

**INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING ON SOCIAL INTERACTION AMONG
UNIVERSITY UNDERGRADUATES**

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Abstract

This study investigated the influence of social networking on social interaction among university undergraduates. 120 participants (60males and 60females) were randomly drawn from the Enugu State University of Science and Technology. They are within the age range of 20 – 25 with a group mean of 22.17. A 41 items inventory with Likert-type response format designed by Lampard (1997) and validated in Nigeria by Amadi (2011) was used to collect data from the participants. A survey design was adopted A 2x2 (two-way) ANOVA was used for statistical analysis of data. Hypothesis I which states that there would be no significant influence of social networking on social interaction of students was rejected because the obtained value $F(df=1)=39.92$ was found to be greater than the critical value $F(df=1)=3.92$ at $p<.05$ level of significance. Hypothesis II which states that there would be significant influence of gender on social interaction of students was acceptable because the calculated value $F(df=1)=51.18$ was found to be greater than the critical value $F(df=1)=3.92$ at $P<.05$ level of significance.

Keywords: Social networking, social interaction, and university students.

Introduction

Living in today's society means being constantly exposed to the buzz surrounding the "internet based interactions" called social networking, nearly everyday. And this revolution if not checked will affect the way our young and adult people interact with each other in their everyday lives. The disturbing frequency in the usage of social networking as a medium of social interaction by university students fuelled the researcher's zeal to carry out this study. It is imperative to ask ourselves about the future of the social interaction of our youths, specifically, our university students on what effect will a high level of exposure to the internet, mostly its various forms of associated – Mediated Communication media (CMC) called social networking, have on their social skills, which help them to interact with one another in a civil, appropriate, and comfortable manner.

Retrospectively, letter writing, telegram, and telephone were once among the convenient means of communication in the 50s and 60s, and such social behaviour that facilitated social interaction in Nigeria, are now going extinct, especially the telegram – which is sending a long distance communication through wires. Later on in the 70s, letter writing became a trend as many could not afford the privilege of telegram, or high cost maintenance of telephone lines. This involves the sharing of feelings, experience, through the medium of writing. Presently, the use of this medium for social interaction is no longer an enjoying luxury because basically it is out-dated for the youths except on official terms. Telling a student to write a letter, and go through stress of buying stamps, envelop and posting them in this jet age could be perceived as a punishment and a waste of time when the recipient could be contacted through a cheaper and faster means like text or a chat. In fact, a good number of young people today never experienced the use of telegram, what they have rather, is a handled version of the stories of the good old days, and they cannot be blamed for this ignorance because each generation has its own operational technological trends.

In this global and technological era, the inception of GSM in Nigeria in 1999, communication with convenience increased with the availability of mobile phones to an average Nigerian. But with the fluctuating high tariff by different networks in Nigeria such as MTN, GLO, ETISALAT, etc is becoming less effective in maintaining close contact with the significant people in a university undergraduate's life. The effect of the high cost in tariff plans could be seen in the abuse of "midnight calls" packaged by different networks. This package allows subscriber to make free call from 12am to 4.0am. When this package is on, students rarely make call in the day time knowing they could save more and talk more with their friends for free at midnight.

Therefore, Spinoza (2010) explained social network as a web or internet based computer-mediated communication interfaces for 21st century social interaction that occur through the use of two or more networked computers or devices. Those communications that occur via the computer formats like instant messaging e-mails, chat rooms, etc. have also applied to other forms of text-based interaction such as text messages. Popular forms of CMC include social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter and 2go, which are booming trend in communication. Moreso, every social interaction is a goal directed communication, which is directed to initiate advance, maintain and disrupt a social contact, using a dispensational user-friendly interface (Amadi, 2011). According to Lierouw (2010), communication is the process of sharing ideas, information and messages with others in a particular time and place. He further pointed out that timing and place/location of interaction is a factor that facilitates the use of social networking by university students who via technology can move social interaction locations to their phones. Amadi (2011) pointed out basic elements of communication found in use in social networking and social interaction to be, source-that is, information source that produces the message, sender-that is, the person that transmits the message, channel-that is, the medium used to transmit the message, destination-that is, the recipient of the message, and the message-that is, the concept, information, or statement sent in a verbal or written form. She further noted that the main increase in social networking media has been facebook. It was ranked as the number one social networking site.

The underground idea behind facebook was to serve as a communication, contact, and interface link for particular university in the U.K., before it became a global product. And presently, this happens to be one of the attractions amongst others, for most university social networking users.

Problems Of Social Networking On Social Skills Of University Undergraduates

Despite the good intentions behind social networking, the effect of pervasion is enormous and should be checked because daily, many university students (boys/girls) are being destroyed, parents are losing their children to the influence of strangers on the net whom their children called friends but they have not seen or known the personality of the individuals involved (Adam, 2006).

Our cultural values that guide our sexuality and self respect is losing its potency as an agent of socialization, because where culture stopped, the internet took over as our agent of socialization, while the nation suffers from the gradual degradation of value in human capacity development of its future leaders (Amadi, 2011).

Academically, social networking is time consuming, self distracting, captivating and can kill a student's aptitude to learn time management, self discipline and verbal skills while in school (Haya, 2004).

The use of peg words and acronyms have a lot of impact on the writing skill of many university students courtesy of social networking shorthand language, such as "wt" in place of "with", "chuz" in place of "choose", "ryt" in place of "right", "tym" in place of "time", "hv" in place of "have", "tanx" in place of "thanks", "dt" in place of "that", and more can be attested by lecturers when marking students scripts (Amadi, 2011).

Dillard (2000) pointed out that some students who struggle to study extensively for just an hour could afford spending the whole day on social networking sites, chatting without feeling it, provided there is sufficient credit to fuel such an indulgence. This directly means less time for academic activity and more time for non-academic indulgence which may likely lead to exam malpractice.

In fact, social psychologists have proven that socialization is an enduring learning process and any form of socialization, including social networking that has the propensity to affect the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor can surely, without effort affect behaviour of an individual in a social environment (Jones, 1997).

Some theories were examined in this study to help filter and project the claims of this study. Social influence theory propounded by Rashotte (2007) pointed out that social influence is any process whereby a person's attitudes, opinions, beliefs or behaviour are altered or controlled by some form of social communication. By this, one can deduce that social communication is capable of inducing a change in one's attitude, opinion, belief or behaviour. Newcomb's balance theory (1997) postulates an attraction or preference to one another on the basis of similar attitudes towards commonly relevant objects and goals or a state that results when two persons like each other and agree about a topic of discussion. For instance, a student's facebook or 2go status could ignite this state of balance because the student and the lecturer can now reach out to each other on a neutral level without positional interruption. This could be possible because on social networking, everybody's status is equal and neutral. Shortcomings from the theory of social influence remain that university students' choice to join any of the social networking as a platform for social interaction depends on the influence of peer pressure. Second, individual may change opinion under the influence of another who is a better expert in the matter at hand. Social impact theory developed by Latane (1996) explained this theory as a phenomenon in which people affect one another in social situations like social interaction or social networking. Its shortcomings remain that the amount of influence, power or intensity is often determined through factors, such as, age, social class, etc.

McKenna and Green (2002) in their study conducted at Carnegie Mellon University using 80 participants (40 extroverts and 40 introverts) on the effects of social networking/internet use on their social participation, found that introverts gained more socially from internet use than the extroverts but reported that gender had no influence on social interaction of students. They argued that anonymity and privacy in text-based communication provides introverted individuals with a way to overcome difficulties in communication. In another study conducted by Dunhan (2001) on impression formation in computer-mediated communication, using 100 participants, found that impressions formed in the CMC environment were less detailed because of absence of cues like eye contact but more intense than those formed in a face to face interaction because of the absence of social constraint.

Purpose of the Study

This study wanted to find out whether students' gender difference will significantly influence their quality of social interaction as a result of social networking usage, and whether social networking will significantly influence the student's social interaction.

It is therefore necessitated by the quest to determine the extent of the influence of social networking on the psycho-social development of university students in the area of social interaction and proffer solution to strike a balance.

For the purpose of this study, two hypotheses were proposed and tested, such as:-

1. There will be no statistically significant influence of social networking on social interaction of university students, and
2. There will be a statistically significant influence of gender on social interaction of university students.

Method

Participants:

A total of 120 participants comprising of 60 males (30 young and 30 old) and 60 females (30 young and 30 old) were randomly drawn from the population of students of Enugu State University of Science and Technology. They are within the age range of 20 – 25. 20 – 22 were regarded as young, while 23 – 25 were regarded as old students, with general group mean of 22.17 and standard deviation of 4.5. They were drawn from four departments of the faculty of the social sciences of the school: Psychology, Economics, Sociology and Political Science departments. 30 participants were drawn from each department mentioned above.

Instrument

A 41-items inventory with Likert-type response format advanced by Lampard (1997) and validated for use in Nigeria by the researcher (2011), was used to measure the influence of social networking on social interaction among university students. The pilot study of the researcher yielded a correlation coefficient of .78, and a split half reliability of .72. The items of the inventory were scored as follows: Strongly Agree – 5 points, Agree – 4 points, Undecided – 3 points, Disagree – 2 points, Strongly Disagree – 1 point. The items measure the positive and negative influences of social networking procedure.

Procedure

A total of hundred and sixty copies of the inventory were randomly distributed to the participants in their various departments. They were filled and returned on the spot. However, out of the one hundred and sixty copies distributed, only one hundred and thirty copies were returned and only one hundred and twenty were correctly filled and used for the study, while the other ten copies were discarded.

Design/Statistics

The design for this study was a cross-sectional design, while a 2x2 (two-way) ANOVA was used for statistical analysis of data.

Results

The Table I: The summary table of participants on the influence of social networking on social interaction of university students.

	Young	Old	
Gender	$T_{11} = 1110$	$T_{12} = 763$	$\frac{T.1}{x.1} = \frac{1873}{60}$
	$N_{11} = 30$	$N_{11} = 30$	$= 31.22$
	$X_{11} = 37.00$	$X_{12} = 25.43$	
Male			$\frac{T.2}{x.1} = \frac{2695}{60}$
Female	$T_{21} = 1649$	$T_{22} = 1046$	$= 44.92$
	$n_{21} = 30$	$n_{22} = 30$	
	$X_{21} = 54.57$	$X_{22} = 34.67$	
	$T.1 = \frac{2759}{60}$	$T.2 = \frac{1809}{60}$	$\frac{T.2}{x.2} = \frac{2695}{60}$
	$X.1 = 45.98$	$X.2 = 30.15$	$= 44.92$

The result in table 1 indicated that young female social interaction obtained the highest group mean of 54.57 followed by young male social interaction 37.00, while female social interaction (old) 34.67, then finally male social interaction (old) 25.43.

Table II: The summary table of two-way ANOVA on the influence of social networking on social interaction of university students.

SOV	SS	Df	Variance Estimate	F.O.	FC	P
Rows (Gender)	5630.7	1	5630.7	39.92	3.92	< .05
Columns (Social interaction)	7219.75	1	7219.75	51.18	3.92	< .05
Social interaction Vs gender	534516.05	1	534516.05	3789.28	7.84	< .01
Within cell	16362.8	116	141.06			
Total		119				

The result above showed that F-calculated value $F(df=1) = 39.92$ was found to be greater than the F-critical value $F(df = 1) = 3.92$ at $p < .05$ level of significance. This showed that the first hypothesis which stated that there would be no statistically significant influence of social networking on social interaction of University students was rejected.

Furthermore, the F-calculated value $F(df = 1) = 51.18$ was found to be greater than F-critical value $F(df=1) = 3.92$ at $p < .05$ level of significance, thereby making the second hypothesis which stated that there would be a statistically significant influence of gender on social interaction of university students to be accepted. In summary, the results showed that social networking had influence on social interaction of university students.

Discussion

This study examined the influence of social networking on social interaction of university students. In the course of this study, two independent variables were tested on one dependent variable, and two hypotheses were postulated and tested as well. The first hypotheses which stated that there would be no statistically significant influence of social networking on social interaction among university students was rejected since the F-calculated value was greater than the F-critical value at the level of significance. The second hypothesis which states that there would be a significant influence of gender on social interaction among university students was accepted since the F-calculated value was greater than F-critical value at its level of significance. The researcher's findings were in support of McKenna and Green (2002) study.

The above results were in line with the effects highlighted in social influence theory, which is any process whereby a person's attitudes, opinion, beliefs, or behaviour are altered or controlled by some form of social communication, which means that an internet based interaction like social networking is capable of inducing a change in one's attitude, opinion, beliefs or behaviour towards others.

Recommendations

1. Various universities should explore and expand the curriculum of social psychology to meet up with modern day social realities, and advocate for the inclusion of social psychology to the GS of the institutions.
2. A curriculum on social media communication intelligence and management should be developed to equip students on social responsibility in a technology-based communication.
3. Future researchers on the similar topic should use larger sample/population in their studies.

In conclusion therefore, based on the findings of this study, the conclusion arrived at, is that, social networking as a factor was found to have significant influence on social interaction among university students, while that of gender showed no significant result.

Summary and Conclusion

In summary, instant messaging nature of social networking makes it more captivating and easy to influence another. For the fact that students have quick access to information on disturbing issues before home intervention, they can easily ask anything online, from name to intimate sexual details, capable of influencing the individual who is the recipient of such information. The unifying theme central to this study is that, the reduction of non-verbal and social relational cues in social networking, produces a depersonalized form of communication and decreased awareness of others; inhibiting interpersonal relations which could be traced to the influence of social networking, a possibility, that the study on influence of social networking on social interaction, confirmed a significant difference.

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