



AWARENESS OF THE USE AND IMPACT OF FACEBOOK AND WHATSAPP AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

ODILI, NGOZI

Baze University Library,

FCT, Abuja.

ngozi.odili@bazeuniversity.edu.ng; ngoziiodili@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Facebook and WhatsApp as social network sites are being used by several individuals, including undergraduate students in tertiary institutions. There is no doubt that social media have brought tremendous improvement in the communication system in educational system and the entire global sphere. Therefore, this paper is a conceptual paper which focuses on the awareness of the use and impact of Facebook and WhatsApp among undergraduate students in tertiary institutions. The paper reveals some relevant literatures related to the topic, which includes the concept of Facebook and WhatsApp and briefly explaining the history of both social networking sites. The paper also discusses the conceptual view of undergraduate students as students in the tertiary institutions pursuing their first degree programme to various disciplines. Awareness of the use of Facebook and WhatsApp by undergraduate students was also looked into, which is the knowledge or perception about the use of Facebook and WhatsApp. From the relevant literatures reviewed, it is obviously that some researchers have shown mixed feeling on the awareness of the use of Facebook and WhatsApp among undergraduate students. Most of the researchers discovered that Facebook and WhatsApp have been useful to undergraduate students in their studies. From the reviewed of related and relevant literatures, it is observed that that the awareness of the use of Facebook and WhatsApp by undergraduate students in higher institutions have become the popular means of communication among undergraduate students, undergraduate students use both Facebook and WhatsApp for social activities and academic purposes as the case may be in terms of creating Facebook and WhatsApp pages to study together and discuss class issues. The paper recommends amongst others undergraduates students should be tutored and advised on how to comport themselves to ensure that these platforms do not become disadvantages as regards to academic activities, undergraduates to make use of these social media more for academic purposes rather than for fun.

Keywords: Social media, Awareness, Use, Tertiary institution, Facebook, WhatsApp

Introduction

Social Media (SM) have brought tremendous improvement in the communication system which enhances learning. It has also provided different entertainment functions which serve as a tool for social change and fast exchange of information. Awareness of the use of *Facebook* and *WhatsApp* has to do with the information and knowledge someone has on the use of *Facebook* and *WhatsApp*. It should be noted that introduction of *Facebook* and *WhatsApp* has brought enormous celebration on the planet today because of the imminent and change in the communication pattern which has helped the scope of communication between individuals and groups. *Facebook* and *WhatsApp* which are social network platforms are made up of individuals, which are tied (connected) by one or more specific



types of interdependency, such as friendship, kinship, common interest, financial exchange, dislike, sexual relationships or relationships of beliefs, knowledge or prestige (Eke, Omekwu & Odoh, 2014).

Facebook and *WhatsApp* as social network sites emerged as a result of the advent of ICT thereby making communication among friends and relations easier than what it used to be. Social media sites among others include *Facebook*, *WhatsApp*, *Twitter* and *MySpace* used by people to create and sustain relationships with one another. Pempe, Yermolajeva and Calvert (2008) found *Facebook*, *WhatsApp* and other SM sites to be gaining popularity among the young adults in this information age. Many of these young adults who are mostly undergraduate students use the sites to communicate with family, friends and strangers as well. Having taken advantage of this technological trend, many undergraduate students have integrated the use of *Facebook* and *WhatsApp* into all their daily practices. A large number of the undergraduate students spend a lot of time on *Facebook* and *WhatsApp* to get information, engage in online chatting with friends, watch online movies or use them for research (Okidi, 2019).

According to Baro, Onyenania and Osaheni (2010), undergraduates can be referred to as students in the tertiary institutions pursuing their first-degree programme in various disciplines. Due to their heavy workload, the undergraduates usually search for information in various sources to support their learning activities. One of the obligations of undergraduate students are to review, understand, and abide by the University's regulations, procedures, requirements, and deadlines as described in official publications, bulletin, university conduct code, student handbook and class schedules. The habit of some undergraduate students by constantly login to *Facebook* and *WhatsApp* sites may affect them negatively in their academic activities to the extent of finding it difficult to concentrate and study effectively. Egedegbe (2013) opined that some people have become very smart because of the information they get from these sites, while some have become academically poor.

Review of Related Literature

Facebook and WhatsApp

According to Alsanie (2015), *Facebook* is an online social networking service that has its headquarter in Menlo Park, California. Its name comes from a colloquialism for the directory given to students at some American universities. *Facebook* was founded on February 4, 2004, by Mark Zuckerberg with his college roommates and fellow Harvard University students Eduardo Saverin, Andrew McCollum, Dustin Moskovitz and Chris Hughes. The founders had initially limited the website's membership to Harvard students, but later expanded it to colleges in the Boston area, the Ivy League, and Stanford University. It gradually added support for students at other universities and later to their high-school students. *Facebook* now allows anyone who claims to be at least 13 years old worldwide to become a registered user of the website, although proof is not required.

Joan (2015) stated that *Facebook* was initially targeting Harvard students, but was later opened to other universities and then high schools. In 2006, it allowed everyone to join and added a News Feed feature that would broadcast changes in members' pages to all its users, identified in their network of friends. It turned *Facebook* into a personalized social news service that by 2010 had more than 500 million members. Two years later, *Facebook* surpassed one billion users. In his own contribution, Grossman (2010) stated that with the rapid growth in field of online social networks, *Facebook* is considered to be the largest social network site on the internet today. *Facebook* is one of the most popular social networks in the world. Day by day, it is becoming an indispensable part of people lives affecting the daily routine of people. *Facebook* has established itself as one of the most popular social media sites. The use of *Facebook* has increased rapidly. Within five-year period after its initial appearance, it has attracted over 500 millions of users worldwide (Facebook Info, 2011).

On the other hand, *WhatsApp* messenger is a proprietary, cross-platform instant messaging



subscription service for Smartphone and selected feature phones. It uses the internet for communication. In addition to text messaging, users can send messages, images, video and audio media as well as their location. *WhatsApp* Inc. was founded in 2009 by Brian Acton and Jan Koum, both former employees at Yahoo. The company is based in Mountain View, California and employs 55 people. As of October 2014, *WhatsApp* is the most globally popular messaging app more than 600 million users. The *WhatsApp* app has become one of the most popular in the market, as evident from its usage by over 350 million users (Tzuk, 2013).

WhatsApp is a Smartphone app intended for sending instant messages. Message can be sent both personally and in-group form-such that it is possible to communicate with several people simultaneously. People utilize this app due to its low cost, the immediate possibility of holding a fluent conversation, the sense of belonging to a group that creates a feeling of community and family, and the confidentiality maintained, unlike social networks (Church & de Oliveria, 2013). An individual can initiate and build strong business partnership in any part of the world with *WhatsApp* without meeting that individual in person. With *WhatsApp* messenger, communication through mobile phones has become easier, faster and cheaper. It is less expensive as compared to the normal phone messaging. An individual can chat with friends and family overseas through *WhatsApp* without having to incur global SMS charges. The provision and access to learning material anywhere, anytime, and in various formats has potential to enhance deep student learning capabilities.

Awareness of the Use of Facebook and WhatsApp by Undergraduate Students

Awareness has been defined as the state or ability to perceive, to feel, or to be conscious of events, objects, or sensory patterns. In this level of consciousness, sensing data can be confirmed by an observer without necessarily implying understanding. More broadly, it is the state or quality of being aware of something. In biological psychology, awareness is defined as a human's or an animal's perception and cognitive reaction to a condition or event (Joan, 2015).

Awareness of *Facebook* and *WhatsApp* is the knowledge or perception about these social media, which means the understanding or knowledge of their environment or usage. *Facebook* and *WhatsApp* profiles were created for a two-way interaction with friends and many undergraduate students equally create a *Facebook* Page for class or department activities as the case may be. It can also be called a Fan Page, where all members are accepted as fans, and comments can be posted by them. Undergraduate students are equally aware of a *Facebook* Group or *WhatsApp* group, in which any community of people may create one. There may be a Group Administrator or administrators who may accept all members or reject requests based on the Group's criteria (Okidi, 2019).

According to Donlan (2010), *Facebook* use among undergraduate students is almost ubiquitous; however, its use for formal academic purposes remains contested. Students' awareness of *Facebook* and *WhatsApp* led them to start using these social media for academic purposes, notably for peer-peer communication around the group work, and for assessment conceptualised by students as learning. Donlan (2010) further stated that students are not ready or equipped for the collaborative style of learning envisaged by the tutor and see *Facebook* and *WhatsApp* as their personal domain, within which they will discuss academic topics where they see a strong relevance and purpose, notably in connection with assessment. Undergraduate students' awareness of *Facebook* and *WhatsApp* make them use these social media for their own mutually defined purposes and a change in student mind- and skill-sets is required to appropriate the collaborative learning benefits of these social media in formal educational contexts.

Blanche, Beard and Britt (2013) conducted a study on using a *Facebook Group* as an educational tool with focus on its effects on students' achievement. The study examined the



effectiveness of using a *Facebook* group to increase pre-service teachers' knowledge of core technology topics and also examined their use of *Facebook*, their use of a course-related *Facebook* group, their participation habits in the group, and their perceptions of using *Facebook* for educational purposes. Results revealed a significant gain in achievement as measured by scores on pre and post-tests. In line with the high level of undergraduate students' awareness of these social media, lecturers can instigate *Facebook* and *WhatsApp* class group pages in the social media in an attempt to provide a space for practice and communication free of the traditional pedagogic concerns of a typical classroom. The distinctive discursive behaviour of *Facebook* and *WhatsApp* groups helps one to achieve that attempt even as they are currently considered as the most popular platforms for online social networking among university students.

Ogedebe, Emmanuel and Musa (2012) noted that nowadays, they are at the forefront of the social media craze, with over 500 million active users on their website every month. Undergraduate students are one of the primary demographics using *Facebook* and *WhatsApp*, with features such as photos, wall posts, and status updates becoming seemingly irresistible to those who want to connect with their friends. It is obvious that University culture loves *Facebook* and *WhatsApp*, embraces these social media and has turned the sites into a lifestyle, rather than just a hobby or a fun pastime. Academic success is now paramount issues to any student, with the pressure to belong to social networks.

Impact of Facebook and WhatsApp Usage on Undergraduate Students' Academic Performance

The potential impact of *Facebook* on students' motivation to learn has inspired researchers to examine the website's role in higher education (Alarabiat & Al-Mohammed, 2015). Surveying such studies has shown mixed results as to students' attitudes and willingness to use *Facebook* for academic purposes. They stated that for one stream of academic research, only a small portion of students used *Facebook* for academic purposes. According to Alarabiat and Al-Mohammed (2015), similar findings to those of Madge et al. (2009) were reported by Pempek, Yermolayeva and Calvert (2009), who observed that 17% of 92 sampled American undergraduates used *Facebook* to communicate with each other for academic purposes. Having applied a descriptive approach to their study, Pempek, Yermolayeva and Calvert (2009) suggested that a more typical diary research approach may provide a broader measure of *Facebook* time use. Another research with a case study methodology was conducted by Grosseck, Bran and Tiru (2011), who declared that only 26.7% of the sampled first year Romanian students at one university perceived the use of *Facebook* and educational groups as important instruments of change in higher education.

Focusing on Engineering students enrolled at 4 Israeli institutions, Gafni and Deri (2012), found that only 25% of 103 sampled students believed that *Facebook* helped them significantly in their studies, and that perception towards *Facebook* academic benefits differed according to academic years the respondents were in. Interestingly, and in addition to applying quantitative surveys, the study further reviewed seven *Facebook* pages that belonged to different engineering institutions to check for significance of traffic and use of those pages. They suggested that formal *Facebook* pages developed by those institutions were not properly designed to enhance students' learning experience.

More recently, and in an experimental study conducted by DiVall and Kirwin (2012), a course specific *Facebook* page was created at one American University. Students who took the course were encouraged to "like" the page and to post and view study tips, links, or questions. At the end of the course, students' use and perceptions were evaluated using an anonymous survey tool. The result confirmed that 86% of the 119 students who completed the survey found *Facebook* academic pages beneficial overall; they reported *Facebook* academic pages as valuable and helpful study tools, further,



57% said they would miss the posts when the course ended. They suggested that faculty members should have an open discussion on the benefits, workload implications, and possible risks of course-specific *Facebook* groups for students and course instructors. According to Yeboah and Ewur (2014), *WhatsApp* is one of the changes in technology that is commonly used on specific mobile phones and computers. Since the Smartphones became popular, many messaging services were launched but *WhatsApp* has become very popular among them. The service is free for one year and after that a very small amount is charged yearly. Besides all, this application is highly addictive and can create a great impact on regular users, and apart from that it can leave a trace that becomes difficult to control and cure. Some of the most prominent technological innovations are smart phones, laptops and using the Internet.

Yeboah and Ewur also stated that *WhatsApp Messenger* has been around for a while but recent updates have improved the functionality of the application since its release date. The main purpose behind this application is to replace SMS with a cross platform mobile messenger that works on an internet data plan. If you have unlimited text, it is still beneficial as it is a convenient way to skip international fees that carriers may charge. The *WhatsApp* messenger was purposely created by Acton and Koum in 2009 to make communication and the distribution of multimedia messaging more easily and faster. In as much as the application brings us so many benefits, it has also got it flaws that are currently causing more harm than good among undergraduate students nowadays. In cognizance of the rate at which undergraduate students are hooking up to social media, there is the need to educate them on its advantages and disadvantages in their academic performance accordingly.

In a study carried out by Nitza and Roman (2016), they revealed that, *WhatsApp* instead of making communication easier and faster, thereby enhancing effective flow of information and idea sharing among undergraduate students, it rather has impacted negatively on the performance of university students. They further noted that *WhatsApp* takes much of students' study time; resulting in procrastination related problems, destroys students' spellings and grammatical construction of sentences, leads to lack of concentration during lectures, resulting in difficulty in balancing online activities (*WhatsApp*) and academic preparation and distracts students from completing their assignments and adhering to their private studies time table.

Conclusion

Facebook and *WhatsApp* are nowadays the most popular social networks in the world. Day by day, they are becoming an indispensable part of people lives affecting the daily routine of people. *Facebook* has established itself as one of the most popular social media sites and its use has increased rapidly, while *WhatsApp* as the most globally popular messaging app. In line with the high level of undergraduate students' awareness of these social media, lecturers can instigate *Facebook* and *WhatsApp* class group pages in the social media in an attempt to provide a space for practice and communication free of the traditional pedagogic concerns of a typical classroom. The awareness of the use of *Facebook* and *WhatsApp* by undergraduate students in higher institutions no doubt has become the popular means of communication among undergraduate students.

Recommendations

This paper makes the following recommendations based on the review of related and relevant literature:

1. Universities and lectures should create workshop platforms to educate undergraduate on the dangers of regular use of *Facebook* and *WhatsApp* for other purpose rather than academic purposes.
2. Undergraduate students should be tutored and trained on how to comport themselves to ensure that these platforms do not become disadvantage as regards to academic activities.



3. Undergraduates should be encouraged to employ the two platforms more for academic activities as such reduce the disadvantages of its use.
4. As the undergraduates are using these platforms daily, it will be beneficial, to continue using it daily but for academic purposes.
5. Time table should be slated to enable undergraduates know when to use their devices and gadget as such helping them reduce time spent online.



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Odili, Ngozi is currently a Librarian I at Baze University, Abuja. A graduate of BLIS and MA in Library and Information Studies from the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria and University of Brighton, United Kingdom, respectfully. Has over ten years of local and international experience in both public and academic libraries in paid and voluntary services. Committed to continuous professional development, therefore a member of the Nigerian Library Association (NLA) and the Librarian's Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN).