



A Critical Analysis of Social Networking and its Influence on Undergraduates' Reading Habit

Mbamalu, Basilia Oge¹ and Onyido, JaneFrances O.²

¹College Library, Federal College of Education (Technical), Umunze | Email: ezinwanyialex34@gmail.com

²Department of Home Economics Education, Federal College of Education (Technical), Umunze | Email: janefrancesonyido@gmail.com

Abstract: *Social networking is one of the components of the information and communication technology (ICT) currently trending across the globe. Social networking has found most attraction among the young people especially the undergraduates. Greater impetus to the involvement of young people comes from the emergence of mobile technology which has made internet services relatively affordable and accessible. While this has promoted greater interaction across traditional barriers, it has equally come with much concern about its influence on undergraduates' reading habit. Based on this concern, the paper critically analyzed undergraduates' craze for social networking and its influence on their reading habit. Using documentary sources, the paper contends that reading remains irreplaceable; but greater immersion of students in social networking may have adverse influence on undergraduates' reading habit. Suggestions are made to curb excesses in the use of social networking sites.*

Key words: *social networking, reading habit, undergraduates*

INTRODUCTION

Reading is an art which provides a human being with the foundation upon which to erect his or her understanding of life as well as the elements with which to build his or her worldview. Clark and Rumbold (2006) observed that, in addition to personal and mental developments, reading is critical for ensuring one's access to social, economic and civic life. Against the backdrop of rapidly changing nature of life as well as the society, reading is considered to be crucial for people from all cross-sections of life for successfully coping with the complexities and challenges of the 21st century.

Reading and reading habit are two aspects that have received increasing attention in recent years. In the evolving knowledge society, reading is considered crucial for gaining the necessary information and insights, which prepare a person to face the diverse challenges of modern times. Holte (1998) maintained that reading adds quality to life and provides access to culture and cultural heritage. He believed that reading empowers and emancipates citizens and brings people together. Okeke (2000) viewed the art of reading as a priceless instrument for everyone. He opined that reading is one of the most important activities in life, through which we enter into the life and experiences of others and extend our knowledge, scope of experience, and enjoyment.

Reading is particularly important in education as well as for unhindered intellectual growth of a person. Tella and Akande (2007) asserted that the ability to read is at the heart of self-education and lifelong learning and that it is an art capable of transforming life and society. Shabi and Udofia (2009) noted that active learning from books is better than passive learning such as watching televisions and playing games.

Reading habits are learning tendencies that enable students to work privately. Azikiwe (1998) describes the reading habit as “the adopted way and manner a student plans his private readings, after classroom learning so as to attain mastery of the subject”. According to her, “good reading habits are good assets to learners because they (habits) assist students to attain mastery in areas of specialization and consequent excellent performance, while opposite constitute constraints to learning and achievement leading to failure”. Good (1998) define the term reading habits as: The student’s way of reading whether systematic, efficient or inefficient etc”. Going by this definition it literally means that good reading habit produces positive academic performance while inefficient reading habit leads to academic failure.

The issue of reading, especially book reading, has received much attention from different quarters in recent times because of the downward trend it is experiencing, especially among the younger generation. The reasons of the decline in the reading habits of the general public, especially students and young people, are being widely debated and discussed by academicians, intellectuals, writers, librarians, and reading enthusiasts. In Nigeria, there are so many factors influencing students reading habit. In recent times, with the emergence of digital technologies reading among young people is said to be on the decline because of their interest in social networking, gaming, music, and so on.

Social media/ Social Networking is one of the technological foundation of Web 2.0 which allow people to create, share, exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks. It is the social interaction among people in which they can create, share or exchange information. Social media depends on mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms through which individuals can share, co-create, and discuss user generated content. Social networking such as Facebook, Orkut, MySpace, Flickr and Youtube are sites where users apply for membership and maintain their personal profile information in a centrally organized database. Each network member controls access to their profile by accepting or deleting request from other network members to be “friend “. By expanding and developing their networks of friends, social networking members are able to maintain online relationship for work, study, special interests leisure- related purposes. Platform like Twitter, Facebook, and Myspace have created online communities, where people can share as much or as little personal information as they desire with other members. The result is an enormous amount of information that can be easily shared, searched, promoted, disputed and created. Social Networking services utilize the participation technology and software tools such as blogs, wikis instant messaging, chat room message boards and social bookmarking to share online ideas, videos, photos etc.

While this has remained the trend, there is concern that social networking is killing the reading habit of undergraduates. The amount of time students devote in social networking eat deep into their reading time that there is barely little or no time left for meaningful engagement with reading culture. This paper seeks to do a critical analysis of the effect of social networking on the reading habits of undergraduates by exploring the pros and cons of social networking and weighing them against the need for reading culture in order to draw some inferences.

Concept of Social Networking

Social media and social networking are used interchangeably in literature. Social media includes a variety of web-based tools and services that are designed to promote community development through collaboration and information sharing (Arnold & Paulus, 2010; Junco, Helbergert, & Loken, 2011). These tools provide opportunities for individual expression as well as interactions with other users (Arnold & Paulus, 2010). The idea of “Social Networking” has existed for several decades as a way for people to communicate in society and build relationships with others (Coyle & Vaughn, 2008). With the increase of technology used for communicating with others and the popularity of the Internet, “Social networking” has become an activity that is done primarily on the Internet, with sites like MySpace, Facebook, Bebo, Friendster, and Xanga (Coyle & Vaughn, 2008). Social networking sites (SNS) may be defined as: Web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

Social networking is the latest technological explosion in the world of information; it is an online platform or site that focuses on building and reflecting on social relation among people, who share common interest or activities. According Adomi and Ejirefe (2012), social networking refers to activities, practices and behaviour among communities of people who gather online to share information, knowledge and opinion using interactive media. The interactive media are web based applications that make it possible to create and easily transmit content in forms of text, pictures, videos and audios. Kaplan and Halein (2010) defined social media as a group of internet – based application that build on the ideological and technological foundation of web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content. Social networking site allow users to share activities, event, ideas and interest within their individual network.

Students use the social networking for various reasons. Some use it to exchange ideas, feelings, personal information, pictures and videos (Loving & Ochoa, 2010). It is used for the purpose of connecting with friends and family (regardless of location), keeping up with the latest events and happening and for academic purposes. Social media can include blogs, wikis, media (audio, photo, video, text), sharing tools, networking platforms (including Facebook), and virtual worlds.

Instagram: A photo sharing app that allows users to edit photos and upload them to share with their followers. Users can choose to have a private or a public account. They can also share a photo directly with a selected few people. This is the equivalent of a private message.

Snapchat: A messaging app that allows you to set a timer on the photos and videos the user sends before they disappear.

Tumblr: A blogging platform but is also similar to twitter in terms of Retweeting and sharing others’ posts. Users can post videos, photos, and writing.

Facebook: A forum that is used to post pictures, videos, write status updates, articles and comments. Facebook also contains an option to create pages for different causes and events.

Twitter: 140 characters microblogging platform to share ideas, thoughts, and what you had for dinner.

Social Networking Sites (SNS) have been popular since the year 2002 and have attracted and fascinated tens of millions of Internet users (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Though only a few have

gained worldwide publicity and attention, the Federal Bureau of Investigation estimated that there are over 200 different sites that are used for social networking (Duven & Timm, 2008). Most people who are members of these sites, such as Facebook (over 400 million users) and MySpace (over 100 million users) participate in them on a daily basis (Duven & Timm, 2008). Each person who becomes a member of a SNS has the opportunity to create his or her own webpage or “profile” which is supposed to be seen as a reflection of that person’s personality (Tufekci, 2008). By using this personal profile, one can build an entire social network based on his or her own personal preferences (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

The idea behind most of this phenomenon, as with many websites, is to help people feel socially connected and part of a community, even though they may be sitting at home alone at their computer (Coyle & Vaughn, 2008). Participants may connect with other people they know through school, work, or an organization, or they may meet complete strangers from all over the world (Coyle & Vaughn, 2008). They do this by searching for people and adding them as “friends” so that they may share information with them and other networks that those people may be a part of (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Being “friends” in the SNS world simply means that two profiles have been linked together (Tufekci, 2008). This, in turn, expands a person’s network greatly, so that they may meet and share information with even more members (Coyle & Vaughn, 2008). In addition, being “friends” with someone on a SNS allows a person to communicate in a variety of ways such as sending private and public messages, participating in on-line games, commenting on photos that have been posted, sharing music or movie preferences, responding to journal entries, and much more (Livingstone, 2008). In one author’s opinion, “Creating and networking online content is becoming an integral means of managing one’s identity, lifestyle and social relations” (Livingstone, 2008:394). A click of a button may mean the loss or gain of a friendship, and a friendship on a SNS may be with someone who is not a friend in “real life” (Livingstone, 2008).

Though there are several options for “privacy” on these sites, research has shown that the public aspect of sharing information is what draws many to join and participate (Duven & Timm, 2008). Privacy has a new definition when referring to Social networking sites, since just becoming a member requires a person to give certain personal information (Duven & Timm, 2008). Some sites, like Facebook, started as a way for college students to connect and having an “edu” email address was required for signing up (Tufekci, 2008). Now, this site is open for all users, which also increases the amount of people who may have two accounts: One for private use, and one for business or school use (Tufekci, 2008).

When conceptualizing why these sites appeal to so many people, it is significant to note that each SNS focuses on the presentation of self and social status (Tufekci, 2008). Each person who joins a SNS must choose a picture to post on their personal profile, which is the picture that will be used as a representation of themselves (Barker, 2009). Some people use a recent picture of their face or a photo of a group of friends, while others choose a different image that they want to represent them or their values (Barker, 2009). Either way, this picture is significant when looking at a SNS because it shows how each individual would like to be seen by others (Barker, 2009).

Social status is also a very important part of SNSs because it plays a role in how each individual is viewed on their profile by others (Tufekci, 2008). Most SNSs will show how many “friends” a person has, as well as how many people have written to that person lately (Tufekci,

2008). Because of this, many SNS members will seek out people to connect with, even though they may not personally want to be linked with specific people (Tufecki, 2008). Adolescents and college-aged individuals are especially interested in having a lot of friends, because many worry what others will think if they do not have as many friends as their peers (Barker, 2009). Not only does joining a SNS help gain and preserve popularity, but selecting the perfect pictures to post are also very important aspects of the experience (Siibak, 2009). According to a recent study done on visual impression management and social networking sites, approximately 60% of adolescents will spend more time selecting which pictures to post on their profile than actually communicating with others (Siibak, 2009). This shows that these SNSs are not just for keeping in touch with classmates and meeting new people, they are used to build adolescent identities (Siibak, 2009).

Influence of Social Networking on Reading Habit

It is a known fact that social networking has taken an appreciable time from young people's routine schedules. The question is whether it has had adverse effect on their reading habit? Igbokwe, Obidike and Ezeji (2012) carried out a study to determine this, and concluded that despite the variations in the opinion of the school children respondents in this study, it is worthy of note that children are faced with distractions and poor reading habits in this modern age of avalanche numbers of communication gadgets in homes and schools. Though some of them play great roles in teaching and learning but there should be enough caution in exposing children to these modern communication tools because of the negative impact on the acquisition of reading skill by school children. Although, the study focused on children, there is no doubt that social networking can distract both children and young people from reading.

Khan (2012) studied the "Impact of Social Networking Websites on Students". The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of social networking websites on students. The author also evaluated why most people use social networking websites. Both primary and secondary data were collected and the primary data were collected through questionnaire method. 168 respondents were randomly selected from Khyber paktoon khwa, Peswar, Pakistan. Collected data were carefully assessed with the help of statistical software i.e. SPSS software. This research study used descriptive statistic and cross tabs analysis to find out the result. The findings showed that the students whose age ranged from 15 to 25 mostly use networking websites for entertainment. 60% of male students commonly used social networking websites for knowledge. Graduate students generally prefer social networking websites for entertainment. The analysis also showed that 67% people used social networking websites due to influence of their friends. The finding of the study is remarkable. The fact that as much as 60% of respondents use the social networking for knowledge is quite commendable and indicates that there is some gain to be derived from social networking.

Wang, et.al. (2011) studied the purpose of using social media by the college students. This study explored the advantages and disadvantages of students use of social networking for study. The study also explored the relationship between the effect of social networking and students study efficiency, and to determine if social media interfered with students' academic lives. The descriptive, exploratory research study drew a random sample of 48 including (26 males and 22 females) who were administered a student perception questionnaire on how social media affects college students. The result of the survey questionnaire indicate that 45% of the

sample admitted that they spent 6-8 hours per day checking social media sites, while 23% spent more than 8 hours; 20% spent 2-4 hours and only 12% spent less than 2 hours on this task. The study concluded that while most college students used social media and spent many hours, there was a negative aspect to college students use of social media. The enormous hours wasted searching and using social networking could have been converted to reading for students' academic enrichment.

Tariq et.al. (2012) studied the impact of social media on education students, and impact on life of teenagers. Further it describes how social networking websites are auditory and dangerous for youth and teenagers. Findings indicated that social network connect them with one another so that they did not even bother to solve their home tasks and they contact elders and seniors to help them in cloning their educational material. Social networks provide a virtual life to the students, those students who could not even speak in front of anyone could feel freedom in their virtual life . The virtual life of students distract his thoughts from education towards other activities and by living inside fantasy world students slowly starts to hate academic activities and studies. According to the survey a very large number of fake identities exist in social networks, these fake identities perform many kinds of violations on social networks in which they register themselves as a fake identity on name of someone else and upload inappropriate materials with fake identity.

Taysur (2014) studied the effect of using social networks ,e.g. Facebook and Twitter on students engagement in both academic and social aspects. The sample consists of 30 freshmen students in the Petroleum Institute excluding female due to cultural and traditional reasons. The study used survey method as the main data gathering instrument. The survey questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data. Findings indicated that students with high GPA spend more time using social networks while students with low GPA spend less time, more than two-third of the respondents do not share information about lectures and homework and further more than half of the respondents do not even look for college related information through social network. The study concluded that there is a correlation between students GPAs and their usage of social Networks. The findings of the study however remained inexplicable because if students do not exchange information on lectures and school activities, how would the use of social networking influence their GPA? The finding therefore remains controversial.

Benefits of Social Networking

Though many arguments can be made about the possible risks of adolescent social networking, it is important to point out the benefits of these websites as well. Many schools have started to use these sites to promote education, keep students up to date with assignments, and offer help to those in need (Boyd, 2007). In general, the Internet and social networking sites can be a positive influence on students. Social networking sites provide an outlet for young people to express themselves in their own unique ways (Boyd, 2007). In addition, they serve both as a meeting place for young people to interact with other like-minded people and as showplaces for a people's artistic and musical abilities (Boyd, 2007). Finally, students use these sites as tools to obtain information and resources for graduation preparation and future planning. For example, students applying for higher qualification visit profiles of that university's students to view pictures and read blogs of past students to determine whether the school would be a good fit (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

Appraising Social Networking in Relation to Reading Habit

Technologies have transformed our lives in many positive ways. But the negative impact of these innovations in our social and educational pursuits appears to over-weigh its positives. This is in line with the fact that there is hardly anything invented by man, no matter its level of perfection that is without some flaws. Education is a very essential aspect of societal and individuals' lives. Education to a society is more important than anything. Advancement in technologies has eased the processes of academic research. Findings also reveal that, today, students show very much interest in using social networks, which in turn affects education severely. As noted earlier, the negatives of social media on students and education in general appears to supersede the positives. Social media has lowered the standard of education in Nigeria. It has grabbed the attention and concentration of students and diverts them toward non-educational, unethical and inappropriate actions such as examination malpractices. It has made students so lazy that they hardly resort to extensive study before sitting for any examination. Instead of studying very hard to write and pass examinations, students now cultivate the habit of cheating through browsing on their mobile handset while in examination halls. Reading culture among students is on the verge of extinction. Concentration in classrooms during lecture periods is now a thing of the past among students. While classes are being held, students lose more than fifty percent concentration to chatting on social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, Friendster, Hi5, Mozat, BBM, 2go, among several others. Social networking brought about loss of concentration among students, thereby creating one problem or the other in their educational pursuits and performance. Communication skills, language usage and creative writing have declined among students, as the new technologies has reduced or taken away their communication skills. Also, students hardly speak good English these days. They mostly use slang words or shortened forms of words in writing as a result of complete reliance on computer grammar and spell check features.

The emergence of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) or the social media has eased the processes of research by providing unlimited access to information on virtually all spheres of human endeavours. But looking at the quality of information available on the Internet, one can agree with the fact that most of the information accessed on social media are fabricated. Not all of the information collated on the social networks are accurate and factual. This is because anybody who has access to the Internet can write and share information of all sorts, regardless of their quality. The dependence of students on social media for the sourcing or gathering of materials for academic researches has degraded the value of most academic works undertaken by students. Today, students are fond of plagiarism. One can access, copy and use other persons' works without acknowledgement. This has greatly affected qualitative research among students, especially in tertiary institutions.

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severely. As noted earlier, the negatives of social media on students and education in general appears to supersede the positives as few examples below demonstrate:

1. Social media has lowered the standard of education in Nigeria. It has grabbed the attention and concentration of students and diverts them toward non-educational, unethical and inappropriate actions such as examination malpractices.
2. It has made students so lazy that they hardly resort to extensive study before sitting for any examination. Instead of studying very hard to write and pass examinations, students now cultivate the habit of cheating through browsing on their mobile handset while in examination halls.
3. Reading culture among students is on the verge of extinction. Concentration in classrooms during lecture periods is now a thing of the past among students. While classes are being held, students lose more than fifty percent concentration to chatting on social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, Friendster, Hi5, Mozat, BBM, 2go, among several others.
4. Social networking brought about loss of concentration among students, thereby creating one problem or the other in their educational pursuits and performance.
5. Communication skills, language usage and creative writing have declined among students, as the new technologies has reduced or taken away their communication skills.
6. Also, students hardly speak good English these days. They mostly use slang words or shortened forms of words in writing as a result of complete reliance on computer grammar and spell check features.
7. The emergence of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) or the social media has eased the processes of research by providing unlimited access to information on virtually all spheres of human endeavours. But looking at the quality of information available on the Internet, one can agree with the fact that most of the information accessed on social media are fabricated. Not all of the information collated on the social networks are accurate and factual. This is because anybody who has access to the Internet can write and share information of all sorts, regardless of their quality.
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Conclusion and Recommendation

Social networking is one of the ICT-induced innovations that has come to stay. It has found high attraction among young people most of whom are participants in at least two social networking sites. While there are gains derivable from social networking which include sociability and reaching out to people without boundaries, the academic implication of social networking can be far-reaching. The time-tested benefits of reading habit are fast giving way to social networking with severe consequences on the intellectual abilities of the present and next generation.

There are possible ways out (solutions) to these challenges. These challenges are avoidable because they are not beyond control. Stakeholders in the education sector should encourage creativity among students. Creativity should be made a competition among students through sponsorship (scholarship) and other education grants to those who are creative, as this will motivate others to be creative and will boost academic performance. The provision of standard research and practical facilities in schools can also help the situation. Where students lack adequate research facilities like books and other relevant and referencing materials in libraries, they tend to resort to the easy “copy and paste” methods of social media. Today, you find out that students write and present final year project works without being able to defend what they claim to have written. There should also be regulation in the education sector with regards to the use of social networks among students. Although, this task can be very tedious to achieve, but the provision of regulatory frameworks in this regard will reduce the challenges posed by social media in the education sector. There should be strict rules prohibiting students from carrying along their mobile handsets and other electronic gadgets to classrooms and examination halls so as to encourage full concentration. Parents also have their own roles to play in this direction, through close-monitoring of their children’s activities and academic performances.

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