peers.

9. Recommendations

Based on the findings in this study, the following are recommended. The two universities and other institutions should leverage the time students
spend on SNS and utilise it as one form of communication with the students.

References

Jin-Liang Wang et al (2012): The relationships among the Big Five Personality factors, self-esteem, narcissism, and sensation-seeking to Chinese University students' uses of social networking sites (SNSs), *Computers in Human Behavior* , Vol 28 , 2313–2319

VanDoorn, George and Eklund, Antoinette A (2013): Face to Facebook: Social media and the learning and teaching potential of symmetrical, sychronous communication, *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*, Vol 10, No 1, 2013.

Erlin, Triyani Arita Fitri and Susandr (2015):Using Social Networks: Facebook Usage at the Riau College *Procedia Computer Science*, Vol 59, 559 – 566

Princely Ifinedo (2016): Applying uses and gratifications theory and social influence processes to understand students' pervasive adoption of social networking sites: Perspectives from the Americas
International Journal Of Information Management, 36, No (2):192-206

Sei-Ching Joanna Sin · Kyung-Sun Kim (2013): International students' everyday life information -seeking:the
Informational value of social networking sites, *Library & Information Science Research*, Vol 35, No 2:107-116

Magogwe, J.M, Phetlhe, K and Ntereke, B (2015): Facebook classroom groupwork: a trial study involving University of Botswana Advanced Oral Presentation students, *British Journal of Educational Technology*,
Vol 46, No 6:1312-1323

Ogbonnaya U. and Mji A (2014): Use of social media by university students in South Africa, *EDULEARN14, Proceedings*, 6135-6135

Tanja E Bosch (2009): Using online social networking for teaching and learning: Facebook use at the University of Cape Town, *Communicatio,* 35:2, 185-200

Zanamwe, N, Rupere, T and Kufandirimbwa, 0 (2013): Use of Social Networking Technologies in Higher Education in Zimbabwe: A learners' perspective, *International Journal of Computer and Information Technology*, Vol 2, No 1: 8-18

Africa Report (5th May 2014

Africa report, 8th September, 2014)

Joseph Kehinde Fasae , Idowu Adegbilero-Iwari , (2015) "Mobile devices for academic practices by students of college of sciences in selected Nigerian private universities", *The Electronic Library*, Vol. 33 , Iss: 4, pp.749 - 759