

Online Social Networking Practices of Some Nigerian University Undergraduates: Implications for Counselling.

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Abstract.

In the attempt to improve academic performance of students, there must be a strong link between learner's pre-requisite knowledge and current learning task. The pre-requisite knowledge of the learner is fostered by the real world he/she is exposed to. Currently, a prominent feature of this world is the internet with its associated life enriching facilities. Further, if test score is to reflect learning, test items should take into account interest and everyday life of the testee. The study reported on in this paper investigated the online social networking practices of some undergraduates of the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria. It was found that exposure to, and competence in, online social networking practice are factors affected by level of study and gender of the undergraduates. To make classroom instructional events relevant to the real world of students therefore, Counsellors need to establish helping relationship with students as online social network practices is appropriately utilised to complement classroom learning activities.

Keywords: Social networking, Internet usage, Counselling needs, Ibadan

1. Introduction

Schooling, as formal education, is guided by well defined curriculum. It serves as vehicle for transmitting, what is available to the collective intellect of members of the community (in terms of knowledge, skills and cherished values), to its emerging members. However, for continuity and development, every community must conserve its knowledge, values and skills and introduce innovations as occasions demand. This would ensure relevance to the international community since no community can afford to be isolated from other parts of the world. In other words, radical changes as innovative initiatives should regularly reform conserved cherished values, set as national goals to be achieved through education, for any community to justify its continued existence and relevance, as well as, ensure development.

It is therefore crucial that every community must take keen interest in what goes on in its school system particularly in terms of curriculum provision, and more importantly the impact of the curriculum on learners exposed to it. In this connection, it should be noted that various studies (e.g. Anderson, 1973; Fraser & Fisher, 1983; Fraser, 1986; Ndoye, 2002; Akindehin, 2004; 2005; 2006; 2007) have found that classroom learning activities determine effect of schooling more than any other factor such as learner background characteristics or school level environment. Attempts to enhance school learning must therefore focus on the classroom.

An indication of the quality of learning that takes place in the classroom is the performance of students in external examinations especially certificate examinations. Such standard examinations can be seen as a common denominator for comparing the academic attainment of all students at the same educational level. One may therefore consider the performance of students at the end of secondary education in this regard. The West Africa Secondary School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) presents acceptable picture of the standard of learning at the end of secondary school education in Nigeria.

Over the years, the performance of students in the WASSCE has not been cheering. The percentage of students who obtained credit passes in five subjects including English Language and Mathematics in the years 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2009 were 19.24, 20.27, 23.62, and 29.93 respectively (WAEC, 2010). The percentage went down to 23 in 2010, but rose slightly to 30.99 in 2011 (Belo-Osagie, 2011). Also it has been observed that in the same examination, only 12 to 15 percent of candidates pass a minimum of five subjects at credit level in one sitting (Oguntuashe, 2011). It should be noted that the admission requirement to tertiary institutions in Nigeria emphasises credit passes in five subjects including English Language and Mathematics at not more than two sittings. This implies that students who do not measure up to this level of performance could not be said to have gained much from secondary education. The chances of a bright future for such student are rather slim. It is therefore important to explore how to raise the standard of learning at the secondary school level.

The Counsellor, as a major helping professional, should be concerned with this situation. This is in consonance with the fact that the Counsellor is the only helping discipline that adopts preventive, remedial as well as developmental approaches as it diagnoses and offers treatment (Alterkruse, Haris & Brandt, 2001). This is where the Counsellor stands out distinctly

among other helping disciplines like Psychologists, Psychiatrists, Social Workers, Family Therapists or Pastoral Care. This in practical terms implies that the Counsellor can by intervention prevent problems before they arise. He can also assess and treat problems as they arise (Kottler, 2004).

The issue of mass failure of students in the WASSCE is a problem that should be of utmost concern that the Counsellor may wish to assess and offer appropriate treatment. This could be by paying attention to classroom learning activities, particularly the quality of instruction. One notes in this respect that, through information communication technology (ICT), there were global school programmes linking classrooms in different parts of the world for improved academic performance (Smith, 1997). Ever since, ICT had been developed and refined to the level that there now exists online social communities as a result of social networking through the internet. Now there are social network sites (e.g. MySpace, Facebook Cyword) which many users have integrated into their daily practices. Social network sites (SNS) allow individuals to identify other users with whom they interact freely (Boyd & Ellison, 2007) resulting in connections between individuals that would not otherwise be made and with whom they take interest and share offline interests (Boyd, 2007; Haythornthwaite, 2005; Zinman & Donath, 2007; Donath & Boyd, 2004; Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe; 2007). The Counsellor may wish to explore the possibility of initiating helping relationships with students and then encourage them to be involved in online social networking through which students can seek information on learning task to complement what was provided by the teacher. This way, students would be equipped to independently search for and appropriately use information. In addition, through the intervention of the Counsellor, students would be enabled to actively engage in learning, ask questions, focus on learning task, enjoy learning and be a life-long learner (Akindehin, 2006; Miller, Ferguson & Byrne, 2000; Mann, 2005; Hudicourt-Barnes, 2003), In effect school learning would be enhanced.

Helping relationships offer opportunity to assist another person to “... make self-determined improvements in behaviour, feelings or thought” (Kottler, 2004). In particular, it has long been realised that, Counselling as a helping professional establishes helping relationships with a client seeing him as a being to be understood rather than to be analysed (May, 1983). To understand the client, the Counsellor must obtain unbiased, useful information. If SNS is to be made relevant to classroom learning events in the Nigerian school system, we need information on social networking practices of our youths. It would be of interest to find out:

- Ways in which online and offline experiences are deeply entwined
- The extent to which online discussions are affected by problems of offline activities
- If the adoption of particular services correlates with individual’s gender, age or educational level.

The study reported in this paper investigated social networking practices of some undergraduates in terms of competence in internet usage, frequency of and experience in the use of the internet. The study also considered how much influence the use of social networking services has on interpersonal relationships, entertainment, convenience, information seeking as well as relaxation.

Information on undergraduate's social networking practices is considered in this study as appropriate basis for exploring further the prospect for recommending social networking as reform initiatives to complement classroom learning events at different educational levels. This has far reaching implications for the counsellor as, through helping relationship, he/she would need to design appropriate intervention programmes for the classroom.

2. Method

2.1 Instrument

A questionnaire- the Internet Usage Questionnaire (IUQ) - was developed and validated for the study. It is in two sections. Section A contains items that request for personal data (age, gender and level of study) from respondents. The items in Section B of the IUQ requested respondents to provide information on the use of SNS in terms of proficiency, frequency as well as length of time. Other items in this section of the IUQ were designed to obtain information from respondents on the extent to which social networking has affected interpersonal relationships, entertainment, convenience, information seeking as well as relaxation. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of IUQ was found to be 0.545.

2.2 Study population

The IUQ was administered to undergraduates of the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria. Five hundred copies of the instrument were administered to a random selection of undergraduates in the university. The students were from one hundred to six hundred levels of study. In all 432 copies of the questionnaire were available for analysis.

2.3 Data analysis

The issue of test interpretation in psychological testing has been of interest to Counselling psychologists in qualitative and quantitative studies (Creswell, Hanson, PlanoClark & Morales, 2007; Lefaiivre, Chambers& Fernandey, 2007). As to studies in helping relationships in particular, the distinction is often made between clinical and statistical significance, in the interpretation of test scores (Kettler, 2004). In all, the crucial point to note is the need for substantive interpretation of data without distortion of reality, in all areas of behavioural research. In this connection Akindehin (1986) found the multivariate analytical technique, which has facilities for "... dealing separately and simultaneously with multiple outcome measures..." as most appropriate, particularly the Discriminant analysis model (Akindehin, 1991). Besides, multivariate analysis is appropriate for testing competing theories (James, 2011).

The data obtained with the IUQ was processed for analysis. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used in the analysis. The Discriminant Analysis sub programme of the SPSS was employed and the stepwise option was adopted. The grouping variables were Age, Gender and Level of Study. Age was a five level categorical variable; Gender had the usual two levels, while Level of Study was in six levels. The five levels for Age in years were 18 or less; 19-24; 25-30; 31-35; above 35. The following were the discriminating variables:

- Proficiency in internet usage

- Frequency of internet usage
- Years of internet usage
- Effect of internet usage on inter personal relationships
- Effect of internet usage on entertainment
- Effect of internet usage on convenience
- Effect of internet usage on information seeking
- Effect of internet usage on relaxation.

In effect there were nine discriminating variables for each of the three grouping variables.

3. Result and discussion

The result of the computations showed that with Age as the grouping variable none of the discriminating variables could be entered into the Discriminant equation. This implies that there was no significant difference among the age groups in terms of the discriminating variables. This finding suggests that social networking does not depend on age among the undergraduates involved in this study.

As to Level of Study, two of the discriminating variables were found to discriminate significantly among undergraduates at different levels of study (Table 1).

Table1: Discriminant Analysis Summary Table

Step	Variable entered	Wilk's Lambda	Significance Level
1	Years of usage	0.950	0.006
2	Proficiency of usage	0.917	0.002

For both variables, the Wilk's Lambda "... a measure of group discrimination ..." (Klecka 1980) was found to be significant. This implies that the two variables significantly discriminate among the groups. The best discriminating variable was Years of usage, followed by Proficiency of usage. It could be inferred from this result that in social networking the most prominent factors affected by level of study among undergraduates involved in this study are experience and competence. The next stage in the analysis was to derive discriminating functions. The discriminating function is an indication of the separation of the groups (Klecka, 1975). With a six level grouping variable a maximum of five functions are derivable. However, only two functions were derived (Table 2). The Eigenvalues as seen from the table were 0.070 for the first function and 0.020 for the second function. Thus the Eigenvalue of the first function is about 3.5 times that of the second function. This means that much of the discrimination among the groups is accounted for by the first function. Table 2 also shows that the percentage of variance for the first function is 78, and for the second function it is 22. This is another indication of the relative importance of the two functions. With a canonical correlation of 0.256, about 6 percent of the variance in the first function is explained by the groups

Table 2: Summary of Canonical Discriminant Function

Eigenvalues					
Function	Eigenvalue	% of Variance	Canonical Correlation		
1	0.070	78	0.256		
2	0.020	22	0.139		
Test of Functions	Wilk's Lambda	Chi-square	df	Sig. Level	
1 through 2	0.917	27.444	10	0.002	
2	0.981	6.145	4	0.189	

In the test of significance of the functions also shown in Table 2, Wilk's Lambda (0.917) with chi-square of 27.444 is significant at the 0.002 level. However, the value of Wilk's Lambda after the first function had been derived increased to 0.981. This increase in the value of Wilk's Lambda is an indication that much information on the discrimination among the groups is contained in the first and only significant function. As seen in Table 2, the chi-square computed for the second function was not significant. This confirms the earlier finding that the discrimination among the groups is explained better by the first function. The differences in social networking practices among the undergraduates at different levels of study are therefore fully explained with the first and only significant function. The analysis then proceeds further to consider the variables that contribute to the two functions derived (Table 3).

Table 3: Standardized Canonical Discriminant Function Coefficient

Variable	Function	
	1	2
Years of Usage	0.953	-0.387
Proficiency	0.599	0.836

While Years of Usage contributes more to the first function (0.953), Proficiency contributes more to the second function (0.836). Since the second function was not significant, Years of usage (experience) seems to be the explanation for the significant differences in online social networking among undergraduates at different levels of study. This finding suggests that experience in online social networking should be given appropriate prominence among students. Next to experience is competence. However, both may be related in that one would normally expect that experience would foster competence.

The other grouping variable considered in this study is gender. It was found from the analysis that Years of usage is the only variable that could be entered into the Discriminant equation. In effect experience significantly discriminates between male and female undergraduates involved in this study. With years of usage as significant discriminating variable the Wilk's Lambda

(0.968) obtained in the computations was significant at 0.000 level. The Eigenvalue of the only canonical Discriminant function was 0.33 and the canonical correlation was 0.178. The percentage of variance of the Eigenvalue was 100. Further, the Wilk's Lambda of the Discriminant function (0.968) had a chi-square of 12.605 and was significant at 0.000 level. This finding again emphasises experience in online social networking practices as crucial to the undergraduates involved in this study.

Some points stand out from these findings. One is that age does not affect online social networking practices of undergraduates involved in this study. Students could be encouraged therefore to be involved in online social networking at the appropriate level of competence and sophistication. It has in fact been found that many youths, in Nigeria, are involved in social networking (Augoye, 2011). They must have acquired the skill incidentally in the course of daily living. They need to be formally guided and monitored in online social network practices to bring out desirable effect, particularly in promoting school learning. The counsellor has much at stake in this regard. Another point from the findings of this study is the importance of exposure to, and competence in online social networking. It was found from this study that exposure and competence take precedence over effect of online social networking on such issues as interpersonal relationships, entertainment, convenience, information seeking or relaxation. There is hope then that online social networking can be an instructional instrument for use to enhance school learning when it complements classroom learning activities. This is not the case as at now in most public schools in Nigeria.

As we pay attention to classroom learning activities, we should note that ours is an age of knowledge revolution where the economy is knowledge driven. Nigerian youths are exposed to this with a demand put on them for skills of the 21st century- competence in communication, problem solving and reasoning (Grubb & Lazerson, 2005). Classroom learning activities of our time must emphasise cognitive, interpersonal and intrapersonal development (Hong, Green & Higgins, 2006), if we are to prepare youths for this real world. But school learning is affected by learner's pre-requisite knowledge as well as the aspect of learner's existing knowledge activated during learning (Mayer, 1975). Moreover, since learning is understanding new things and looking for new ways of doing things (Hubbard, 2004), there has to be a strong link between learner's existing knowledge and the current learning task. In other words, classroom learning activities must be made relevant to the real world of the learner (Kiyosaki & Lechter, 2000). Currently, an important feature of this real world is the internet. There should be a way of bringing the internet into the classroom. This would not be difficult to achieve since, as a matter of fact, Nigerian youths today readily understand and operate electronic devices to the admiration of their parents. They follow global issues, particularly the world of sports and games, with rapt attention. They painstakingly watch series of foreign films, understand the story line, and critique them effortlessly. Yet, as noted earlier in this paper, these same youths perform below expectation in public examinations like WASSCE. We are then faced with the question of what is taught in Nigerian classrooms and what is tested in public examinations.

It has since been realised that test scores are affected by such factors as familiarity with the content of the test, the extent to which the context of the

test engages the interest of the testee, as well as the concept tested (Bransky & Qualter, 1993). Test score is also affected by the extent to which test items relate to testee's "... everyday life..." (Sternberg, 2008). The effect of cognitive fatigue on test scores has also been documented (Ackerman, Kanfer, Shapiro, Newton & Beier, 2010). The point being made here is that there seems to be a disconnect between the existing knowledge of Nigerian youths, what is taught in the classroom and what is tested in WASSCE. To reconcile these differences the Counsellor may need to establish helping relationship with students and guide them in social networking practices as complement to classroom learning activities. The Counsellor is in a better position for this role since Nigerian youths do not trust their parents in this aspect (Augoye, 2011). The development of trust in this situation is very crucial. To achieve this, the Counsellor should note aspects of trusting relationship which according to Kottler (2004) include:

- Respect for student's intrinsic right to be his or her own person,
- Warm regard for the student as a unique being,
- Genuineness, which means being real.

Further, online social networking as complement to classroom learning activities could be used to preserve the cherished African tradition of expressing views and fostering family as well as tribal values at village setting. At such village setting, "... the family and neighbourhood gather to share stories..." (Lasisi, 2011). Online social networking as a form of 21st century village setting would provide an appropriate platform to enrich classroom learning activities. In fact, under proper monitoring, online social networking can enrich classroom learning environment and consequently enhance academic performance.

4. Conclusion

The academic performance of candidates in WASSCE has been of major concern to various stake holders over the years. The point of view in this paper is that helping relationship that encourages the use of online social network practices as complement to classroom learning activities could be prospects for enhanced academic performance. This study investigated online social networking practices of some undergraduates of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. It was found that there is significant difference in the online social network practices between male and female undergraduates and also among undergraduates at different levels of study. Exposure to, and competence in, online social networking practices were found to be the major factors responsible for the significant differences observed.

This bench mark study opens up areas of study that requires further investigation. For instance, there is need for further study on the extent to which WASSCE test items reflect the real world of candidates. This would involve a consideration of familiarity of candidates with the content and context of test items. The investigation may also consider the extent to which concepts tested in WASSCE are in the area of interest of candidates. Another area for further study is the packaging of resources for the Counsellor in establishing helping relationship with students. Further studies would also be needed on the online social networking practices of students at primary and secondary educational levels with a consideration on online and offline social networking practices. The observation that youths resist their parents'

involvement in online social networking (Augoye, 2011), raises the need to investigate further current child rearing practices. What in general could be the social interaction among Nigerian children and parents? There is also the need for research information on appropriate online social networking practices for different educational programmes that would ensure enhanced school learning. One would like to state here again that school learning would be improved if Counsellors would provide helping relationships to monitor online social networking practices for enriching classroom instructional events.

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