SOCIAL NETWORKING, AGE AND GENDER: A CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGE ON STUDENTS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN NIGERIA

by

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Abstract

This study investigated social networking, age and gender as contemporary challenges on students' academic performance. Six hundred (600) participants were selected from ten secondary schools in Imo State using random sampling. Three hundred and sixty-eight (368) were males, while two hundred and thirty-two (232) were females within the age range of 13-20 years with a mean age of 15.18 years. The participants were administered a 21 item inventory which measures social networking, developed by the researchers and has a reliability coefficient of cronbach alpha of .76. Three hypotheses were postulated and tested. These include: (a) *Students who are involved in social networking would not differ significantly from those who are not involved.* (b) *Gender of students would not differ in their academic performance and (c)Age of students would not differ in their academic performance. The study adopted mediamorphosis theory as its theoretical framework. Chi-square statistics was used to analyze the data. Results showed that social networking influences the academic performance of school children. Gender and age were found to vary accordingly as males were more involved than females, and students within the age of 13-16 years dominated usage of social networking. Recommendations were offered based on these findings.*

Keywords: Social networking, Age, Gender, Students and Academic Performance.

Introduction

Researches on academic performance of students in recent time have shown that social networking, age and gender, among others, are the most important factors challenging the academic prowess of students (Egwumba, 2012, Abosi, 2012). Poor performance of students on their academics have attracted debate and discussion among educationists, psychologists, sociologists, teachers, parents

and even governments (Ajonuma, 2003; Anderson, 2004; Hope, 1996).

Social networking are web based services which allow people to present themselves, articulate their social interaction and establish or maintain connections with others (Egwumba, 2012). It connects people who share similar interests and activities across political, economical and geographical border. It provides a different way for individuals to communicate digitally (Kosoko, 2009). Many embrace these means of communication due to the fact that it allows them to connect people outside their pre-existing social group or location. It is an online service platform or site that focuses on building and reflecting on social relations among people. It consists of a user profile (his/her social links) and a variety of additional services.

Because of the value attached to social networks, many organizations, today have found them as a medium through which organization's image, strengths and weakness are sold to the public (Nimetz, 2007). Their sites are popularly used for work-related context, romantic relationship, music, politics, religion and above all academic works of secondary school students. For clear understanding, these sites include email, Google; facebook, twitter, mygamma, myspace, 2go, WhatsApp, facebook chart, prochart; pinging, charting, 2wap, etc. Research has shown that social network sites currently have more than 60 million users daily, with expectations of many more. With its emergence in 2004, and reprinted by 2007, more than 21 million have registered with 1.6 million pages viewed each day. Drawing its property from college and secondary school students, some of these sites accommodate distinct viewers, while others attract people

based on similarities, such as common language, racial, sexual, religious or national based identities (Crispo, 2008).

However, over 22,000 organizations have been identified to make use of facebook yearly. Also the 7th most popular site on world wide web social network sites has been linked to psychological well-being of users such as, depression, self-esteem, anxiety, insomnia, and satisfaction with life (Bargh and Mckenra, 2004). More so, it has been found that Internet services like facebook and 2go help college students to remain close to their school friends after revealing that, students and youths spend much time on those networks than reading their books, even in their various classrooms. Students indulge in academic procrastination because of those sites. In Mexico, it was discovered that facebook addicts spend over four hours every day on facebook. Several studies have linked social network usage with gender. Shock and Umber (2010), reported that males get involved more than females. Certainly, studies have shown that, students who spend much of their time online find it difficult to concentrate on their academic activities as a result, faces drawback in their performance as they are always distracted.

The popularity of social networking activities is increasing without comparison. The shift has caused a lot of damage as many students cannot read or write again. They now use text message in short forms. Today, students are used to keyboards and touch pad more than their writing materials. They cannot spell words correctly. Parents and teachers should therefore combine effort to discourage this behaviour, if not; the future of our tomorrow's leaders would be for nothing. Spending hours on social media would breed poor academic performance, excessive tiredness and lack of

engagement in school activities (Chukwu, 2008).

Another factor linked with poor academic performance is age. Researchers that based their work on age have focused on the age of the students that indulge in social media, business or networking (Kezie, 2003; Harryson, 2005). Today, students are cited and seen in our various streets and schools moving around with phones including under aged. It becomes a worrisome situation to teachers, counselors, parents, researchers and educationists on the rampant use of electronic materials by students. Many of them are seen pressing and dancing along the streets and in their classroom. Some plug theirs on their ear. This situation has called for urgent attention in order to improve the students' academic standard. Therefore, restrictions have to be placed on the use of such materials and most importantly, age of the students has to form the baseline for the restriction (Okoroji, 2010). Students of age 10 are seen with cell phones which belong to them, and these phones are highly sophisticated with Internet facilities.

A lot of studies have been advanced on the age of the students as it relates to social media usage. Many have written that students of secondary schools are highly dominant in the usage. Furthermore, Maxwell (2011), argued that, the use of social media network affect mostly students within the age of 13-15 years, while at above 15years, the effect is not much, but cannot be compared. Other related investigations on students' academic standard have a correlation with the use of social media and network both in school and at home (Bishop, 2006; Camp, 2009; Kizito, 2008).

The rate at which parents and school counselors frown at the sudden fall in student's academic performance have raised questions yet to be answered, and many researchers had attributed the fall to various factors like; poor learning environment, poor staffing, poor physical and unconducive environment (Hycinth, 2006). Others had written extensively on the rapport which exists between teachers and students, methods of teaching, teaching aid and all these factors were considered previously by many scholars and researchers, still the worst is seen and noticed among students of secondary school. It is against this background that the researchers agreed to investigate social networking, age and gender to determine whether the fall noticed on students' academic performance could have any link with them.

The study will find out if social networking, age and gender pose serious challenges to students' academic performance. It will also suggest measures effectively needed to nip these challenges in the bud. The study will be beneficial in the sense that it will proffer solutions to the challenges occasioned by social networking, age and gender on students' academic performance.

Social Networking

According to Rouse (2016), social networking refers to the practice of expanding the member of one's business and/or social contacts by making connections through individual(s), social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google etc

Social networking can be defined as the use of platforms such as Facebook, Whatsapp, Instagram, Twitter, Chat etc to reach out as many people as possible. Social networking has advantage and disadvantage. In the former, it can be used to establish relationships that might end up in marriages. In the latter,

since hoodlums have used it to deceive, defraud and in some cases kill their victims.

Age

This is a noun, and refers to the length of time that a person has lived or a thing has existed. In other words, how long somebody or something has been inexistence. Age can be seen from the perspective of periodization in the history of existence of an animate or inanimate object.

Gender

According to FAO (1997), gender is defined as the relations between men and women, both perceptual and material. Gender is not determined biologically, as a result of sexual characteristics of either women or men, but is constructed socially. It is a central organizing principle of societies, often governs the processes of production and reproduction, consumption and distribution. A distinction can be made between gender and sex. In the former, it denotes differences between men and women on the basis of race, ethnic, religion, culture etc. in the latter, it refers specifically to either male or female.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted mediamorphosis theory as its theoretical framework. According to Fildler (1997), the media do not arise spontaneously and independently, rather, they emerge gradually from the metamorphosis of older media. This emergence results from the perceived deficiencies of the older media and denials of opportunities to citizens and their pressing need for participating in the communication process. Thus, the new media become a solace for the satisfaction of the citizens' need for information and communication. The relevance of this theory to the study is that the emergence of the new media such as Facebook, Whastapp, Instagram, etc have given the students the leverage to access information and engage in interactions with the outside world. Thus, while these social media platforms provide a vista of opportunities for the students, it nevertheless affects them negatively when wrongly used by them.

Method

Participants

Six hundred (600) participants of unequal gender of 368 males and 232 females were randomly selected from ten (10) secondary schools in Imo State. They were selected from; Okwuohia Secondary School, Holy Family Secondary School, Egbu Comprehensive Secondary School, Development Secondary School, Orlu Grammar Secondary School, Mbaise Secondary School, Uboma Girls Secondary School, Oguta Comprehensive Secondary School and Ihioma Girls Secondary School. The participants were drawn from Senior Secondary One (SS1) and Senior Secondary Three (SS3) of the schools mentioned. Fifteen males and fifteen females were selected from each of the schools within the age range of 13-20 years with a mean age of 15.18years.

Instrument

A 21 items inventory developed on a two point scale of yes and no options was adopted for data collection. Developed and validated by the researchers on a reliability coefficient of Cronbach alpha of .76 and test retest reliability of .86. the yes options were scored 2 marks while no options were scored 1mark.

Procedure

One hundred (100) copies of the questionnaire were distributed among SS1 – SS3 students of each of the schools mentioned. The students were directed and informed on how to fill the

questionnaires and were asked to spend about ten (10) minutes, because there were no correct or wrong answers.

The questionnaires were collected after 10 minutes. The researchers sorted them out immediately and the first sixty copies properly filled and completed represented the sample from each school and the total was six hundred (600) copies which represented the sample for the study.

Design/Statistics

A cross sectional survey design was adopted and chi-square statistics was used for data analysis.

Results:

Chi-square summary result showing the effect of social networking, age and gender on secondary school students' academic performance.

Age	Gender	Student involved in social networking	Students not involved in networking	Total
13- 16	Male	318	50	368
17-20	female	208	24	232
Total		526	74	600

$$X^2 = \frac{(O-E)^2}{E} \ X \ \frac{ct \ X \ rt}{gt}$$

$$Cell_1 = \frac{368 \ X \ 526}{600} = \frac{193568}{600}$$
$$= 322.6$$

$$Cell_2 = \frac{368 \ X \ 74}{600} = \frac{27232}{600}$$
$$= 45.4$$

$$Cell_3 = \frac{232 \ X \ 526}{600} = \frac{122032}{600}$$
$$= 203.4$$

$$Cell_4 = \frac{232 \ X \ 74}{600} = \frac{17168}{600}$$
$$= 28.6$$

O	E	O-E	(O-E)^2	$(O-E)^2/E$
318	322.6	-4.6	21.16	0.06
50	45.4	4.6	21.16	0.47
208	203.4	4.6	21.16	0.10
24	28.6	-4.6	21.16	0.74

X^2C = 1.37
df = (c-1) (r-1)
(4-1) (4-1)
(3)(3) = 9
df = 9
X^2C = 1.37
X^2t = 16.92

Interpretation

Since the X^2 critical value is greater than the X^2 calculated value, the first hypothesis which states that students who are involved in social networking would not differ from those who are not involved is therefore rejected, meaning that variation existed between students involved and students not involved at probability level of p >0.05, df = 9; X^2C = 1.37; X^2t = 16.92. This further explains that students who are involved in social networking performed poorly than those who are not involved. Gender was found to vary, as males were more involved than females, also age was found to vary as students within the ages of 13-16 years dominated the scene against 17-20 years respectively.

Discussion

This study investigated social networking, age and gender as contemporary challenges to students' academic performance. The study

discovered that, students who are involved in social networking vary in their academic performance with students who are not involved.

Gender and age were found to vary accordingly, as gender varies, males were found to be more in social networking than females, while students within the ages of 13-16 years dominated the scene. The gender findings were supported by Shock and Umber (2010), while Maxwell (2011), confirmed the age findings as well.

Summary
Some of the challenges that affect student's academic performance have been attributed to such factors as social networking, age and gender. These factors cause distractions to students, hence their studies are abandoned resulting in poor academic performance.

Conclusion
Research has shown that these factors such as social networking, age and gender impact negatively on the student's academic performance. This is because the time and energy that students can use, and channel to their studies are wasted on social networking.

Recommendations
1. Government should enact a legislation that will make it mandatory for students below 18 years not to engage in social networking/media at the expense of their studies in school.
2. Students who disobey this law should be prosecuted and if found culpable should be convicted.
3. Parents are advised to monitor their children at home in order to stop them from engaging in social media activities which negatively affect their academic performance.

4. Teachers should also monitor the activities of students in their school on how they engage in social media/networking activities.

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