

Internet Usage and the Development of Social Skills among Nigerian Youths

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ABSTRACT: This research was carried out to examine the effects of the use of internet on the development of social skills of Nigerian youths. It is born out of the existing contention on the social impact of internet usage on the youths of the nation. The study adopted a survey research design, two research question and three hypotheses were generated to guide the study. The main instrument for data collection was Internet Usage and Social Skill questionnaire (IUSSQ). The sample of the study was five hundred youths, randomly selected in Cross River State Tertiary Institutions. The data were analyzed using independent t-test and Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The result revealed that despite the usefulness of internet, it had a negative impact on the development of social skills among Nigerian youths. The conclusion was that internet usage cut down social activities and exposes the youths to some anti-social behaviors, portraying them as either victims or criminals. Based on the finding, it was recommended that a collaborative approach should be utilized to curb the menace of wrong usage of the internet by the youths.

Keywords: Anti-social behaviour, internet usage, social skills, social outlaws and social involvement

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INTRODUCTION

The dawn of the new millennium ushered us into the world of greater inter-connectivity, accelerated knowledge and flow of data, which knew no national boundaries. The force fueling this rapid transformation of isolated islands to interconnected superhighways is Information and Communication Technology (ICT). This has resulted into the rapid fall in the costs of communication computing and the extraordinary penetration and accessibility of World Wide Web, (W.W.W.) turning the world into "a global village". The leap into the technological revolution made it possible to amalgamate local knowledge with information held in remote databases and information repositories to bring about greater understanding/enlightenment. The opportunities arising out of the information technology revolution are immense. If properly utilized within its framework, it can secure considerable gains towards sustainable human development. On the one hand, knowledge is empowering while on the other, lack of it is debilitating.

Knowledge empowers an individual especially the youth to form his or her own opinion, to act and transform condition to lead to a better quality of life. Sense, access to right information at the right time gives the youth greater control over their destinies. The internet is the world's largest interconnected environment. It is the most recent communication tool of the world where a user can transcend borders and have access to the encyclopedia, newspaper, bulletin boards, video arcade, hyper-mails, broadcast stations, the movies, mail order, music entertainment etc all at one stop; in a global village. The internet has opened the door of shared information that could not have been possible in the past. The internet provides that store of information that is not possible for any single entity to hold or manage. All of a sudden, information is available on any topic imaginable. It was as if someone collected the world's entire knowledge put it together on an easy - to - use interface, and hands it to anyone who is in need of it. This youth could learn other

anti-social behaviour through the internet. This great opportunity could be misused as it can sometimes come at the expense of other healthy activities such as homework or normal social exchange (Eteng, Abang, Uchegbu & Ntamu, 2021). The potential of the internet to disseminate vast amount of pornographic material within an unregulated market place with an international audience is of great concern to those who feel it does harm. So are hate groups, gangsters, and Internet addiction among other socially unacceptable behaviors {Schaefer, 2011}.

Social skills on the other hand, may simply be defined as the ability to interact freely and meaningfully with others both within and outside one's environment without much inhibition. According to Eteng, (2019) social skills are keys to learning and it is very important for early childhood education as its deficiency can be portrayed in some negative attitude such as lacking patience to relate with others, shyness/timidity, alienation, fighting, among other forms of violence. Social skills acquisition/development is one of the most important thing parents; teachers and all adult members of the society owe the youths. Right from the cradle, children ought to be taught how to get along with others. No matter how gifted a child is physically or mentally, that child's happiness and success in life will depend on his ability to get along with people. There are many ways to help the youths to develop social skills; one way is to establish a set of rules or standards for acceptable, behaviors in our homes, schools, organizations and society at large. The exact rules may vary but could probably fall into three broad categories; We need to respect ourselves; we need to respect others and we need to respect things.

The rules established to teach these general principles must be repeated often so as to make it very clear to the youths. A second way we teach social skills is by the behaviour we model. We cannot ask children or the youths to treat each other decently and then treat them disrespectfully ourselves. The youths and children learn by watching and practicing what adults do. Every time you talk kindly to them you are teaching them how to talk kindly to each other. Again, way to encourage positive behaviour is to teach the youth's specific skills. One important skill youths must learn is to consider the feelings of others. They should or rather must think about how their behaviour affect others. Furthermore, we can also teach the youth's acceptable ways to respond to difficult situations. We should not just tell a child to share; we should teach them how to share probably by taking turns. Finally, we need to encourage children to offer and accept affections and appreciations. Teach them how good it is to tell others what they like to appreciate about them. At home and at school, let them learn how to say what like about others around them (Peggy, 1992). The aim of this study is to examine the effects of the use of internet on the development of social skills of Nigerian

youths.

Literature review

The theoretical framework is social learning theory; Social learning is sometimes referred to as observational learning, modeling or vicarious conditioning. The basic process of Social Learning is through observation and imitation of others in real life and on films. Social learning theory belongs to the neo-behaviorist perspectives of learning and can be considered to be a theory, which borrows ideas and concepts 'selectively from several systematic outlooks. Cognitive explanation was also used to account for how we learn from other people. As can be seen in Peretomode (1993), Social Learning theorists assert that "humans are social animals". The observation of our social world, through cognitive interpretations of that world, and the reinforcement or punishment of our responses in that world, enormous amounts of information and complex skilled performances are learned. Bandura (1986), one of the foremost proponents of social learning has demonstrated in several of his studies that children become more aggressive after watching an aggressive model in a film of an aggressive character. It has been established that if violent models are shown receiving no reproof or punishment some of the observing youths may learn dangerous things. A typical example can be seen in Rathus (1981), who reported a case in Florida, USA in '1997 in which a teenage (boy) killed an elderly woman because the child is exposed to violence images on the internet. Affonso (1999), noted that the youths are much heavier internet users than older adults. While adults tend to use the internet as part of their jobs, and to get employment - related information, the youths especially the teenagers were more likely to use the internet to play games, to listen to music, for pornography, chatting etc. This particular appeal has caused further concern among educationists such as can be seen in Weinstein (1995) who argued that he strongly believes that Internet users will "lose the savvy skills and patience to conduct socials relations in the corporeal world". And that they will intensify the negative effect television has already had on our social skills. Thus, it is assumed, that we are encouraging our youths to become social outlaws. Conclusively, in dealing with information technology today, youths are often portrayed as either victims or criminals. This has raised issues of safety and concern when dealing with the internet (Eteng, 2004)

METHODOLOGY

The population of study comprises of all students in tertiary institutions in Southern Senatorial district of Cross River State. A total of two hundred and twenty-four

thousand, two hundred and twenty-nine students (224,229). The population of students in University of Calabar was one hundred and ninety-two thousand five hundred and eighty five students while the population of students from Cross river University of technology was thirty-one thousand, six hundred and forty-four students. A total of five hundred students were randomly selected from the two tertiary institutions. After the retrieval of the questionnaire the scoring was carried out on a six-point likert scale ranging from very strongly agree to very strongly disagree.

RESULTS

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference between the social involvement level of internet users and no user. The analytical tool used is independent t-test is presented in (Table 1). The entries reveal that the calculated value of $t = 10.815$ is greater than the critical value of $t = 1.96$ with the degree of freedom (df) - 498. This means that the null hypothesis, which says there is no significant difference in the degree of social involvement of internet users and non-internet users is rejected, hence there is a significant difference in the degree of social involvement of internet users and non-internet users.

Hypothesis 2: This null hypothesis speculates that there is no significant difference between internet users and non-users in terms of social tolerance. To test this hypothesis, independent t-test analysis was used in determining the social tolerance of internet users and non-internet users (see the result in (Table 2). Table 2 depicts that the calculated value of $t = 2.637$ is greater than the critical value of $t = 1.96$ with the degree of freedom 498 which means that the null hypothesis which says that there is no significant difference between internet users and non-users in terms of social tolerance is rejected hence there is a significant difference in the social tolerance of internet uses and the non-internet users.

Hypothesis 3: This hypothesis postulates that there is no significant relationship between internet usage and social skills' development of the youths. To test this hypothesis, Pearson product moment correlation Coefficient (r) was used in assessing the influence of internet usage on social skills development of the youth, (see the result in (Table 3). The entries in (Table 3) above reveals a significant relationship between internet usage and social skill's development in that the calculated r -value of 0.67 is greater than the critical r -value of 0.1946 hence the null hypothesis which postulates that there is no significance relationship between internet usage on social skills' development is rejected.

DISCUSSION

This null hypothesis from hypothesis one states that there is no significant difference in the degree of social

involvement of internet users and non-internet users. The result from this hypothesis depicts that there is a significant difference in the degree of social involvement of internet users and non internet users. This goes to attest to Davis (1999), who asserts that internet users have the tendency of neglecting friends, their academic work, family members and other personal responsibilities. Their health are neglected too, they sometimes-more often than not-have inter-personal problems which results in the cutting down on their social engagements as evident in the work of Putman (1995) who documented a broad decline in civic engagement and social participation in the United State over the past 35 years, it was noted that citizens vote less, go to church less, discuss government with their neighbors less, are members of fewer voluntary organizations, have fewer dinner parties and general get together less for civic and societal purpose.

Likewise at a large university in New York, the dropout rate among freshmen newcomers was discovered to rise dramatically as their investment in computer and internet access increased. The reason the administrators learned was that 43% of the dropouts were staying up all night on the internet (Wallace 1999). This social disengagement is having major consequences for the social fabric and for individual lives. As discussed above, internet related activities engulf the totality of the users, personalities. In this research the finding shows that heavy internet users are "unkempt", that is they do not really pay much attention on their looks. Also, they do not keep to most appointments due to the long hours spent on the internet. Likewise, they keep thinking about internet even when off-line. As afore mentioned, some of the youths stay up and browse all nights neglecting sleep which is necessary for healthy living.

This null hypothesis two speculates that there is no significant difference between internet users and non-users in terms of social tolerance. The result from this hypothesis reveals that there is a significant difference between internet users and non-users in terms of social tolerance. To have a healthy society, the youths must learn to respect themselves by developing habits of honesty, responsibility and self-control (Todd, 1992 and Scully, 2000). This research finding reveals that this is where the bulk of the problems of internet lies as the saying goes "bad communication corrupt good morals". Human beings are social animals. And we know that through observation and interaction with our social world, cognitive interpretation is made consequently enormous amounts of information and complex skilled performances are learned.

In consonant with the above view, Bandura (1986) in several of his studies asserts that the youths become more aggressive and intolerant after watching an aggressive character. It has been established that if violent models are shown receiving no reproof or punishment like its shown or displayed on the internet,

Table 1: T-test Analysis of social involvement difference between internet users and non-internet users.

	N	X	SD	t
Social involvement of internet users	280	25.97	4.96	10.815
Social involvement of non internet users	220	21.45	4.37	

Significant at 0.05, df 498, t-critical = 1.960.

Table 2: t-test analysis of social tolerance difference internet users and non-internet users.

Variables	N	X	SD	T
Social tolerance of internet users	280	21.18	4.76	2.6371
Social tolerance of non-internet users	220	20.1	4.37	

Significant at .05 df 498, t-critical = 1.960.

Table 3: Pearson product moment correlation analysis assessing the influence of internet usage on social skills development.

Variables	$\sum x$	$\sum x^2$	$\sum xy$	r-value
Internet usage (x)	5797	132815	95720	0.6777
Social skills development (y)	4574	102326		

* Significant at .05 level, critical r=.138, df=198

some of the youths may learn dangerous and harmful things. A typical example can be seen in Rathus (1981) who reported a case in Florida, USA in 1977 in which a teenager (boy) killed an elderly woman over slight provocation. The boy had become addicted to electronic media violence. Similarly, in 1974 a nine-year-old California girl was raped with a bottle by four other girls who admitted they got the idea from a movie titled "Born innocent". (Peretmode, 1993).

This null hypothesis three postulates that there is no significant relationship between internet usage and social skills' development. The result from this hypothesis shows that there is a significant relationship between internet usage and social skills' development. Despite all the benefits derived from the use of internet this research finding indicates that the use of internet has a negative influence on the youths and their social skills development. This is because as a group of researchers argued headed by Walther et al (1994), internet has been found to encourage some anti-social behaviours such as insults, swearing, hostility, violence and hate groups-which we call cultism social intolerance, social disengagements to mention but a few. Although their findings concluded that inter personal effects that are expected to accrue over time could result to face-to-face (FIF) interaction. This too could be abused. In consonant with the above discussion dialogue in an internet chat room. This finding shows that internet alters social interactions probably due to the long hours the youth spend on the internet playing game, or watching pornographic films among other forms of entertainments which are available on the internet. The wide nature of this inter-activities is causing the youths to become socially isolated and cut off from genuine social relationships as they stay up alone over their terminals

communicating with anonymous strangers through a "socially impoverished medium" (Stoll, 1995). This has enormous adverse consequences for society and the youth's personal wellbeing.

On the other hand, if people use the internet primarily for entertainment and information, the internet's social effects might resemble those of television. And watching television does indeed lead to a decline in the development of social skills and to some extent the psychological wellbeing of the youths. The most plausible explanation faults time displacement. That is the time people spend watching television and using the internet is the time they are not active or socially engaged. Although it has been argued by some authors that people use internet mainly for inter-personal communications, (Kroust et al 1998). However, this does not imply that the social interactions and relationships on the internet are the same as the traditional social interactions or that the social uses of the internet will have effects comparable to traditional social activity. Some group of authors such as Cohen and Wills (1985), Krackhardt (1994) argued people receive most of their social support from people with whom they are in most frequent contact and bigger favours from those with whom they have stronger ties. Generally speaking, strong ties are supported by physical proximity. And the Internet as we know has the potential to reduce the importance of physical proximity in creating and maintaining networks of strong social ties in favour of weak ties which are superficial, easily broken bonds, infrequent contact and narrow focus.

Conclusion

This paper examines the Internet Usage and Social skill development among Nigerian youths.

The findings reveal that although the Internet certainly has potential for educational use and day-to-day communication, it can and has been used for destructive purposes. Imagine a library without librarians and other observers/caretakers. There is this general feeling of being all alone with no one else around while browsing. This of course is one of the greatest dangers of this medium. The materials available on-line are overwhelmingly enormous some of which are morally corrupt and spiritually destructive. It makes the youths lose track of discipline. As such the more the use of this medium penetrates into all corners of the world, the more we are turning out social outlaws.

Highlight of the paper

1. Indeed, there is a drop in social involvement or civic participation of the internet users.
2. Heavy internet users were unable to keep up with their relationships due to the sentimental attachment they have towards it and the long hours they spend on the internet.
3. If not checked or cautioned the prolong use of internet could lead to neglect of one's health, academic pursuit and other important things in one's life.
4. Internet usage was found to encourage some anti-social behaviour due to the wide inter-connectivity and the enormous materials available on the Internet.
5. The pro-long use of Internet, if not cautioned as it is gaining more ground all over the world will produce social out laws.

Recommendations

Having carefully examined the effects of Internet, parents, teachers, counselors and in fact all adults members of the society ought to seek for avenues or what resources are available to protect the youths from being targets of crime and exploitation. Some organizations are beginning to offer tools that ranges from rating systems to world detection soft-ware that filters out undesirable content. Some approaches block materials even before it reaches the system.

We can come up with technological innovation that can suit our cultural values. Since it has been discovered that internet usage has an adverse effect on social interaction the youths should be encourage to be self-discipline especially in terms of time allocation to their social academic activities to avoid wasting much time at the cyber cafe like some are of the habit of staying all-night - long-browsing the internet.

Parents, teachers, guardian, counselors, voluntary organizations among others should encourage the youths

to relate with people in acceptable manner in order to develop social tolerance among themselves avoiding circumstances that will bring about social upheavals in order words they should be accommodating.

All service providers should publish thoughtful and acceptable guidelines of conducts within their premises. Charity, they say begins at home, parents should take the pain to talk to their wards and nurture them in the fear of God just as the Bible says; train up a child the way he should go and when he is grown, he will not depart from it. Religious organization should take up this challenge and educate their members on the ills of pornography and other harmful practices displayed on our streets via the internet.

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