

Undergraduates' Awareness and Attitude towards the Potential Dangers of Social Media Use in University of Ibadan, Nigeria

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Abstract

The social media creates the platform where undergraduates can communicate and share information with family members, friends and lecturers. Despite the perceived benefits of social media use, there are also potential dangers associated with the use. The aim of this study is to examine undergraduates' awareness and attitude toward the potential dangers of social media use in the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. Descriptive survey method was adopted for the study and the population comprised of undergraduates in the thirteen faculties of University of Ibadan, Nigeria. The multistage sampling technique was used to select the sample size of 290 and the questionnaire was the data collection instrument. Results showed that most of the respondents 270 (93.1%) ranked Facebook as the most used social media platform. The respondents had high level of awareness as regards the potential dangers associated with the use of social media like sharing too much information and exposure to inappropriate contents. Findings also showed that most of the undergraduates 235 (81.1%) had the right attitude as regards the use of the social media as they maintained privacy while online. Even though the social media can be used in a beneficial way by the undergraduates, the dangers associated with the use are also real. Undergraduates should be careful of the nature and volume of information they share online.

Keywords: Undergraduates; Awareness; Attitude; Social Media; Nigeria

1. Introduction

Advancement in the field of technology has revolutionized social communication and interactions. The social media have created a platform where transfer of information in different formats is no longer limited by time and space. Individuals on different continents can share information in text, audio and video formats at any time of the day on the social media. The social media can be described as collaborative environments backed by web 2.0 technologies that enable content creation, sharing, discovering and exchange of user-generated content in a participatory way (Choi 2012; Chu and Du 2013). With internet enabled device and connection, individuals can create profiles, post comments, pictures and videos, view pictures and videos of others and even comment on their posts. With the use of the social media, the opportunity to connect with lost friends is second to none. The social media have also created a platform for instant messaging.

Chapman (2009) provided insight into the history of the social media. The earliest form of social media that came to the scene in the late 90's were "Forums", that encouraged interest based discussions between individuals on particular topics. Next was SixDegrees in 1997, which acted like the Facebook of today where users can create profiles and have friends. In 2002, Friendster, which is still in existence provided a platform where friends of friends can be networked. The year 2003 witnessed the arrival of Photobucket, the first prominent photo-sharing site on the web. LinkedIn was created also in 2003 to provide the first business or colleague based social network. Also in 2003, Myspace that allows users to create original backgrounds, embed slideshows and play music was established and it grew to be the largest social media site in 2006. In 2004, Facebook started out as a Harvard-only networking site. But as time passes, it offers the rest of the world the opportunity to create profiles, groups and fan pages. Pictures, videos, audio and comments can be shared with friends. In 2008, Facebook surpassed Myspace as the largest social media site. Digg was created also in 2004 to allow users share links and other web-based information. YouTube debuted as the prominent video-based social site in 2005 and Twitter which offers micro-blogging, status based service came to the scene in 2006.

Since then, there have been different types of social media platforms. Kim, Sin and Young Yoo-Lee (2014) categorized the social media platforms as Wikipedia, Social networking sites (for example Facebook); User Reviews (such as reviews in Amazon.com); Video sharing sites (YouTube); Social question and answer sites (for instance, Yahoo! Answers); Blogs and Microblogs (example Twitter). Though not exhaustive, this categorization reveals the different aspects of the social media. At present, the social media platform with the highest number of users is Facebook. According to a British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) report issued on August 28, 2015, Facebook gained its billionth user in October 2012 and has nearly 1.5 billion users who log in at least once a month. This figure reveals the pervasiveness of this social network and indeed of the social media. Individuals from all walks of life and in different countries utilize the social media quite regularly. Undergraduate students are a unique category of social media users. By virtue of their age group and exposure in the university environment, some undergraduates are technologically savvy and their need for social acceptance and interactions encourage them to use these social media sites.

Studies have established that undergraduates are active users of the social media, with Facebook as the most used social media platform. Undergraduates also used the social media for different purposes and at varying frequency. Wang, Chen and Liang (2011) studied the effects of social

media on college students in John and Wales University, Rhode Island, United States and found out that 60% indicated that they used Facebook, 22% chose Skype, 10% for Twitter and 8%, Myspace. Findings from the study further showed that 55% of the respondents used the social media for fun, 25% to make new friends and 20% to complete school assignments. As regards the frequency of use of social media, 45% spent 6-8 hours per day, 23% spent more than 8 hours, 20% spent 2-4 hours and 12% spent less than 2 hours.

Ezumah (2013) assessed college students' use of the social media at a four-year public university in the Mid-Western Region of the United States. Purposive sampling technique was used to select students between 18-28 years of age. Results collected through the use of the questionnaire showed that most of the respondents affirmed that Facebook was their favorite social media platform, followed by Twitter. In fact, 99% of the respondents said they had a Facebook account that they accessed for at least 5 hours per day. Findings also revealed that 98.9% of the respondents said they used the social media for keeping in touch with friends, 81.7% for sharing photos, 79.3% for keeping in touch with family and 70.9% for entertainment.

Aramide, Ladipo and Adepoju (2015) examined social media utilization and addiction among the undergraduate students of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria and also discovered that 90.2% of the respondents said Facebook was the most accessible social media. This was also followed by Twitter, as noted by 77.6% of the undergraduates. Majority of the respondents 65.2% and 56.1% noted that they used Facebook and Twitter on a regular basis. On the purpose of use, 78.2% utilized the social media to make friends, 67.9% for news, 66.5% for communication and 54.0% for online learning.

The use of Facebook and other social media platforms by undergraduates can be indeed beneficial. Eke, Omekwu and Odoh (2014) noted that the use of the social media can benefit the undergraduate students as it encourages virtual meeting with scholars and co-students, increases self esteem and well being, helps in learning and research, support collaborative and peer to peer learning, and also helps in strengthening interpersonal relationships. Undergraduates can also use the social media to get clarifications on assignments and projects, interact with their lecturers and facilitators. It also creates an environment where new friends and lifelong friendship can be made and formed.

Despite the perceived benefits of social media use by undergraduates, there are also potential dangers associated with the use of social media. These dangers may seem latent, but their consequences can be disastrous to the academic and social activities of the undergraduates if adequate steps are not taken to avoid them. The UK's Home Office (2008) outlined some dangers associated with the use of the social media as bullying, harassment, exposure to harmful content, theft of personal information, sexual grooming, violent behavior, encouragement to self harm and racist attacks. Other related potential dangers include exposure to pornographic images, audio and videos, sexting and internet addiction. Kuppaswamy and Shankar (2010) also explained that the social media have the capacity to grab the total attention and concentration of undergraduates and divert it towards non-educational unethical and inappropriate actions such as useless chatting and procrastination.

In order to guard against these potential dangers, undergraduates need to be aware. The study by Eke, Omekwu and Odoh (2014) on the use of social networking sites among undergraduates in University of Nigeria, Nsukka showed that some undergraduates within the Nigeria context are

aware of dangers associated with the use of the social media. Findings from this study showed that the undergraduates were aware that the use of the social media could lead to; internet addiction with a mean of 3.40, laziness (mean=3.16); crime like identity theft (mean=3.08); waste of time (mean=3.04); lack of privacy (mean=2.76); immoral acts like prostitution and pornography viewing (mean=2.52) and lastly child abuse (mean=2.50).

This level of awareness will only be meaningful when it is backed up with the right attitude by the undergraduates. This is because even when undergraduates are aware of the potential dangers associated with the use of the social media, they could still fall into the dangers if their attitude shows otherwise. DeLambo et al (2011) concluded after studying the social media, that users of the social media, including undergraduates are quite comfortable disclosing large amounts of personal information, which could put them at risk if they do not exercise caution in using strategies to protect their privacy and reputation. It is in this light that the study investigated undergraduates' awareness and attitude towards the potential dangers of social media use in the University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

1.2 Research questions

The following are the research questions for the study;

1. What are the most used social media platforms by undergraduates of the University of Ibadan?
2. Why do undergraduates of the University of Ibadan use the social media platforms?
3. What is the frequency of use of the social media platforms by undergraduates of University of Ibadan?
4. What is the level of awareness of undergraduates of the University of Ibadan on the potential dangers of social media use?
5. What is the attitude of undergraduates of University of Ibadan as regards the potential dangers of social media use?

2. Methodology

The descriptive survey was used to carry out this study and the population consisted of 12173 undergraduate students of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria from 100 level to final year in all the thirteen faculties. The multistage random sampling technique was adopted. In the first stage, three faculties were randomly selected with the use of the balloting method. The second stage involved the purposive selection of two departments with the highest number of undergraduates from the three faculties. The last stage of sampling involved the selection of the sample size from the departments with the use of 20% sampling fraction. The justification for this sampling fraction came from Singh (2006) who suggested that one should select 10-20% of the accessible population for the sample. With the use of this sampling fraction, the sample size was 290. A self constructed questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection and descriptive statistics of frequencies, tables and percentage counts were used for data analysis.

3. Results

A total of 290 copies of the questionnaire were administered to the undergraduate students of University of Ibadan and all copies were duly completed and returned. This represents a 100% response rate.

3.1 Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Table 1 showed that most of the respondents 118 (40.7%) were in 300 level, while 3 (1.0%) were in 500 level. The undergraduates that participated in the study consisted of more females 150 (51.7%) as against males 140 (48.3%). Majority of the respondents were between 21-25 years of age, 166 (57.2%) lived on campus and 172 (59.3%) had a personal monthly income that was below #10,000.

3.2. What are the most used social media platforms by undergraduates of the University of Ibadan?

Table 2 presented the analysis of the social media platforms used by undergraduates of University of Ibadan. Findings indicated that the most used social media platform was Facebook, this was noted by 270 (93.1%) of the respondents. This was distantly followed by Google+ with 110 (37.9%), YouTube with 106 (36.6%) and Twitter with 90 (31.0%). The least used social media platform was LinkedIn, as 275 (94.8%) of the undergraduates stated that they never used LinkedIn.

Table 1 Demographic characteristics of respondents

Variables		Frequency	Percentage
Level of study	100	51	17.6
	200	79	27.2
	300	118	40.7
	400	39	13.4
	500	3	1.0
Gender	Male	140	48.3
	Female	150	51.7
Age Range	16 – 20 years	69	23.8
	21 – 25 years	159	54.8
	26 – 30 years	55	19.0
	31 – 35 years	7	2.4
Residence	School Hostel	166	57.2
	Off campus	105	36.2
	Home	19	6.6
Personal Monthly Income	Below #10,000	172	59.3
	#10,000 - #19,000	50	17.2
	#20,000 - #29,000	26	9.0
	#30,000 - #39,000	13	4.5
	#40,000 - #49,000	9	3.1
	#50,000+	20	6.9

Table 2 Social media platform used by undergraduates of the University of Ibadan

s/n	Social media	Yes		No		Ranking
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%	
1	Facebook	270	93.1	20	6.9	1
2	Google+	110	37.9	180	62.1	2
3	YouTube	106	36.6	184	63.4	3
4	Twitter	90	31.0	200	69.0	4
5	Blogs	54	18.6	236	81.4	5
6	Skype	50	17.2	240	82.8	6
7	Instagram	48	16.6	242	83.4	7
8	Academia.edu	43	14.8	247	85.2	8
9	MySpace	34	11.7	256	88.3	9
10	LinkedIn	15	5.2	275	94.8	10

3.3. Why do undergraduates of the University of Ibadan use the social media platforms?

Table 3 showed that the undergraduates used the social media platforms for various purposes. Majority of the respondents 285 (98.3%) agreed they used the social media to send message and communicate with friends and family, 256 (88.3%) also agreed that read news and entertainment stories about celebrities on the social media and 245 (84.5%) uploaded photos. On the other hand, more than half of the undergraduates 164 (56.5%) disagreed that they used the social media platforms for dating and building relationships.

Table 3 Purpose of use of social media by undergraduates of University of Ibadan

s/n	Purpose of use	A		D	
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%
1.	Send message and communicate with friends and family	285	98.3	5	1.7
2.	Read news and stories (entertainment and celebrities)	256	88.3	34	11.8
3.	Current affairs	244	84.1	46	15.8
4.	Join online discussion forum	234	80.7	56	19.3
5.	Install applications	240	82.7	50	17.3
6.	Write/read blogs	235	81.0	55	19.0
7.	Upload photos	245	84.5	45	15.6
8.	Listen to favourite music	224	77.3	66	22.8
9.	Creating and customizing profiles	206	71.0	84	29.0
10.	Making and developing friendships/contacts	218	75.1	72	24.8
11.	Looking at the profiles of other people	193	66.5	97	33.5
12.	Eavesdropping (sensing other people’s activities on social networking websites and analyzing their posts)	159	54.9	131	45.1
13.	Dating and building relationships	126	43.5	164	56.5

3.4. What is the frequency of use of the social media platforms by undergraduates of University of Ibadan?

Results indicated that 163 (56.2%), 67 (23.1%) and 38 (13.1%) of the undergraduates acknowledged that they made use of Facebook, Google+ and Twitter daily. While, majority of the respondents 172 (59.3%), 164 (56.6%), 154 (53.1%) and 140 (48.3%) noted that they never used LinkedIn, MySpace, Instagram and Skype (Table 4).

Table 4 Frequency of use of social media by undergraduates in University of Ibadan

s/n	Social media	Daily		Twice weekly		Weekly		Monthly		Seldom		Never	
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
1.	Facebook	163	56.2	49	16.9	32	11.0	9	3.1	25	8.6	12	4.1
2.	Google+	67	23.1	78	26.9	29	10.0	21	7.2	14	4.8	81	27.9
3.	Academia.edu	37	12.8	57	19.7	36	12.4	34	11.7	18	6.2	108	37.2
4.	Twitter	38	13.1	40	13.8	47	16.2	39	13.4	19	6.6	107	36.9
5.	YouTube	19	6.6	57	19.7	35	12.1	43	14.8	27	9.3	109	37.6
6.	Blogs	26	9.0	34	11.7	45	15.5	26	9.0	18	6.2	141	48.6
7.	Instagram	22	7.6	48	16.6	35	12.1	19	6.6	12	4.1	154	53.1
8.	Skype	28	9.7	34	11.7	29	10.0	25	8.6	34	11.7	140	48.3
9.	MySpace	17	5.9	38	13.1	34	11.7	24	8.3	13	4.5	164	56.6
10.	LinkedIn	11	3.8	30	10.3	37	12.8	21	7.2	19	6.6	172	59.3

3.5. What is the level of awareness of undergraduates of the University of Ibadan on the potential dangers of social media use?

The results presented in Table 5 revealed that the undergraduates had a very high level of awareness of the potential dangers of social media use. Findings showed that 242 (83.5%), 240 (82.8%) and 231 (79.7%) had a high level of awareness that lack of privacy, sharing too much information and exposure to inappropriate contents were some of the potential dangers associated with the use of the social media. In addition, 228 (78.6%) and 222 (76.5%) of the respondents also averred that posting false information and decline in study habits were also potential dangers of social media use.

3.6. What is the attitude of undergraduates of University of Ibadan as regards the potential dangers of social media use?

Table 6 showed the attitude of undergraduates as regards the potential dangers of social media use. Most of the respondents 235 (81.1%) stated that they maintained privacy when online, while 209 (72.1%) expressed that they slept very late whenever they used the social media. Majority of the respondents 191 (65.8%) also expressed that the use of the social media does not have any negative effect on their academic activities. Most of undergraduates 121 (41.8%) and 109 (37.5%) also disagreed that online harassment is a normal thing on the social media and that there is no big deal sharing personal information about themselves online.

Table 5 Awareness of undergraduates on the potential dangers of social media use in University of Ibadan

s/n	Awareness	High		Low	
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%
1.	Sharing too much information	240	82.8	50	17.2
2.	Posting false information about themselves or others	228	78.6	62	21.3
3.	Exposure to inappropriate contents	231	79.7	59	20.4
4.	Lack of privacy	242	83.5	48	16.5
5.	Decline in study habits	222	76.5	68	23.5
6.	Significant drop in grades	190	65.6	100	34.5
7.	Online harassment and cyber bullying	198	68.3	92	31.7
8.	Feeling of loneliness and social isolation	191	65.8	99	34.1
9.	Starring on screen for too long results in health issues relating to eye problems	194	66.9	96	33.1

10.	Sexual experimentation	170	58.6	120	41.4
11.	Severe psychological distress, such as depression, anxiety	174	60.0	116	40.0
12.	Missing classes	172	59.3	118	40.7
13.	Poor integration in extracurricular activities	171	59.0	119	41.1

Table 6 Attitude of undergraduates towards the potential dangers of social media use in University of Ibadan

s/n	Attitude	SA		A	
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%
1.	I usually maintain privacy when online	235	81.1	55	19
2.	Sometimes I sleep very late when using the social media	209	72.1	81	28
3.	The use of social media does not have any negative effect on my academic activities	191	65.8	99	34.2
4.	I feel quite comfortable disclosing large amounts of personal information not minding the consequences	155	53.5	135	46.6
5.	I really do not care who view the information I post online	141	48.6	149	51.4
6.	There is no big deal sharing personal information about myself online	109	37.5	181	62.4
7.	Online harassment is a normal thing on the social media	121	41.8	169	58.3

3.7 Discussion of findings

Majority of the undergraduates ranked Facebook as their most used social media platform. This result is consistent with the findings of Wang, Chang and Liang (2011) and Aramide, Ladipo and Adepoju (2015) who in their separate studies of undergraduates in United States and Nigeria discovered that most of their respondents also agreed that Facebook was their most used social media. This result alludes to the fact that Facebook is indeed the social media with the largest number with over a billion users at present.

Results also indicated that majority of the undergraduates utilized the social media to send message and communicate with friends and family members. This is consistent with the findings of Ezumah (2013) who found out that most of the undergraduates sampled noted that they used the social media to keep in touch with family members and friends. The social media platforms provide alternative to voice calls, and as such most individuals including undergraduates can chat extensively with their family and friends for hours. This they may not be able to do via telephone calls due to the cost of airtime, especially as most of the undergraduates in this study noted that their average monthly allowance was below #10000.

Most of the undergraduates indicated that they used Facebook daily, while some of them also noted that Google+ and Twitter were also used daily. This is in agreement with the findings of Aramide, Ladipo and Adepoju (2015) who reported that most of the undergraduates they studied said that they used Facebook and Twitter on a regular basis. This implies that despite the rigors of academic activities, most undergraduates make it a point of duty to check their social media accounts daily for updates and to communicate with family and friends.

The level of awareness of the undergraduates as regards the potential dangers associated with the use of the social media was very high. This is similar to the results of the study conducted by Eke, Omekwu and Odoh (2014) where internet addiction, crime like identity theft, waste of time, lack of privacy, immoral acts like prostitution and pornography viewing and lastly child abuse were part of dangers highlighted by the undergraduates that could result from social media use with high mean scores. This result showed that most undergraduates are aware that if the social media platforms are not used rightly, serious dangers await them.

The findings also highlighted that most undergraduates had the right attitude towards the potential dangers associated with the use of the social media, as they were weary of what they posted online and also cared about who viewed their posts. This is a deviation from the conclusion reached by DeLambo et al (2011) that users of the social media, including undergraduates are quite comfortable disclosing large amounts of personal information, which could put them at risk if they do not exercise caution in using strategies to protect their privacy and reputation. This display of attitude could be as a result of the fact that most undergraduates are learning from the real life cases of identity theft, fraud and at times rape and death that befall some individuals as results of the use of the social media.

4 Conclusion and Recommendations

The use of the social media has no doubt brought about increase in social communication and interactions between individuals. With the use of the social media, undergraduates can share information as regards their education, politics, sports and health. The social media platforms have also created an avenue where societal issues are discussed and where opinions are shaped. However, the potential dangers associated with the use of the social media are real and many individuals have fallen victims. Undergraduates should bring their knowledge and exposure to bear by exhibiting a high level of consciousness of the dangers inherent in the use of the social media. The social media can be a very good tool if used carefully and can also be a harmful tool if used carelessly. In order to ensure that undergraduates utilize the social media in the way that will not be dangerous, the study recommended that university management and school-based organizations should periodically organize sensitization programs on how the social media can be used rightly and in a balanced way by undergraduates. It is also very important for undergraduates to be careful of their activities on the social media, especially it relates to the nature and volume of information they share.

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