

# EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA (NET WORKS) ON READING CULTURE OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS: A CASE STUDY OF ABUJA MUNICIPAL AREA COUNCIL (AMAC)

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## ABSTRACT

*The paper focused the findings of the study of effects of social networking sites on reading habits of some selected secondary schools in Abuja Municipal Area Council. The population of study was 50 students randomly selected from 5 secondary schools. Questionnaire and interview were the basic instruments used for the study. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were presented in tables for the use of the study. The findings showed that there is an increasing number of students' subscription to social networking sites, excessive and addiction to their usage with a decline to reading habits for either academic or personal development. The study reveal that though there is need for students to use social networking sites, it has become necessary to reduce the time spent on such sites and be also engaged in reading print materials to improve the declining performance of students in academic activities.*

**Keywords:** Social media, reading culture, secondary school

## INTRODUCTION

Long before the internet became the commercialized mass information and entertainment as it is today, the internet and its predecessors were a focal point for social interactivity, computer networking was initially envisioned in the heyday of the military command and control scheme. It has been contention of scholars such as Kellner and Bohman (2001) that new media, and particularly the internet, provides the potentials for democratic postmodern public sphere in which citizens can participate in well informed, non-hierarchical debate pertaining to their social structures.

Interactivity has become a key term for a number of new media use options evolving from the rapid dissemination of internet access point and the digitization of the media from the media convergence. Rice (2002) defined the new media as communication technologies for users of information.

New media changes continuously emerge due to the fact that it is constantly modified and redefined by the interaction between the creative uses of the mass developing technology, cultural, social, environmental changes, etc.

As the internet expanded beyond just a privileged few hubs and nodes, so too did the idea that connected computers might also make a great forum for discussing mutual topics of interest and perhaps even meeting or renewing acquaintances with other people

Computers were a far rare commodity in the late 70's and 80's. The machine language was bewildering and their potential seemingly limited. The social networking sites, started with the Bulletin Board System, these online meeting places were effectively independently produced by hunks of code that allowed users to communicate with a central system where they could download files or games and post messages to other users, accessed over a telephone line via a modem. Early social networking sites on the World Wide Web that began in the form of generalized online communities were Theglobe.com (1994) and Triopod.com (1995). Boyd (2007).

Many of these early communities focused on bringing people together to interact with each other through chat rooms, and encouraged users to share personal information and ideas via personal Webpages by providing easy-to-use publishing tools and free or inexpensive web space. Some communities such as classmates.com, flickr, Rytes, friendster, blog, sixdegrees.com, etc. took a different approach by simply having people link to each other via email addresses. In the late 1990s, user profile became a central feature of social media. Therefore, the literature review which will be relevant to the topic will include:

## **i The Internet**

## **ii Facebook**

Mass communication has over the years, witnessed revolution as a result of the improvement in information technology. Winston, cited in Mohammed (1991:7) observes that "we are today surrounded by a myriad, of communication technologies such as microcomputers, robots, data bases and cable television. Mohammed (1991:8) observes that these are only some of the many forms of technologies that are revolutionizing information acquisition and processing. The users of social networking sites normally build online profile and share information, which includes photographs and connect with other users to communicate with old friends or find new friends. Nowadays, social networking sites are attracting millions

of people all over the world especially the students. The students are now using social networking sites for entertainment, play games and to derive pleasure. One major area that is now a cause for concern is the excessive and negative use of these social networking sites to the detriment of students' academic development, hence the need for this study.

## **OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of the study are to:

- I. Find the relationship between students' use of social networks and reading habits.
- ii. Identify the effect of use of social networking sites on reading habits.
- iii. Proffer ways of balancing use of social networks and reading habits among students.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The following research questions were raised for the study:

- i. How often do you use social networks?
- ii. For what reasons do students use social networks?
- iii. How much time do you spend when surfing social networks?
- iv. What effects do the social networks have on your reading habits?

## **INTERNET**

The internet is a global system of interconnection of computers that use the standard internet protocol to serve billions of users worldwide. Most traditional communication media such as telephone, music, films, and television have been reshaped and redefined by the internet, giving birth to new services such as voice over internet protocol. Newspapers, books and other print publishing are adapting to website technology, or are reshaped into blogging and web feeds. The internet has enabled or accelerated new forms of human interactions through instant messaging, internet forums and social networking. The internet is allowing greater flexibility in working hours and location, especially with the spread of unmetered high speed connections and web applications (Baran, 1964).

## **HISTORY OF THE INTERNET**

The internet arose in the late 1960s out of efforts to share expensive computer resources provided by the military to universities across the United States. The initial

network, called Arpanet switching, a method of transferring information that breaks down messages into small packets that are transmitted separately across the network and reassembled once they are received. Through e-mail and file sharing, Arpanet soon became a tool used by academics to collaborate and communicate across the country,

As the number of incompatible networks grew in the 1970s, Bob Kahn and Vint Cerf develop the ICT/IP protocols that would allow the networks to communicate with each other in 1983. ARPANET started using the ICT/IP protocols. This is commonly seen as the true beginning of the internet. The internet is unique among the mass media in allowing interpersonal communication through e-mail and instant messaging group communication through listservs, newsgroups, discussion boards and mass communication through the World Wide Web.

The World Wide Web was developed in 1889 by British physicist Tim Berners-Lee while he was working at the European Organization for Nuclear Research in Switzerland. His goal was to produce a decentralized system for creating and sharing document anywhere in the world. The web has three major components: the uniform resource locator (URL), the hypertext transfer protocol (http), and the hypertext markup language (HTML). Berners-Lee published the code for the World Wide Web on the Internet in 1991 for anyone in the world to use at no cost.

The World Wide Web has turned the Internet into a major mass medium that provides news, entertainment, and community interaction. The web offers a mix of content, including traditional media companies, new media companies offering publications available only on the web, aggregator sites that offer help in navigation through the web, and individuals who have something they want to say.

The web has been criticized for elevating rumors to the level of news, making inappropriate material available to children, collecting private information about users, and creating a false sense of intimacy and interaction among users.

Over the past years, users have moved increasingly from slow dial-up connections to high-speed "always on" connections that have changed how people view and use the internet. Media are making use of these high-speed connections to deliver content that includes a rich mix of video, audio, photos and text.

## FACEBOOK

Facebook is the second largest social network on the web; it is primarily focused on high school to college students. It has been gaining market share and more significantly a supportive user base since their launch in February 2004, it has also been able to obtain over 8million users in the US alone and expand worldwide to 70 other English-speaking countries with more to follow. Unlike other social network sites, Facebook was designed to support distinct college networks only. (Boyd and Ellison 2006)

Facebook, according to the slogan on the website's homepage, "help you connect with people in your life," while according to Wikipedia, "it is a social network website owned by Facebook Inc" which enable users to add friends and send them messages and update their personal profiles to notify friends about themselves. The website currently has more than 350 million active users worldwide. Users of this social networking site can create up to 200 groups according to area of interest and fan pages where they can interact with both known person and strangers to expand their contacts and friendships.

It began in early 2004 as a Harvard's only Social networking site (Cassidy, 2006). To join, a user must have a Harvard email address. As Facebook began to expand to other schools, those users were also required to have University email address associated with those institutions, a requirement that kept the site relatively closed and contributed to users' perception of the site as an intimate private community.

It was found by Mark Zuckerberg, former Harvard student (while at Harvard). He ran it as one of his hobby projects with some financial help from Eduardo Saverim. Within months, facebook and its core idea spread across the dorm rooms of Harvard where it was very well received. Soon enough, it was extended to Stanford and Yale where, like Harvard, it was widely endorsed.

Mark Zuckerberg was joined by two fellow Harvard students; Dustin Moskovits and Chris Hughes to help him grow the site to the next level. Only months later when it was officially a national student network phenomenon, that in August 2005, the Facebook was officially called Facebook and the domain Facebook.com was purchased for a reported two hundred thousand dollars (\$200,000). The network opened up and within months anyone with valid institutional email address from over thirty thousand (30,000) organization across the planet were eligible for membership, including high school students, government employees and the corporate community.

In September 2006, Facebook expanded once again. At this time, anyone with a valid email address could sign up and update their profile with their start and sign up. Between May 2006 and May 2007, Facebook traffic grew by an astonishing 89%. This social network site helps to connect people from different part of the world, Lampe, Elison, and a number of Facebook friends found that profile fields that reduce transaction costs and are harder to falsify are most likely to be associated with larger number of friendship links. These kinds of data also lend themselves well to analysis through network visualization.

### **SOCIAL NETWORKING AND YOUTHS READING HABIT**

One of the most important factors in education is the ability to read, understand and critically comprehend the text which in turn would be used to solve life challenges. Capability of understanding text and forming a reading habit should be developed from early childhood through the whole life. It is important for everyone to develop the rudiments of reading and the culture of reading always so as to survive in life. Reading adds quality to life and provides access to culture and cultural heritage. He pointed out that reading empowers and emancipates citizens and bring people together. The art of reading is a priceless instrument for everyone. It is one of the most important activities of life through which we enter into the life and experiences of others and extend our knowledge, scope of experience and enjoyment. It has critical role to play in the overall development of an individual and the nation at large. Reading enlightens the mind, makes the intellect sharper and makes an individual travel far without motion. Reading can be said to be the bedrock of most forms of learning activities culminating into literacy. To be capable of achieving this, students must develop their reading habits on daily basis. Reading habits are vital part of lifelong learning concept. It is therefore, not surprising that every nation prides itself in the reading culture of its literate population. A good reading culture in any nation is therefore an enviable virtue.

Furthermore, many activities of ordinary life require the ability to read. Moreover, reading enriches one's understanding of how language is used, thereby improving ones spoken and written language. Additionally, in-depth reading helps to develop the mind and personality of a person; it enriches intellectual abilities; provides insights into human problems, and influences attitudes and behavior. In other words, reading helps to mould a person's character. This depends on reading the type of books; that is books that entertain but at the same time educate (Busayo, 2005).

Due to technological advancement, reading habits are changing. In our society today, while technology is gradually taking a steady control over individual lives, the reading habit is fast vanishing into thin air (The Hindu 2004). Most students now lack the skill of reading, spending many hours on social networks with remote and strange friends on needless issues to the detriment of their educational studies is obviously the order of the day. In a nut shell, this has made the reading of a book or any other piece of written material in the library or at home an archaic idea for the majority of the populace especially the younger people. In a speech, Obama (2008) pointed out that children cannot achieve unless they raise their expectations and turn off television sets. Active learning from books is better than passive learning such as watching television and playing games. Students are rarely interested in reading for pleasure and enjoyment instead they read only to pass examination.

Research has established the fact that the most conspicuous users of the internet are adolescents and undergraduates. In Nigeria, many researchers have attributed students' non-challant attitude to reading and consequently, mass failure of students in both internal and external examinations to the use of the internet. Buenos (2012) posit that ask every student if they had an account in any social network, they will definitely answer that they have an account ranging from 1 – 3 in different social networking sites.

The internet is one of the defining technologies of the digital age. The internet, which is a global system of interconnected computer, provides many benefits to its users, including access to social networking sites, which provide information on news updates, information on academics from distant documents and databases that can be read and studied to improve knowledge.

Social networks combine and present through the same medium the virtues of print and multimedia resources. With social networks, students can improve their learning by gaining access to information and materials available online, which they might read online or download and print to read later. The social network is also not just passive medium that youths use to connect with friends and chat, but explore to obtain information on their own.

It is also increasingly being used by education institution and teachers as a flexible medium for the delivery of online education to distant or on-campus students. In spite of the benefits of the internet for education and learning, there is a growing concern as to whether the increasing number of hours spent by students browsing the internet limits the amount of time and effort devoted by them to the actual

reading and study of the materials obtained from or outside the internet. This concern is similar to the motivation for a study, by Bussiere and Gluszynski (2004), of the patterns and interrelationships between the computer use and reading behavior of 15-year olds in Canada. The study found that promoting effective access to computer among such teenagers may not guarantee the use of computer for serious educational purposes by them, and that policy should also address the latter objective.

### **EFFECTS OF SOCIAL NETWORK ON YOUTHS READING HABIT**

In spite of the benefits of the internet for education and learning, there is a growing concern as to whether the increasing number of hours spent by youths browsing through social networks limits the amount of time and effort developed by them to the actual reading and study of materials obtained from outside the net.

In Nigeria, there has been concern on the possible effects of daytime and sometimes all-night browsing on reading time effort among students. Some studies, for example, Oji (2007), has highlighted the growing incidences of students, using the internet not necessarily for academic purposes, but for anti-social activities such as fraud, pornography, blackmail, racketeering and so on. This probably explains why cybercafés patronized by youths in many Nigeria cities and towns are often raided by law enforcement officials. Igun and Adogbeji (2007) have found out that the youths of Nigerian universities, being surveyed often studied to acquire personal knowledge and skills and to prepare for examinations. Most of them visit the net for educational uses such as information search, browsing, communication and study and other less educational uses such as entertainment and pleasure seeking or anti-social behavior.

The poor reading habits among Nigerian youths has been attributed to major causes like listening to music and chatting culture, insufficient libraries, absence of appropriate reading materials, and some environmental factors (Ogunrombi and Adio 1995). Whereas the internet offers information and systems of instruction that complement the traditional ways that students study and learn, nevertheless, reading remains a fundamental building block for liberal education, providing a broad basis for knowledge and understanding. However, the seeming decline in art and practice of reading should be of great concern if, as Yeoh (cited in Fang, 2008), posits that, "Reading for knowledge and information will become a critical source for competitive advantage besides development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century".



## METHODOLOGY

The researchers adopted a survey method for the collection of data. Five secondary schools with 50 students in Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC), F.C. T. namely; Government Secondary School Maitama, Government Junior Secondary School Wuse, Model Secondary School Tudun Wada, Government Secondary School Gwarinpa and Abuja Capital International College, Gwarinpa District Estate, Abuja. This was facilitated through the use of a structured questionnaire validated by a pre-test of the instrument with a few number of students of Government Secondary school, Maitama, Abuja. The researchers personally went round the schools to administer the questionnaire and waited for collection after completion. Data collected were analyzed using frequencies and percentages and presented in tables. Descriptive analysis was also used where necessary.

## DATA ANALYSIS

Table I

### USE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS:

S/No	Statement	Yes	%	No	%
1.	Do you often use online social network?	38	76	12	24
2.	Do you have a Facebook account?	33	66	17	34
3.	Do you have access to social network while reading?	18	36	32	64

From the table (I) above, the respondents were asked to tell whether they often use online social networking sites; out of the 50 respondents, 38 representing 76 % admitted to be users of social networks, 12 (24%) are not users. On subscription to Facebook account, 33 or 66% of the respondents are on Facebook while 17 (34%) are on other social networks. About access to social networks while reading, 18 (36 %) respondents do access social networks while reading, 32 (64%) do not. This confirms research reports that the most conspicuous users of the internet are adolescents and undergraduates.

Table II

### MEANS OF ACCESSING SOCIAL NETWORKS:

S/No	Means	Frequency	%
1.	Cell phone	36	72
2.	Personal computer	9	18
3.	Cyber café	5	10
4.	Total	50	100

Table II show the means by which the students access social networks, a whopping figure of 36 or 72% respondents access the networks through their cell phones, 9 (18%) from personal computers and only 5 (10%) do so at cyber café. This result indicates that most of the students use their cell phones when accessing social networks and little wonder why more and more students are getting on social networking sites because of the easy accessibility of the sites from their portable mobile phones.

Table III

### REASON FOR USE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS:

S/N	Reason	Frequency	%
1.	To do assignment	12	24
2.	For self education	14	28
3.	To chat with friends	16	32
4.	For news update	3	6
5.	Others (games, music, business, etc)	5	10
6.	TOTAL	50	100

As of the reason for using social networks, 12 which represents 24% use it for doing assignment, 14 or 28% for self education, 16 (32%) for charting with friends, 3 (6%) for news update and 5 (10%) for others like playing games, music, business, etc. This indicates that there are other reasons than educational purposes that students use social networks for. Since most of them spend more time (as would be seen later) on these sites surfing for other purposes, the actual academic work continue to receive less and less time.

Table IV

### EFFECTS OF SOCIAL NETWORKS ON READING HABITS:

S/No	Response	Frequency	%
1.	Positive	33	66
2.	Negative	17	34
3.	TOTAL	50	100

Asked whether the use of social networks have positive or negative effects on the students' reading habits, the table above shows that; 33 (66%) responded as positive and 17 (34%) said it is negative. Their claim of its positivity could only be referring to the text they read on the web pages; howbeit, web pages lack key words, glossary of terms or index and comprehensive questions as in book materials. No wonder therefore, that there is high rate of spelling errors, bad grammar and poor construction of sentences in students' spoken and written English language nowadays. In Nigeria, many researchers have attributed students' non-challant attitude to reading and consequently mass failure of students in both internal and external examinations to the use of the internet. Reading of books is taken serious only when examination is at hand.

Table V

**NUMBER OF HOURS SPENT WHEN USING SOCIAL NETWORKS:**

S/No	No of hours	Frequency	%
1.	1 – 2	23	46
2.	2 – 4	27	54
3	TOTAL	50	100

On number of hours spent browsing social networks, 23 (46%) spend 1– 2 hours on social networks and 27 (54%) browse between 2– 4 hours. The sad revelation from this is that, students spend very little time to read their notes or study for their academic development as they spend on the social networks and most of the reasons for consulting the social networks have little or no relation to their education. This is true of what Obama (2008), pointed out that children cannot achieve unless they raise their expectations and turn off television sets. It is also basic fact that active learning from books is better than passive learning such as watching television and playing games. Students are rarely interested in reading for pleasure and enjoyment instead they read only to pass examination.

Table VI

**HOW OFTEN SOCIAL NETWORK (FACEBOOK) IS USED:**

S/No	Basis of use	Frequency	%
1.	Daily	15	30
2.	Weekly	14	28
3.	Monthly	5	10
4.	Occasionally	16	32
5	TOTAL	50	100

Table VI presents responses on how often the social media (Facebook) is used; 15 (30%) use it daily, 14 (28%) on weekly basis, 5 (10%) get on social networks monthly and 16 (32%) occasionally used the social networks. There would be a negative impact on reading habits of those who use social networks daily, because they may be drifted into spending time that would have been used to read their notes. On the contrary, consulting the social networks occasionally will give room for reading of books but would also miss out on some social activities that might have been of benefits to personal development.

## **CONCLUSION**

The social network is fast becoming a source of academic information among students due to easy access, correctness, availability and up-to-datedness, while the library is mainly as a reading place. Youth today spend more time surfing through the internet, which consist of social network sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, Myspace, Flickr, Google+, and the rest.

Though the social networks may help the students in their studies and socialization, but negative and excessive use of them have harmful effect on their education. Spending lengthy time surfing social net works cause them to sleep in the class while lessons are going on and score low marks in tests and examinations. Another danger is meeting online predators who may claim to be what they are not and later become a danger to the user, disrupting their studies.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings of this work, it is recommended that;

1. Library hours should be created in school time table where students enter the library to read books only, especially fictions with good role models as characters.
2. School authorities and teachers should create awareness for students on the sooner or later harmful effects of addiction to social networking sites on their education and personal self.
3. Instead of chatting on needless issues, parents and teachers should suggest interesting titles of online electronic books for students to read.
4. Late night browsing at home or in cafés should be discouraged.
5. School libraries should acquire current and interesting collections and also make the libraries attractive to encourage reading.
6. Students should make friends with books as they do with their phones by carrying one around with them.

7. Teachers and school Librarians should give students assignments that involve buying and reading a named title (for example, African series).
8. Campaign on the need for children to reduce time taken in watching television, playing computer games, chatting and browsing should be intensified.
9. Make students to set goals of number of books they will read in a month or a term and to also sought and make a list of book titles of about 10–20.
10. Teachers and Parents to make it a duty of reading a story or passage to the hearing of their students and children from the class reading corner or their home study respectively.

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