Use of Social Media For Information Dissemination by Undergraduates in University of IBADAN, NIGERIA

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Abstract: Social media has been found to be used by undergraduates in different countries. Not much is known about the type of information disseminated using these media in University of Ibadan. In this study, 226 undergraduates completed a questionnaire to find the level of availability of social media, frequency of use and type of information shared. The findings revealed that Facebook was the most used social media and academic information, videos and pictures were the information disseminated. Accessing the internet, erratic power supply, sharing information on some sites, different versions of same information and time constraint were the major challenges encountered by the undergraduates in using the social media. Implications of social media use for improved information dissemination by providing an enabling environment by university administrators were discussed.

Keywords: Social Media, Information Dissemination, Undergraduates, Nigeria

1 Introduction

Undergraduates are in the university to learn, conduct research and increase in knowledge. They need information for their daily responsibilities as students and the extent to which relevant and timely information is available and accessible to them may help to determine their overall academic success. In achieving all these, they make use of many resources at their disposal, print and electronic including technology. Today's undergraduates which consist of Baby Boomers, Generation Xers, and Millennials are exposed to all types of technologies in many aspects of their lives [1]. On a daily basis they use desktop computers, laptops, e-readers, tablets, and cell phones to actively engage in social networking, text messaging, blogging, content sharing, online learning etc. [2].

Undergraduates are technology conscious as they use technology for every facet of their life: school work, recreation, information dissemination, information acquisition, networking etc. As new technologies became available, they readily adopt them as soon as they perceive that the benefits and cost are aligned. Students are using these emerging technologies and platforms in all facets of their daily lives, specifically social media [1,3]. Technology offers undergraduates an array of options to socialize, network, stay informed and connected. These students are now using technology to communicate more than face-to-face interaction and also disseminate information through social media.

Social media sites are profile-based websites that allow users to maintain social relationships by viewing, visiting and sharing their lists of social connections with other members. They are online discussion forum, chat rooms; community based personal websites and other social space accessible to users for exchange of personal contact, communication. Examples are Facebook, Orkut, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube and My space. Social media sites provide a wide variety of resources and services such as messaging, chatting, blogging, uploading and sharing videos and photos etc.

Social media sites not only function in effective communication but also in the development of collaboration and networking of the users. Through such sites, undergraduates make new friends or extend their personal base by connecting and interacting with friends of friends and so forth. These connections can help one with a variety of things such as: finding romance, seeking a new job, locating assistance, getting and giving product and service referrals, receiving support from like-minded individuals, making or receiving advice on career or personal issues. Entertainment (music and videos) is another benefit for using social media and Facebook has some recent attraction such as game applications that have appeared over the last couple of years.

Real-time information sharing is also one of the benefits of social media use. Many social media sites incorporate an instant messaging feature, which means users can exchange information in real-time via a chat. Social media have been found very useful in exchanging or disseminating information such as breaking news, research findings, latest trend globally on different issues, disaster outbreak, etc. This feature has been particularly useful to students in higher institutions of learning.

Undergraduates form a large proportion of users on social media networks. A review of literature reveals that the students or youngsters are the most frequent users of social networking sites. A Pew study reports that social media are getting more popular among all generations of users, including undergraduates [4, 5, 6]. According to a Nielsen Media Research study, in June 2010, almost 25 percent of students' time on the Internet is now spent on social media websites [7]. Lenhart et al. (2010) Almost three quarters of all college students (72%) as reported by [4] have a social media profile with 45% of university students using a social media site at least once a day.

Reports show that this generation of undergraduates spends a considerable amount of time on different kinds of networking sites and virtual communities [8]. Social media have revolutionized undergraduates' communications as students hold brainstorming sessions, manage projects, share best practices and disseminate information without face to face encounters.

With the advent of social media, dissemination of information by undergraduates has become easy and free. The networks permit and favour the publication and sharing of information; self-learning; teamwork; communication, both between students and between students-teacher;

feedback; access to other sources of information [9]. Online social networks have become the ideal space for undergraduates to exchange information and knowledge in a swift, simple and convenient way. It is also used to create personal profiles and make friends on a reciprocal basis [10].

Undergraduates are disseminating huge quantities of content and information to their online social networks and potentially the information and content shared can reach a great number of people. The dissemination patterns may be different depending on who shares the content, what type of content is being shared and which social media it is being shared on. How undergraduates disseminate information in social media depends not only on the network structure but also on the topic of the information and content.

Undergraduates share almost everything online on social media. About 29% of the items were shared on Twitter, 18% through Yahoo and 9% on MySpace. On Twitter, Slashdot, Digg, Reddit, and Facebook, among others, users post news or links to news stories, discuss them, and share their opinions in real time. Facebook has been noted to be the most popular social network globally and reported to have the largest number of individuals using it as it had 1.65 billion monthly users as at the end of the first quarter of 2016 [11]. Over 30 billion items are being shared on Facebook every month and these sites are often the first to break important news [11].

The social media has many benefits but undergraduates encounter some challenges in using it for information dissemination such as rules of engagement: how to create and manage an account, what should be response time and what are the legal implications etc. Use of social media requires a lot of time as undergraduates is faced with overload of information and this may have an adverse effect when combined with academics as it involves a lot of time [12].

Another challenge is the relatively expensive gadgets needed for internet access in order to use social media. The scarcity and prohibitive costs of high speed internet connections and the limited number of personal computers in use is a challenge in social media use, especially by undergraduates in third world countries. For many developing countries such as Nigeria, irregular power supply and insufficient bandwidth constitute a problem to social media use.

Instances of inaccurate and false information may be an inherent problem, given the nature of social media platforms and the number of people disseminating information. The ability of undergraduates to use social media applications appropriately and carefully is a serious issue. Young users are acclaimed to use social media as many universities have groups and profiles where students and lecturers can interact, share resources and disseminate information [13], but how and what information they disseminate using this media needs to be further examined.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Nigerian undergraduates use social media a lot and this involves a lot of time that would have been used for more academic tasks. They use the Internet, e-mail, instant messaging, blogs, and social media than individuals from any other generation. Presently, not much research has been carried out to ascertain the use of social media for information dissemination in University of Ibadan despite the observed tremendous use of these social media by undergraduates for different purposes. What is their purpose for using this media and what do they share? This study therefore, is carried out to determine undergraduates' use of social media for information dissemination.

2 Methodology

The research design was a descriptive survey design with a population comprised of 9171 undergraduates from 100 to 300 levels in all the thirteen faculties in the University of Ibadan. A random sampling technique was used to select six departments: Communication and Language Arts

(CLA), Religious Studies (RES), Educational Management (EME), Guidance and Counselling (G&C), Civil Engineering (Civil) and Mechanical Engineering (Mech). A sample size of 226 was selected using a sample fraction of 28% and data was collected using a questionnaire. A total number of 209 copies of the questionnaire were retrieved and used for analysis.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Types of Social Media Available to the Undergraduates

The responses showed that Facebook was very readily available (64.1%) to the respondents while LinkedIn (10.5%) was least available as shown in Figure 1. The findings revealed that all of the sampled undergraduates were using at least one form of social media with Facebook being the most readily available. This confirms the findings of [7] who affirmed that Facebook was the most used social media by undergraduates. An examination of the use of social media among students in the United States was carried out and found that Facebook (73%) was currently the social network of choice among the students [4].
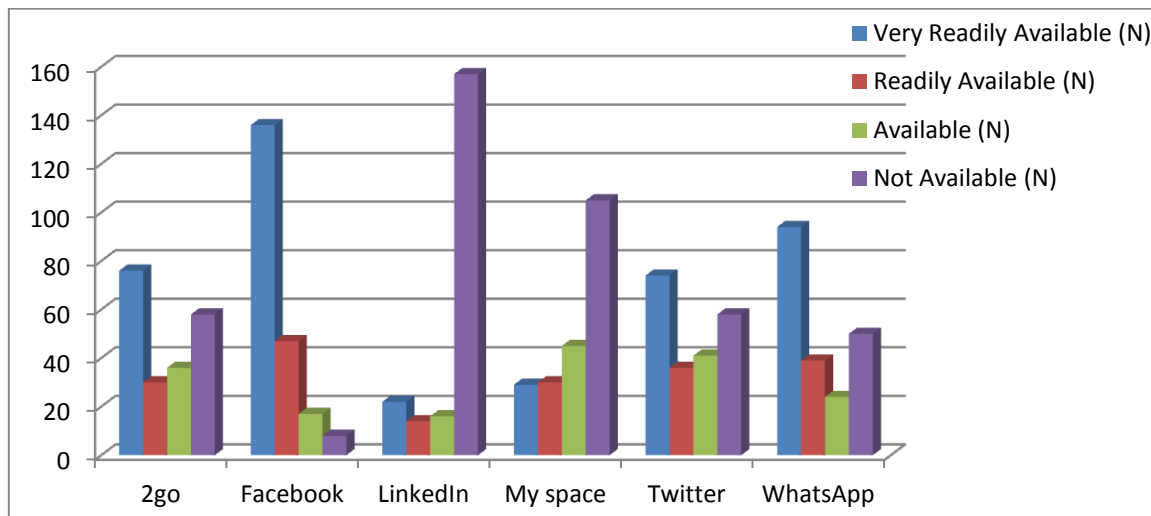

Figure 1 Level of Availability of Social Media to Undergraduates

3.2 Purpose of Use of Social Media by Undergraduates

The respondents were given the following options to choose from for purpose of using social media: academic task, gather information, share information, chatting with friends, staying in touch with friends, share pictures and videos, others. Over 48% of the respondents strongly agreed to the use of social media for all the options except sharing pictures and videos, while over 35% of the respondents agreed to use social media for all the listed purposes as shown in Figure 2.
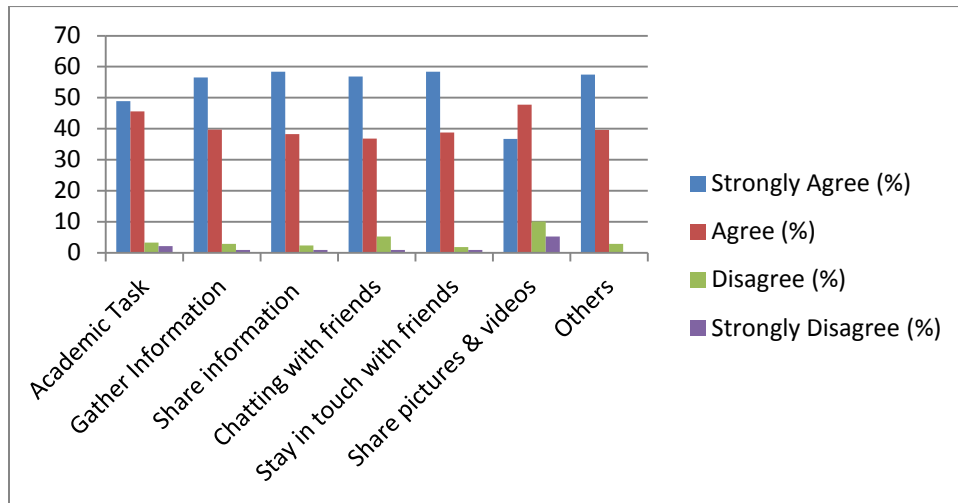
Figure 2 Purpose of Social Media Use by Undergraduates

Social media was used by the undergraduates for different purpose especially for academic tasks, gathering and sharing information, chatting with friends and staying in touch with friends. This result agrees with those of [14] in their study on undergraduates' use of social media where they found that MySpace, Facebook, Windows Live Spaces, Orkut and Hi5 have attracted millions of users who used them for many purposes such as chatting, connecting, information and content sharing.

3.3 Frequency of Use of Social Media by Undergraduates

The social media that were used for more than once a day were 2go, Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp with a range of 30- 60% of the respondents. A large percentage of the respondents (60%) used Facebook more than once a day, while LinkedIn was least used more than once a day (6.1%). However, 73% and 66% of the respondents did not use LinkedIn and My space respectively at all (Figure 3).
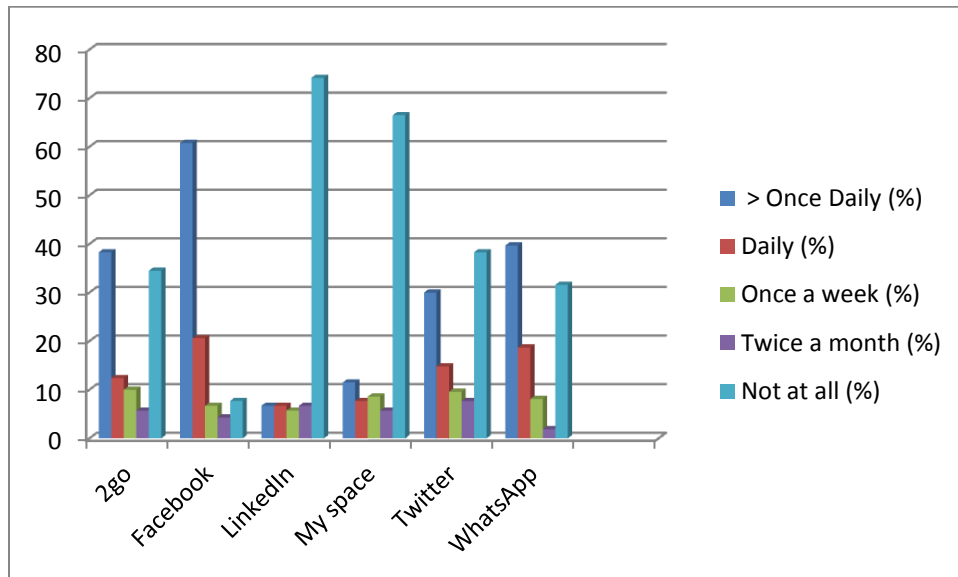

Figure 3 Frequency of Social Media Use by Undergraduates

About a thirty to sixty percent of the respondents used 2go, Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp more than once a day, although majority of the respondents used Facebook the highest more than once a day. This could be due to the popularity of Facebook to the respondents as reported by [15] in their study on the effect of social media sites usage on the study of undergraduates in three higher institution in Mubi, Adamawa state, Nigeria, and reported that Facebook was mostly used by the students (95%). A study on 92 undergraduates' experiences on Facebook in Georgetown University, USA, reported that the undergraduates spent approximately 30 minutes throughout the day disseminating information to their friends and spent more time observing content than posting content [16]. It was also found by [17] that 82% of college students reported logging into Facebook several times a day, while more than 50% of college students go to social media sites several times a day as revealed by [18].

3.4 Type of Information Disseminated by Undergraduates on Social Media

Different types of information were disseminated by the undergraduates through social media. The types included information on academic, personal, breaking news, entertainment news, pictures and videos, links to information and others (Fig 4). About half of the respondents (51.7%) agreed that they disseminated academic information on social media as against the 1.4% who strongly disagreed (Figure 4). Pictures and videos were found to be the second highest type of information disseminated on social media (48.5%), followed closely by links to information (Figure 4).
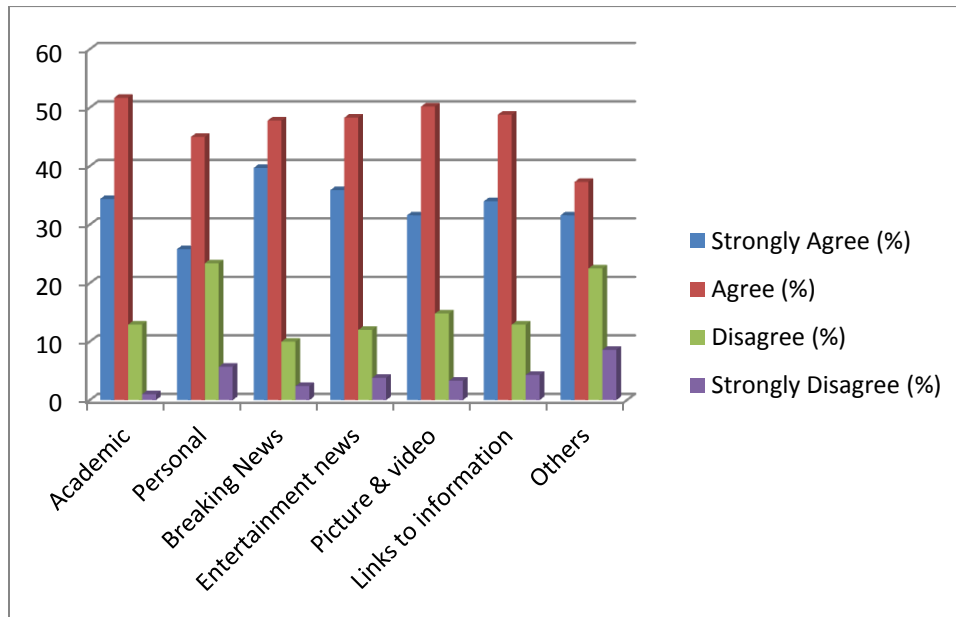

Figure 4 Types of Information Disseminated on Social Media by Undergraduates

Different types of information were disseminated by majority of the undergraduates through the social media, although there was variation in the types disseminated with over half of respondents disseminating academic information. Pictures and videos were also found to be disseminated after academic information which indicated that the undergraduates being young in age are interested in sharing videos and pictures which could be music videos or those relevant for their academic achievement. This means that information on different areas was disseminated to people using the social media.

This result agrees with that of [19] who reported that University of Cantebury, New Zealand used Facebook to disseminate information to the university community for many months after a massive earthquake struck in the region. It was also affirmed by [17] that undergraduates used Facebook to have fun, know about the social activities occurring in one's social network, while [20] in their study on undergraduates' use of Facebook in a University in Ontario, Canada also reported that they disclosed information about themselves such as birthday, email addresses and posted pictures of different occasions.

3.5 Challenges of Social Media Use by Undergraduates for Information Dissemination

The major challenges respondents' encountered in the use of social media for information dissemination were those having over 50% responses. They included: access to the internet (79.4%), power supply (78.9%), sharing information on some sites (67.9%), different versions of same information (67.9%) and time constraint (57.4%). About half of the respondents (52.2%) disagreed that their devices were slow to connect to the internet, which indicated that these respondents used devices that connected very fast to the internet (Table 1).

Table 1 Challenges of using Social Media for Information Dissemination by Undergraduates

Challenges	Agree		Disagree	
	N	**%**	**N**	**%**
Access to the Internet	166	79.4	43	20.6
Sharing Information on some sites	142	67.9	67	32.1
Slow connectivity of my device	100	47.8	109	52.2
How to share information	99	47.4	110	52.6
Different versions of same information	142	67.9	67	32.1
Power supply	165	78.9	44	21.1
Time constraint	120	57.4	89	42.6

Access to the internet, power supply, sharing information on some sites, different versions of same information and time constraint were the major challenges faced by the respondents in using the social media for information dissemination. In Nigeria, the internet is not readily accessible and when it is, it comes with a fee and connection may be unstable or slow which may frustrate the use of it to connect to the internet and disseminate or share information. Power supply in Nigeria is irregular and erratic and this can affect the use of using the social media which can be accessed through electronic devices such as phones, iPad, laptops which may not be able to be used when the battery power is low and electricity to charge such electronic devices by the undergraduates is not available. This finding is supported by [21] and [22] who listed stable power supply and good

telecommunication, knowledgeable technical expertise as factors that affect the use of ICT in Nigeria.

4 Conclusion and Recommendations

Undergraduates used social media for different purposes such as searching and disseminating information for academic purpose, staying in touch with friends and family, chatting and sharing pictures and videos. The social media is an important tool that can be used to disseminate information to the undergraduates since it is frequently used by them, although with some challenges. The university administrators must provide the enabling environment for its maximum use among the undergraduates by improving electricity supply and subsidizing internet access fee. The university must tap into the potentials of these social media in disseminating information to their students which could include teaching and learning.

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