

Influence of Social Media on Students' Cultural Diversity and Academic Achievement

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Abstract

This paper examined the influence of Social media on students' cultural diversity and academic achievement. Social media are web applications which generally refer to the social environment in which everybody has the potential to become a creator of content or applications. Social media allow users to organize, create and share their own media their own way. This is possible with the special qualities of platforms. Today, social media has been accepted by several institutions of learning, making it a platform where students connect with their instructors, fellow students and other higher authorities across the board. This therefore called for the study to explore how social media has impacted on students' cultural diversity and academic achievement. The study adopted survey research method, while data was collected using a 15-item structured questionnaire. The population of study comprised students of Alex Ekwueme Federal University. A sample size of 180 respondents was drawn, out of which 162 responded effectively. The findings revealed that 96% of the respondents use social media and they access them regularly. Also, 69% of the respondents stated that social media have supported their academic life positively, while 67% agreed that social media contributes to their socio-cultural awareness. In line with the findings of the study, the paper recommended among others, that social media platforms should be used to promote cultural diversity in Nigeria especially in these times when the country is bedeviled by a lot of divisive tendencies, while caution must be exercised to avoid the malicious use of social media platforms by students.

Keywords: Social Media, Culture, Cultural Diversity, Influence, Students Academic Achievement

Introduction

Social media has progressively become a very popular part of our everyday life in today's globalizing society (Sawyer & Chen, 2012). With the emergence of the Internet, boundaries of time and space have begun to disappear in communication while it has become easier and faster for citizens to access information. With the introduction of various social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, among others, in the 2000s, interaction-based and multi-faceted communication has become possible. Compared to other Internet-based applications, the difference with social media is that it can create social networks and offer users the chance to create, share and consume content and/or ideas (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014, cited in Çömlekçi, 2020). Boateng & Amankwaa (2016) observe that social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Google Plus, and Flickr, are being used in learning for the purpose of convenient communication with other students and potentially with others outside the class such as students of the same topic and subject experts. Similarly, social media applications can strengthen class material and positively influence discussions, collaborative work, and authoring. Following this development, educators and researchers are also constantly experimenting with social media technologies hoping to stimulate critical thinking skills, collaboration, and knowledge construction.

According to Sawyer & Chen (2012), social media has social, physical and cultural effects in terms of cultural adaptation. Students for example are able to socialize via social networks when they migrate to other societies, increase their social and cultural capital (Brekke, 2008) and easily have access to some information on cultural codes of the host society that might be crucial for the daily life. Hence, while cultures around the world value their individual traditions, beliefs, and norms that make them unique, social media links people around the world regardless of differences and geographical boundaries. According to Chen and Zhang (2010), "the compression of time and space, due to the convergence of new media and globalization, has shrunk the world into a much smaller interactive field." People across the globe can interact with each other within seconds of sending and receiving messages. This study is therefore an attempt to find out the influence of social media on students' cultural diversity and academic achievement.

Objectives of the study

- i. To find out the level of usage of social media among students.
- ii. To determine the impact of social media on students academic achievement.
- iii. To ascertain the influence of social media on students' cultural diversity.

Research Questions

- i. What is the level of usage of social media among students?
- ii. What is the impact of social media on students' academic achievement?
- iii. What is the influence of social media on students' cultural diversity?

Conceptual Clarification

Social Media

Social media are web applications which generally refer to the social environment in which everybody has the potential to become a creator of content or applications and to reshape the relationship between user and media as well (DiMicco & Millen, 2007). Selwyn (2012) cited in Boateng & Amankwaa (2016) describes the social media as application that allows users to converse and interact with each other; to create, edit and share new forms of textual, visual and audio content, and to categorize, label and recommend existing forms of content. The social media became a major tool used by audiences to source for information and to express their mind as it grew older. Social media have empowered people globally, serving as a platform for the expression of views on both personal and global issues. Ozuru & Ekeanyanwu (2013), also agree with the notion that "social media networks have spiced up ways in which information are disseminated." Social media platforms have also increased the capacity of societies and people to tell their own stories, generate their own stories and disseminate same without the traditional gate keeping managed by the traditional media.

Impact of Social Media on Student Academic life

Social media according to Gurcan (2015) provides students a new mechanism for a familiar exercise. It provides students a direct medium by which to publicly evaluate and comment on their campus environments, institutional policies, classes, professors, and administration and fellow students in real-time. Today's students communicate via technology by means of a variety of tools such as Skype, text, email, Facebook and twitter. Dewing (2010) notes that social media opens up new ways for collaboration and discussion in the sense that, it offers a great deal of content posting, coping, sharing and search ability by easily using online search tools. Students today use social media anywhere and at any time where internet connection is available in order to meet their educational needs. Students use social media to communicate with their teachers as a group outside of class and to plan school events as well as other academic activities; social media also allow students to get help on school work from teachers and fellow students during the evening, weekends, and holidays so that they do not lag behind. Although, El-Badawy and Hashem (2015) showed that there is no correlation between the students' academic performance and social media but from some earlier works, it is evident that there are significant effects of communication technology and social networking sites on students' academic performances (Lomi et. al., 2011; Junco, 2015, cited in Obadiora, 2013). According to Abousaber & Oueder (2018) social media play a crucial role on communication between faculty students, which help in circulating correct information and leads to clear understanding and the development of ideas. Social media has a great influence on learning method and relationship among people (Butler & Matook, 2015). It can be used positively in sharing and generating ideas and concepts related to studies. Also, Boateng & Amankwaa (2016) note that many universities now maintain profiles and groups on social networking sites such as Facebook, where students and faculty can interact, share resources and express learner voice. Social media poses a liberal environment for students to discuss and share their views and opinions easily and freely on issues that otherwise would not have been done in a normal traditional classroom, thus, Mason and Rennie (2007) reasoned that, shared community spaces and inter group communications are a massive measure of what excites young people and therefore should contribute to their persistence and motivation to learn. Mingle and Adams (2015) however suggested for

proper monitoring and counseling of students, so that social media can be used by them for educational purposes only.

Culture/Cultural Diversity

Generally, culture is seen as ways of living of a particular people. According to Lederach (1995), culture is the shared knowledge and scheme created by a set of people for perceiving, interpreting expressing and responding to the social realities around them. Filo (2008) defines culture as shared values and beliefs in a given group, while Carla (2009) further adds that culture is the shared patterns of behaviours and interactions, cognitive constructs and effective understanding that are learned through a process of socialization. Culture has two main components: the material and non-material components. The material component of culture include food, dresses, shelter, equipments and tools, while the non-material component are language, attitude, beliefs and religion, music and dance as well as norms and values of a society (New World Encyclopedia, 2007).

Nigeria is a nation of numerous ethnic groups with rich customs and traditions. This could be the reason for the complexity of the existing cultural diversity of the nation. By definition, Cultural diversity is used to describe a society with people of different ethnic groups and traditions (Filo, 2008). According to Obaro (1999), there are more than 200 ethnic groups in Nigeria with their distinctive customs, traditions and languages; these groups include the Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Jukun, Edo, Itshekiri, Ibibio, Efik, Urhobo, Isoko, Idoma, Tiv, Birom, Angas, Kanem, Fulani, Nupe, Igala, Ijaw, Aguleri, Kagoro Moro'a, Jaba, Fantsuan, Bajju, Gbagi, Kagoma, Mada, Ninzam, Attaka Attukar Koro, Eko, Kutebq, Kataf, Egbira, Ikwerre, Kanuri, among numerous others. In addition, there are more than four hundred language groups in Nigeria (Omolewa 1986). Osaghae and Suberu (2005) affirm that the exact number of ethnic groups in Nigerian is not known.

In accordance with Emuze & James (2013), diversity is important in a social environment because it can help to create an environment that offers mutual respect and support, appreciation of different and unique individuals and the non-reliance on biases that can exist due to lack of education, information and knowledge. Thiederman (2003) observes that viewing biases logically would afford the opportunity to accurately perceive others and gain better exposure to, and knowledge of a diverse group. The new knowledge and perspectives brought by diversity can become a resource for innovation and adaptability (Ely & Thomas 2001). Fredrickson (2003) opines that experiencing greater creativity and innovation can breed positive intergroup relations and commitment to change, if members of an organization understand the strategic resource potential of diversity. Also, those who believe that diversity is a source of creativity and learning are more likely to show behavioural support and facilitate its implementation with greater focus, persistence, and effort. Positive attitudes and emotions can counter dysfunctional reactions and create upward spirals through contagion.

Influence of Social Media on Cultural Diversity

Cultural differences influence communication, behavior, and values. As Rosen, Stefanone, and Lackaff (2010) pointed out, there are differences among cultures, and these differences affect the way people communicate within social networking sites. During intercultural adaptation to a host country environment, people use social media to learn about their host countries, establish and maintain relationships, and stay informed with events in their home countries. Sawyer & Chen (2012) put it this way; 'social media is an important part of our life because it promotes the interconnectedness and interdependence of our culturally diverse world.' The communication that occurs in these online contexts promotes interactive dialogues that build understanding of different points of view.

Methodology

The method adopted for this study is survey. The population of the study comprises students of Alex Ekwueme Federal University (AE-FUNAI), Ndufu-Alike, located in Ikwo Local Government Area of Ebonyi State. The university has a population of over 10,000 students. The university was picked because the population comprises of a large number of students from different ethnic background in Nigeria, and a

few overseas students, hence, it will afford the researcher the ability to get diverse opinion about the topic of study. The sampling techniques adopted were the multi-stage and cluster sampling technique. These techniques were chosen because the population was large and it was necessary to cluster them and select them in stages to administer the questionnaire with ease. The researcher first clustered the population into faculties. There are 10 Faculties in AE-FUNAI; however four Faculties were randomly selected. They are: Faculty of Agriculture, Faculty of Sciences, Faculty of Education and Faculty of Humanities. Departments were randomly picked from the faculties. The sample size of the study is 180.45 respondents were randomly selected from the department, making a total of 180 respondents; however only 162 copies of the questionnaire were correctly filled and returned. Data was analyzed quantitatively using frequency tables and percentages.

Results

It is important to note that only 162 copies of the questionnaire were effectively filled and used for analysis. From the demographic data, the study had more male respondents (53.7%) than female respondents (46.3). Similarly, more respondents were between the ages of 20-24 (47.5%) followed by respondents between ages 15-19 (25.3%). Few respondents fell between the age ranges of 25-29 (19.8%), and 30 and above (7.4%). Results also indicated that more respondents were in their third (31.5%), fourth (26.5%) or final years (19.1%) of their study, followed by those who were in their first (16%) or second year (6.8%) since the average minimum entry age into the university is age 16 and most courses on an average last for a maximum of four to five years. This result can be said to represent the contemporary Nigerian society where most university students are young adults with fewer teenagers and older citizens.

Findings in table 1 indicate that majority of the students (96.9%) use social media. This is a clear indication that social media has permeated deeply into the student community.

Table 1: General Information on Respondents' use of Social media

Response	Do you make use of social media? (%)
Yes	96.9%
No	3.1%
Total	100
	n = 162

Results in table two shows that more respondents use more than one social media platforms. Facebook (96.9%), WhatsApp (96.9%), YouTube (88.3%), Twitter (76.5%), and LinkedIn (68.5%) were more commonly used platforms among the students.

Table 2: Social media platforms used by respondents

Response	Which of these social media platform do you use the most?	(%)
	Facebook	96.9
	WhatsApp	96.9
	Twitter	76.5
	Instagram	59.9
	YouTube	88.3

	Telegram	36.4
	Skype	34.6
	LinkedIn	68.5

In table three, result show that more respondents (72.2%) were constantly logged in, followed by those who logged in daily (67.3%), those who visit more than five times a day (63.6%), and less than five times a day (29.6). Respondents who only logged in to social media on weekly (19.6%) and monthly (8%) basis were the fewest represented by the data. This result clearly expresses the fact that online activities are continuously becoming a part of the daily routine of an individual.

Table 3: Frequency of Usage

Response	How often do you log into social media in a day?	(%)
	More than five times a day	63.6
	Less than five times a day	29.6
	Daily	67.3
	Weekly	19.6
	Monthly	8
	I am constantly logged in	
	I am never logged in	3.1

As shown in Table Four, most respondents use social media to get information (87%), followed by the use of social media for communication (84%). The use of social media to acquire knowledge received 73.5% affirmation, while entertainment (59.3%), and meeting new people (64.2%), had considerable representation. Social media platforms provide constant information and updates to its users and also enable constant interconnectivity at a somewhat inexpensive rate.

Table 4: Reason for the use of Social media

Response	Why do you use social media?	(%)
	Communication	84
	Information	87
	Meeting new people	64.2
	Entertainment	59.3
	Acquire knowledge	73.5
	None of the above	3.1

According to the data in Table 5, 91% of the respondents agreed that they use social media for academic purposes.

Table 5: Use of Social media for academic purposes

Response	Do you use social media in your academic life?	(%)
	Yes	91.4
	No	8.6
	Total	100

In table 6, data revealed that social media is highly (77.2%) used by students for academic purposes, and majority (69.1%) of them agree that social media contribute positively to their academic life.

Table 6: Extent of use of social media for academic purposes

Response	To what extent do you use social media for academic purposes?	((%)
	To what extent has social media supported your academic life?	(%)
High extent	77.2	69.1
Neutral	12.9	20.4
Low extent	9.9	10.5

In table 7, majority of the respondents affirmed that they belong to academic (74%) and cultural forums (58%) on social media. Most students are members of departmental and faculty-wide whatsapp groups, and some are members of different groups on Facebook where academic activities or socio-cultural issues are discussed.

Table 7: Group membership on social media

Response	Do you belong to academic group(s) on social media?	(%)
	Do you belong to cultural forum(s) on Social media?	
Yes	74	58
No	25.9	41.9

Total

Table 8 shows that 82% of the respondents rated the influence of social media on their academic life as good.

Table 8: influence of social media on students' academic life

Response	How would you rate the social media in terms of influence on your academic life?
Good	82
Neutral	14.8
Bad	3.1

In table 9, 67% of the students acknowledged the fact that social media contributes to their socio-cultural awareness. This could be partly responsible for the reason why 77% affirmed that the social media do not hamper a people's culture.

Table 9: Impact of social media on culture

Response	Does social media contribute to your Socio-cultural awareness?	(%)
	Does social media hamper your culture?	(%)
Yes	67.3	7.4
Not sure	9.3	15.4

Discussion of Findings

Generally, findings indicate that students use of social media is not only high (96.9%), but social media offer them platforms to discuss academic activities like their assignment and course work, class schedules, class venues; they also receive and send information among their peers, explore issues related to students welfare, payments of different kinds, among others. This finding is in line with the opinion of Boyd & Ellison (2007) who assert that social media allow people identify other users with whom they have a connection, read and react to postings made by them on the site, and send and receive messages either privately or publicly. Thus, this study corroborates the position that social media provides students a new mechanism for a familiar exercise. It provides students a direct medium by which to publicly evaluate and comment on their campus environments, institutional policies, classes, professors, and administration and fellow students in real time.

In the same vein, the respondents' responses to ways in which membership of cultural groups has affected their socio-cultural orientation indicates that through shared experiences on social media via videos, images, texts, audio clips, links, among others, students (87.7%) are able to get insight about other people's culture, and this helps them to understand and appreciate such cultures. Similarly, some other respondents (79.6%) explained that social media helps them to connect with people from their part of the country and others. Others (83.3%) observed that social media gives them the opportunity to nurture social bonds, as well the opportunity for cultural expressions and promotion of their individual cultures. The responses clearly support the observation of Boyd & Ellison (2007) that social networking sites allow individuals to create profiles within the system, view others' profiles with which they share a connection, and interact with others in the system. Accordingly, Georgetown University (2010) opines that turmoil and violence would exist unless people actively promote intercultural dialogue and communication competence to achieve harmony and understanding. Social media provides a place where people across the world can stay in touch and feel closer and more connected regardless of the distance that separates them. While providing a common way of linking people together through knowledge, behavior, and attitudes, a sense of belonging to a greater social network other than one's own local community is effectively created; hence, the Internet exemplifies such a significant means in connecting to a diversity of people, places, ideas, and cultures.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study investigated the influence of social media on students' cultural diversity and academic achievement. The found that with the arrival and popularization of social media, the society has undergone a revolutionary change, hence the high level of usage among students. Also, the study has been able to establish that social media tend to have a positive influence on students academic achievement cultural diversity. Specifically, social media create a new line of thought that enable a lot of people from different cultures to connect with each other, accept each other, and express each other culture in different forms.

Recommendation

In line with findings of this study, this paper recommends the use of social media platforms to promote cultural diversity in Nigeria especially in these times when the country is bedeviled by a lot of divisive tendencies. It is a good development that the students are beginning to realize the importance of social media in both their academic and socio-cultural lives. Hence, it is imperative to encourage the use of social media to foster peaceful co-existence among the different ethnic groups, while caution must be exercised to avoid the malicious use of social media platforms by students.

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