

Knowledge and Utilization of Social Media by Students of Nuhu Bamalli Polytechnic, Zaria, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the level of awareness and utilization of social media by HND II students of Mass Communication in Nuhu Bamalli Polytechnic, Zaria. Social Media are online communication systems with complex techniques that enable interactivity, sharing, conversation and linkages by users. The development of ICT and GSM technology in Nigeria has made social media very popular among students of tertiary institutions. The study employed the survey method of communication research. It found out that the students acquire knowledge of Social Media through course mates, friends and conventional mass media. In addition, the utilization is influenced by the perceived social status and enlightenment level of the students. The paper also argues that social media affect the academic performance of the students both positively and negatively. The paper concludes that governments and managements of tertiary institutions should provide adequate guidance on access and enlightenment to students about the potentials of social media. It further recommends that students should strike a balance between using

Social Media and the pursuit of academic excellence.

Keywords: Social Media, Knowledge, Utilization, Students and Education

Introduction

The development of Internet and convergence of mass communication channels and technologies have created significant changes in the mass communication industry. Social media are among the prominent products of new media of mass communication. According to Dominick (2011, p. 25), “social media are online communications that use special techniques that involve participation, conversation, sharing, collaboration and linkage.” Similarly, Kaplan and Haelein (2009, p. 61) view them from a technological perspective. They define them as “a group of Internet based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content”. In the same vein, McQuail (2010, p. 520), describes social media as “comprising a number of Internet websites that have been set up to enable and encourage users to create networks of acquaintances and also to share messages and audio visual materials, often available to a wider public.”

Participation and exchange of information between individuals and groups are the major activities normally achieved through social media. “The first tool for social media was telephone. It connected friends and family and kept people in touch. When Bell laboratories invented speed dialling, the telephone became an instrument of community building” (Dominick, 2011, p. 72). Consequently, developments in ICT and Internet led to the invention of other social media channels like *Facebook*, GSM phones, *MySpace*, *Twitter*, *2Go*, *YouTube*, *Skype*, blogging, live chat, *wikis*, *Hi-5*, *email*, e.t.c. The application of

“social media is relatively new and their cultural impact is evolving” (Dominick, 2011, p. 73). This can be identified from educational, economic and community development in our contemporary society. This study examines level of knowledge and use of social media among students of mass communication in Nuhu Bamalli Polytechnic, Zaria. The study specifically focuses on the HND II students, towards identifying how they get to know and use social media in their personal and academic activities.

Statement of the Problem

The advent of social media has created a significant change in the communication industry. Apart from altering the pattern of social interaction among people in the society, it has also revolutionalized the feedback structure of the communication process. Social media have turned feedback in mass communication to be immediate with additional supporting illustrations of audio and video and still images to support messages. Most national and international media organizations use social media such as *facebook*, *twitter*, *Skype*, GSM, email e.t.c to receive feedback from their audience and staff alike. It is therefore very imperative for mass communication students to understand how to use social media effectively as the potential practitioners in mass communication industry. However, the students find it very difficult to create a balance between using social media and concentrating on their academic activities. This is related to the informal channels through which the students get to know about social media and poor guidance and counselling by parents and school instructors. Against this backdrop, the researchers examined the level of knowledge and use of social media among HND II students of Nuhu Bamalli Polytechnic, Zaria in order to identify how they get to know social media and their relations with academic activities.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

1. To find out the ways through which the students of mass communication of Nuhu Bamalli Polytechnic get to know social media.
2. To assess the level of awareness of social media among the students.
3. To identify the pattern of social media use among the students.
4. To examine the level of influence of social media on the academic engagements of the students.

Research Questions

The study finds answers to the following research questions.

1. What are the ways through which students of mass communication of Nuhu Bamalli Polytechnic get to know about social media?
2. What is the level of social media awareness among the students?
3. What are the patterns of social media use among the students?
4. To what extent do social media disrupt academic activities of the students?

Literature Review

Social media are byproducts of continuous improvement in the simple technologies of Web 2. 0. This continuous development improves on societal interconnectivity, interactivity, sharing and gaining knowledge at our convenience and most a time at the click of a button on our fourth generation hand-held screens (Van Groove, 2009). There is general understanding that the social media environment is characterized by interactivity, user-generated content and multidirectional communication flows. The growth and popularity of social media have not shown signs of slowing down, either on a global level or in Nigeria. For instance,

the Wisconsin Centre for Education Research (2011, p. 1) submits that:

Every day, about 250 million people log in to Face book. *Twitter* has 15 million regular users; they send 65 million messages each day. People watch more than 2 billion video clips on *YouTube* daily. Every hour, users upload an average of 24 hours of video content. Every day, more than 90 percent of college students visit a social networking site.

The concept of social media could be understood from the concepts of participation, openness, conversion, community and connectedness (Mayfield, 2008). By participation, social media encourage contributions and feedback from everyone who is interested. It blurs the line between media and audience and between the teacher and his students. In addition, by openness, social media are open to everyone; both students and lecturers can share and update contents via social media. By conversation, they are a two-way communication where issue of sender and receiver is blurred. By community, they can be built based on community of interests; politics, hobbies and education. By connectedness, social media are all about connecting people. By connecting people, social media connect the students with their lecturers even outside the classroom.

To aptly capture the essence of social media to education in particular and civilization in general, Mayfield (2008, p. 7) opines that:

A good way to think about social media is that all of this is actually just about being human beings. Sharing ideas, cooperating and collaborating to create art, thinking and commerce, vigorous debate and discourse, finding people who might be good friends, allies and lovers – it's what our

species has built several civilizations on. That's why it is spreading so quickly, not because it's great shiny, whizzy new technology, but because it lets us be ourselves – only more so.

Thus, the potentials of social media in imparting knowledge on students of tertiary institutions is in its ability of alleviating hindering factors of interaction and communication with other people. According to Selwyn (2011, p. 1), social media “are now driven by (and to some extent determined through) the activities of its (sic) ordinary users - what has been described as many-to-many rather than one-to-many connectivity.” To this end, Social media constitute an increasingly important context wherein individuals live their everyday lives. Indeed, some commentators talk of the 'networked self' is acknowledging the importance of social media as a key site of sociality and identity performance in many peoples' lives (Papacharissi, 2010).

In relation to the above, Chu (2011, p. 31) observes, “In the past few years, social media have become perhaps the most popular communication channels for college-aged Internet users.” Here lies the relevance of social media to tertiary education. Because the virtues of social media include allowing multiple entry points and learning pathways, supporting multi-modality, enabling student improvisation, and supporting the sharing and creation of student artefacts on the move. Students can interact with one another and take hand-held devices into the field for data gathering and hypothesis testing (Jones, 2010).

Furthermore, social media are distance insensitive, they bridge the distance between the lecture hall and students' accommodation space. Social media allow students from different schools or even different countries to come together over the Internet and work on common projects. They can transmit research materials and disseminate papers and analysis to those working on that activity. To buttress this stance, West (2012, p. 7) observes thus:

Research on school's social media collaborations reveals that they do a good job of connecting students for instructional purposes. One study of *Twitter* used for classroom discussion found broader student participation through *Twitter*. Unlike class discussions, often dominated by a handful of speakers, use of the social media platform encourages many more students to offer comments. This was particularly the case with shy students.

Furthermore, social media are about not only text and visualization of reference materials to students and lecturer alike. Social media can take the actual classroom experience to students and lecturers' living rooms via video conferencing. According to West (2012, p. 7) "some education institutions are using Skype phone-video connections to link students around the world, a school in Worcester, Massachusetts, run five concurrent courses using Skype. Every seventh-grader's lab partner is in England. They design wind turbines through another company in Massachusetts."

However, with all these laudable potentials of new media to tertiary education, there are contrary feelings in some quarters of the negative influence of social media on students' pursuit of academic excellence. This is so especially, where there is poor or lack of guidance and counselling of the student on how to use social media. In a study conducted by Adamu (2011), on the impact of third screen i.e. GSM handset on the academic performance of Ahmadu Bello University students, it was found that (45.5%) of the respondents agreed that they use their handset during lectures; (26.95%) agreed that they browse Internet during lecture; and (27.7%) stated they always or sometimes surfed the Internet with handset during lectures. In addition, 30-3% of the respondents agreed that they watch movies and listen to music with their handset during lectures (Alavi, Yoo and Vogel, 1997),

but studies by McGorry (2002) and Lieblein (2000) have shown that social media aid and even improve on the quality of education at tertiary level by giving the students wider horizon and improved content delivery. Furthermore, Redecker, Ala-Mutka and Punie (2010, p. 4) observe that “studies conducted by the Institute for Prospective Technological Studies (IPTS) suggest that the high take up of social media applications outside of formal educational settings provides new opportunities for innovating and modernizing education and training institutions and for preparing learners for the 21st century.”

It is worth emphasizing that social media are not an end; rather they serve as an educational aid which could help students and lecturers alike, to understand the aiding process. According to Redecker, Ala-Mutka and Punie (2010, p. 8):

Social media can lead to innovations in four different dimensions. Firstly, social media allow learners to access a vast variety of (often freely available) learning **content**, which supports learning and professional development in a lifelong learning continuum; contributes to equity and inclusion and puts pressure on education and training institutions to improve the quality and availability of their learning material. Secondly, social media allow users to **create** digital content themselves and publish it online, giving rise to a huge resource of user-generated content from which learners and teachers can mutually benefit, also encouraging more active and pro-active approaches to learning. Thirdly, social media **connect** learners with one another, and to experts and teachers, allowing them to tap into the tacit knowledge of their peers and have access to highly specific and targeted knowledge in a given field of

interest. Fourthly, social media support **collaboration** between learners and teachers on a given project or a joint topic of interest, pooling resources and gathering the expertise and potential of a group of people committed to a common objective.

To this end, social media could be likened to an arena, a social sphere where learning through collaboration, content contribution and sharing of ideas are the order of the day. Unlike the traditional knowledge sharing setting where the teacher knows it all, social media are an extension of andragogic idea of imparting knowledge; where teaching is fun to do and learning is enjoyable. With the social media, almost all that come are equal when it comes to content contribution, content sharing and content mash-ups because not only can audiences comment on or respond to media content created by others; the widespread availability of digital media tools means that people with relatively modest financial resources and basic technological literacy can also create their own media content and contribute to or alter content on other media platforms (West, 2012).

Theoretical Framework

This study is premised on two theoretical perspectives: the technological acceptance model and media ecology theory. The former supports the study on the acceptance level of social media, while the latter deals with the influence of social media on the population under study.

Fred Davis propounded the Technological Acceptance Model in 1986, in his Doctoral thesis at the MIT Sloan School of Management. This model originated from the field of Information Systems. According to Chen, Li and Li (2011, p. 124) “technology acceptance model is one of the most influential research models on studies of the determinants of information systems and information technology acceptance to predict intention to use and

acceptance of information systems and information technology by individuals.” The technology acceptance model tries to explain why society or individuals accept a particular technology. The model explains acceptance from three perspectives:

- I. Perceived ease of use
- II. Perceived usefulness
- III. Attitude toward the technology

According to Chuttur (2009, p. 2) “the attitude of a user toward a system was a major determinant of whether the user will actually use or reject the system. The attitude of the user in turn, was considered to be influenced by two major beliefs; perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use, with perceived ease of use having a direct influence on perceived usefulness.” Thus, the relevance of the model to this study lies in the model's quest to explain why an innovation, which social media represent, would be accepted or not by its potential users.

Marshall McLuhan propounded the Media Ecology Model (MET) in 1964. He explains the influence of technologies such as radio, telephone, television etc on the entire human communication process, by establishing their social impact on the society. “In essence, McLuhan felt societies are highly dependent on mediated technology and that a society's social order is based on its ability to deal with that technology” (West and Turner, 2010, p. 429). This assertion by McLuhan can be clearly identified in our contemporary society with the development of Internet as it changes the environment of mass communication globally. The MET was established on three fundamental assumptions:

- I. Media infuse every act and action in society
- II. Media fix our perceptions and organize our experiences
- III. Media tie the world together

According to West and Turner (2010, p. 429) “Media Ecology Theory centers on the principles that society cannot escape the influence of technology and that technology will

remain central to virtually all walks of life.”

Method

The survey method was used in this study. For the selection of the sample, the authors used probability sampling technique that enables a researcher to draw a sample based on “mathematical guidelines whereby each unit's chance for selection is known” (Wimmer and Dominick, 2011, p. 89). A systematic random sampling approach was used to draw a sample of 150 respondents, from the population of 300 students of HND II mass communication in Nuhu Bamalli Polytechnic. This was carried out through the sampling frame that contains a comprehensive list of all the class members. One unit interval was used to select each unit from the population, which made up the 150 units of the sample population of the study. One hundred and fifty copies of the questionnaire were administered to the sample population of which 141 copies were completed and returned.

Results

The interpretation and analysis of data gathered for this study are presented in tables with the frequency and proportion of each score. Please, note that all tables here were from the authors field survey.

The sex distribution of the respondents indicates that the majority of the respondents (63.83%) are males while females are only (36.17%). In the age group distribution of the respondents, majority are within the age group of 25-30 years with (80.14%). Those within the age group of 31-36 years are the second highest with 10.64%, while the least age group was respondents within 18-24 years with (9.22%).

Table 1: Types of Social Media Used

Social Media	Frequency	%
Facebook, GSM Phone, 2go	125	88.65
Twitter and GSM phone	05	3.55
Relay chat and GSM phone	04	2.84
MySpace and GSM phone	07	4.96
Total	141	100

Table 1 above indicates the responses pertaining the types of social media used by the respondents. The majority (88.6%) are users of Facebook, GSM phone and 2go social media. Those using MySpace and GSM are second with 4.96% of the respondents, followed by those using twitter and GSM with 3.55%.

Table 2: Sources of Information on Social Media

Sources	Frequency	%
Friends	69	48.94
Family	04	2.84
Mass media	52	36.88
School	16	11.35
Total	141	100

Table 2 above indicates the sources through which the respondents get information on social media. The majority 48.94% get to know about social media through their friends, while those who know social media through mass media are second with (3.88%).

Table 3 - Uses of Social Media

Uses	Frequency	%
Academic	45	31.91
Socialization	21	19.89
Networking	03	19.89
Friendship	17	21.06
All of the above	55	39.91
Total	141	100

Table 3 above shows the various uses of social media by the respondents. The majority (39.91%) use social media for all of academic, socialization, networking, and friendship purposes. However, those using social media specifically for academic purposes are second with 31.91%, followed by those that are using them for socialization purpose only with 19.89%. The respondents using them for networking alone are the least with 2.13%.

Table 4: Level of Awareness of Social Media

Level	Frequency	%
High	48	34.04
Average	88	62.41
Low	05	3.55
Total	141	100

Table 4 above shows the awareness levels of social media among the respondents. The majority (62.41%) have an average level of awareness, while 34.04% said their awareness level was high.

Table 5 – Frequency of Use of Social Media

Response	Frequency	%
Everyday	95	67.38
Sometimes in a week	38	26.95
Sometimes in a month	08	5.61
Total	141	100

Table 5 above shows the frequency of use of social media among the respondents. The majority (67.38%) use the social media everyday while those using the social media some times in a week are second with (26.95%).

Table 6 - Determinants of Use of Social Media

Determinants	Frequency	%
Available money	21	14.89
Available time	62	43.97
Available Internet service	20	14.18
All of the above	38	26.95
Total	141	100

Table 6 above shows the factors that determine the use of social media among the respondents. The majority (43.9%) stated that time is the major determinant while those that identified availability of money, time and Internet service, are second.

Table 7 – Means of Accessing Social Media

Means	Frequency	%
GSM phone	09	70.21
Personal computer	10	7.09
Cyber cafes	02	1.42
All of the above	30	21.28
Total	141	100

Table 7 above shows the means through which the respondents accessed social media. The majority (70.21%) used social media through GSM mobile phones while those that accessed them through all of GSM phone, personal computer and cyber café are second with (21.28%).

Table 8- Perceived Effects of Social Media on Respondents' Reading Culture

Perceived Effects	Frequency	%
Strongly agreed	17	12.06
Agree	44	31.21
Neutral	27	19.15
Disagree	40	28.37
Strongly disagree	13	9.22
Total	141	100

Table 8 shows the views of respondents on whether social media distract them from reading their books. The majority (31.21%) and (12.06%) agreed and strongly agreed that social media distract their attention from reading their books while those that disagreed and strongly disagreed are second with (28.37%) and (9.27%) respectively.

Table 9- Contribution of Social Media to Academic Activities

Perceived Contribution	Frequency	%
Strongly agree	60	42.55
Agree	69	48.94
Neutral	06	4.26
Disagree	05	1.42
Strongly disagree	04	2.84
Total	141	100

Table 9 above shows the views of the respondents on contribution of social media to their academic activities. The majority (48.94%) and (42.55%) agreed and strongly agreed respectively that social media are making a positive contribution to their academic activities. Those with neutral views are second (4.26%) followed by the respondents that strongly disagreed and disagreed with (2.84%) and (1.42%) respectively.

Discussion

The above data provided insight about the subject matter. The age and gender distributions of the population have already been analyzed. However, the indication of these findings is that majority of the students of HND Mass Communication that participated in this study are males that are in the core youthful age group of 25 – 30 years. The study was, however, primarily set to find answers to four research questions.

The first research question attempted to investigate sources through which the HND II students of mass communication get to know about social media. Table 2 presented above shows that the majority of the respondents (48.94%) knew about social media through friends. This indicates the significance of friendship and peer groups in disseminating information about social media particularly among students of tertiary institutions. Other sources include the mass media, school, and family with (36.88%), (11.35%) and (2.84%) respectively. The above findings clearly indicate that knowledge of social media did not come to the students through the formal learning processes.

The second research question attempted to investigate the awareness level of social media among the respondents. Table 4 presented above shows that majority of the respondents have average and high level of awareness on social media as indicated by (62.41%) and (34.04%) respectively. Table 5 above shows that the majority of the respondents are using social media everyday and sometimes in a week with (67.38%) and (26.95%) respectively. In addition, Table 1 shows that the majority of the respondents use *facebook*, GSM phone and *2go* with 88.65%.

Very few use other types of social media like *twitter*, *MySpace* and relay chat.

The indication of these findings is that the respondents are using only very few of the various types of social media available, as there are many other social media that the respondents don't know about like *Wikis*, blogging, *Skype*, *YouTube* etc which are normally used by mass media organization to receive feedback and interact with their audience. This finding is in line with the first two main assumptions of the Technology Acceptance Model that people accept a particular technology base on the perceived ease of use and usefulness to their life. In addition, it corroborates the assertion of Chu (2011, p. 31) that social media have become the most popular channels of communication among student Internet users as discussed in the literature review.

The third research question attempted to investigate the student's use of social media. Table 3 presented above shows that majority (39.91%) of the respondents use social media for academic, socialization, networking and friendship purposes. Table 7 shows that majority (70.21%) of the respondent's accessed social media through GSM mobile phones. Also, Table 6 shows that majority of the respondents (43.97%) and (26.95%) stated that available time, money, and Internet service are the major factors that determine their use of social media respectively.

Another indication of these findings is that the respondents use social media for various reasons. In addition, GSM phone is the most popular source through which they use social media. This is because GSM plays a dual role in the social media industry. It can be used for interaction through phone calls from one to one or one to many and it can be used to access almost all other types of social media, depending on the capability of a particular handset. These findings are in line with the assertion of Mayfield (2008) and Papacharissi (2010) that social media are capable of affecting every aspect of people's social interaction. Also, the findings support the last assumption of the Technology Acceptance Model that people accept new technology based on their attitude towards the technology and the last two assumptions of media ecology

theory that stated that media determine our perceptions and arrange our experiences, and media bring the world together as discussed in the literature review.

The fourth research question attempted to investigate whether the use of social has negative effect on the academic activities of the students. Table 8 shows that majority of the respondents, (31.21%) and (12.06%) agreed and strongly agreed respectively, that social media distract their attention from reading their books. On the other hand, Table 9 shows that majority of the respondents, (48.94%) and (42.55%) agreed and strongly agreed respectively, that using social media has imparted positively on their academic engagements.

The consequence of these findings is that the students' use of social media is poorly planned hence it has a negative effect on their academic activities. That is why they devote most of their time to them at the expense of their studies. In addition, social media are part of student's life, which requires proper guidance from lecturers so that they create positive impact on the students. These findings are in line with the first assumption of Media Ecology Theory that the media infuse every action in human societies and the assertion by Selwyn (2011) and West (2012) that people live every aspect of their life on social media. Also, it corroborates with the findings of the study of Adamu (2011) that the students usually browse the Internet and even watch movies with their handsets during lectures as discussed in the literature review.

Conclusion

Social media are sophisticated communication channels that are inevitable in our contemporary communication activities. However, their operations are associated with several challenges to social institutions in the society. "Each advance in communication increases our power to convey and record information, and each has played a role in prompting significant changes in our culture and society" (Dominick, 2011, p. 76). Higher education sector in Nigeria is one of the areas affected by the revolution of social media. Therefore, parents should intensify efforts to guide their children on when, how and what

they search on the Internet. In addition, government and management of the tertiary institution should initiate a policy that will incorporate formal training and guidance of students on social media uses and their implications to student's academic activities. "The role of educator is not to condemn or dismiss youth practices, but to help youth understand how their practices fit into a broader societal context" (Boyd et al, 2007).

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