

An Assessment of the Use of Online Social Network Sites for Enhancing Computing Students' Academic Activities

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between all authors. Author JOO conceived the research topic, designed the questionnaire and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Author OGI did the data analysis in conjunction with authors JOO and OGI proofread the final manuscript. Author MSO reviewed the related works. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Online Social Network Sites (SNSs) have no doubt contributed immensely towards communication as well as the educational pursuit of students in higher institutions of learning. Thus, SNSs enhance relationships amongst learners and their teachers, they improve learning motivation as well as facilitate collaborative exercises. In addition, the exchange of ideas, messages as well as real time communication amongst learners and teachers are facilitated. Thus, SNSs are believed to increase students' academic activities as well as performance in educational institution. It is also believed that the use of SNSs adversely affect the academic performance of students. However, the use of online SNSs to boost students' academic activities and performance is still at an infant stage and thus needs to be investigated.

Aim: Based on this background, this paper investigates the impact of SNSs on the academic

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activities of Nigerian students.

Place and Duration of Study: The study was carried out at Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo, Nigeria, between August and October, 2013.

Methodology: A research questionnaire was designed for data elicitation. The questionnaire was distributed to 100 students (55 males and 45 females). Purposive sampling method was used. The respondents were chosen based on their relevance to the study, that is, only respondents that were registered with at least one social network site was allowed to participate in the study. The data collected was analyzed using simple percentage.

Results: The major findings of the study were as follows: SNSs are frequently visited by students on a daily basis. The study revealed that female students use SNSs more than their male counterparts. Facebook is the most visited social networking sites among students. In addition, the study showed that SNSs are used for entertainment purposes, communication as well as academic purposes. The study showed that majority of the students use SNSs more for communication than for enhancing their academic activities. The study however revealed that SNSs can be used to enhance students' reading skills and learning abilities through interactions with experienced professionals and colleagues.

Conclusion: The study therefore concludes that although majority of students do not use social network sites to foster their academic activities, online social networks can facilitate the academic experiences of students by helping them to improve their reading skills and also providing an enabling environment for academic discussions through diverse interactions with professionals in their field.

Keywords: Social network sites; academic activities; internet; communication.

1. INTRODUCTION

The introduction of the Internet has touched almost all spheres of human life. The advent of the Internet has also brought about the creation of online Social Network Sites (SNSs). The establishment of online SNSs such as instagram, twitter, facebook, mxit, cyworld and badoo is a huge leap for technological development in the world. These sites connect millions of people globally and simultaneously and also facilitate communication amongst diverse people irrespective of their geographical locations. Thus, SNSs make it possible for individuals to easily exchange ideas and information such as texts, pictures, music and videos. Thus, online SNSs are rich sources of knowledge, entertainment and communication [1].

Online SNSs have been widely embraced by teenagers and young adults who are predominantly students [2]. SNSs facilitate relationship and collaboration amongst students, improves learning motivation and offers personalized course materials [3]. Thus, online SNSs enhance students' contact and they also increase students' participation in class, especially amongst introverted students who find it hard to raise questions before their peers in school [2]. Online SNSs are not without limitations in spite of their numerous benefits. For instance, addicted users of online SNSs might

commit lesser time to academic activities and set back their personal and professional responsibilities. This however leads to poor academic performance. Thus, the use of online SNSs to boost students' academic performance is still at an infant stage and thus needs to be investigated [2]. Consequently, this paper examines the impact of SNSs on students' academic activities. Section 2 discusses Social Network Sites, section 3 discusses the research methodology, and section 4 highlights the results of the study, section 5 deals with the discussions of the results while section 6 concludes the study.

2. ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORK SITES

Online Social Network Sites (SNSs) are defined as web-based services that enable individuals to construct semi-profile within a bounded system as well as articulate a list of other users with whom they share connections and views [4]. The nature and nomenclature of these connections vary from site to site. Social networks sites are unique in the sense that they enable users to articulate and make visible their social networks. To join a site, individuals sign up as members. This process may include the provision of personal information such as electronic mail (e-mail) address, permanent address, or zip code. Users are allowed to create a sign-in name and password for their personal profile, a requirement

that creates a false sense of security and the impression that their information is private [5]. A profile contains information that an individual chooses to share within the site. Most profiles provide users with the option to share home town address, e-mail address and phone numbers. There are also opportunities for users to post information regarding where they attend or attended schools, where they are employed, personal interests and more trivial information, such as, movies and music. Students also share personal information about themselves, including their place of residence/ hall or room number, class schedule, and campus involvement [6]. Although a profile may seem on the surface as a way of sharing real-world personal information, students use it to market their ideal identities [7]. Users usually post on the site what they personally deem important.

2.1 Examples of Online Social Network Sites

The following are examples of online SNSs

2.1.1 Instagram

These are online social networking sites that allow its users to take videos and pictures. In addition, instagram facilitates the sharing of videos and pictures on other social networking sites such as facebook and twitter. Instagram was created in 2010 by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger with over 100 million users as at April 2012 [8].

2.1.2 Google+

Google+ (pronounced as Google Plus) is also a social networking site as well as an authorship tool owned and operated by Google. This SNS allows its users to share pictures, music, video, play games as well as chat. Google+ is the second largest SNS in the world after facebook with about 540million active monthly users.

2.1.3 Badoo

This is a SNS that is primarily focused on dating. Badoo is a free social network site which allows its users to pay extra token to access extra features like e-mail.

2.1.4 Netlog

This was formerly known as Facebook. This SNS allows its uses to chat, play games, share videos, post blogs and also to create their own webpage.

2.1.5 LinkedIn

This is an online SNS that is primarily designed for business professionals for facilitating their business engagements such as finding a job and connecting with business partners. Hence, LinkedIn is different from other online SNSs like facebook and twitter which facilitates making of friends and sharing of media.

2.1.6 Facebook

Facebook: This is one of the most popular Social Network Sites (SNSs) today for students and even the general public. It was developed by Sophomore Mark Zuckerberg of Harvard University in 2004. The site was originally developed for college and university students as a way to attach with one another. Users spend about 20 minutes a day on the site and two thirds of the users log in at least once a day [4]. In the year 2010, facebook had more than 500 million active users, attracted 450 visitors and had 22,000 photo-views in its first four hours online [4].

2.1.7 Twitter

Twitter was established as an experimental site in 2006. Twitter is however rapidly becoming one of the most popular social network service providers. Twitter is a real-time communication platform which allows users to create accounts, post as well as receive messages from a network of contacts. Twitter allows its users to build their network of contacts by inviting others and also following other members' posts [9].

2.2 Pros and Cons of Online Social Network Sites

One of the advantages of online SNSs is that they facilitate communication among people irrespective of their geographical locations. These forms of communication include instant messaging, posting public messages on the SNSs walls as well as commenting on other people's pictures [10]. Online SNSs strengthen the development of social and interpersonal relationships amongst adolescents. Online SNSs also facilitate the creation and sharing of various forms of contents such as blogs, videos, pictures and as well as audio messages. SNSs provide opportunities for formal learning across geographical contexts. According to [11], online SNSs facilitate learning and skill development by providing support for peer-to-peer learning, enhancing knowledge and skills as well as

collaborative activities across geographical boundaries. SNSs also allow their users to develop their identities by sharing information about themselves. In spite of these advantages, online SNSs have their own limitations. For instance according to [12], Dr. Norman Nie of Stanford University envisaged that online SNSs impact adolescent social lives adversely by lessening their sense of well-being. Furthermore, [2] revealed that teenagers would use the Internet for purposes of meeting strangers instead of building on established relationships. Nalwa and Anand opined that adolescents spend so much time on computers, and this affects their real-life friendships and relationships with others unfavorably [13]. Also, Juvonen and Gross [14] reported cyber bullying as a major drawback of online SNSs. In addition, it has been hypothesized that children and teenagers become less social with family members when they engage excessively in online SNSs [13]. The use of SNSs also leads to lower psychological well-being for some girls [15]. It has also been observed that the use of online SNS affects students' use of English and Grammar [15]. For example students use short forms of writing such as "U for You", and "4 for For" during chatting. This can however affect their assessment in class.

2.3 Online SNSs and Gender Differences

Gender ordinarily without connotation refers to the state of being male or female. It is a multi-dimensional concept of social knowledge that helps to regulate socially defined, sexually differentiated roles and relationships, particularly power relations among women and men. It also refers to the identification of the sexes usually influenced by cultural factors like religion, politics, social factors and education. Thompson and Lougheed [16] identified that there is paucity of literature on the relationship between online SNSs and gender. However, quite a number of studies have been performed in this area. Madden and Zickuhr [17] believed that females use online SNSs more than their male counterparts. [17] considered women as the power users of social networking. In addition, a survey carried out by Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project showed that females are more likely to use SNSs than males [18]. For instance, the result of the study showed that 17% of the female respondents used twitter and 16% of the female respondents used instagram while 15% of the male respondents were twitter users and 10% of the male

respondents used instagram. Furthermore, a recent survey carried out by Pew showed that 76% of online United States of America (USA) adult females use facebook while 66% of the online male users were facebook users, 18% of the female online users and 17% of the male online users used twitter respectively, while 20% of the female used instagram and 17% of the male users deployed instagram [19]. Conversely, 24% of males employed LinkedIn compared to 19% of their female counterparts. This study therefore revealed that females use other SNSs more than males apart from LinkedIn in the USA.

In the Nigerian context, however, a study conducted by [20] in Enugu State in the Eastern part of Nigeria amongst secondary school students which comprised of 201 males and 316 females showed that the male students tend to participate more in social networking activities than their female counterparts. Similarly, a survey conducted by [21] on the level of social media consumption and usage among Nigerian adults revealed that a greater percentage of males used SNSs for various purposes than their female counterparts.

2.4 Online SNSs and Education

Teachers and students use online SNSs as a means of communication. For instance, most students now use different online SNSs for learning and as a result teachers have begun to familiarize themselves with online SNSs in order to influence students' interest in relation to curriculum content through the use of chat-room, forums, group discussions, posting assignments as well as tests and quizzes within and outside the classroom settings. Social network services are also used to enhance teacher-parent communication. These services make it possible and more convenient for parents to ask questions and raise concerns without having to meet face-to-face with their children's teachers. Also, the use of online SNSs by school libraries is increasingly prevalent and they are used to communicate with potential library users as well as extending the services provided by individual school libraries.

Social networks and their educational uses are of interest to many researchers. According to [22], social networking sites represent a moving target for researchers and policy makers. Recent studies have also shown that social services provide opportunities for professional education, curriculum development, education and learning [2].

2.5 Online Social Network Sites and Students' Academic Performance

Different studies have been carried out to investigate the relevance of online SNS on the academic performance of different students at different grade levels. The results of these diverse studies showed that online SNSs have both negative and positive impacts on the academic performance of students. For instance, it was found out in [23] that extreme use of online SNSs causes psychological, physical, interpersonal and educational problems to its users. Furthermore, [24] proclaimed that students who are obsessed with the use of online SNSs find it difficult to focus and correspond while they are offline and this result in lower academic performance. In [25] Dr. Tyagi opined that teenagers who spent most of their valuable time online underrate the worth of their real lives. Tyagi also proposed that such users who indulge so much in online social networking find the real world around them un-stimulating [25]. Also in [25], Pychyl emphasized that the excessive use of facebook can lead to distraction and procrastination. Furthermore, [24] found out that the excessive use of facebook can affect the Collegiate Grade Point Averages (CGPAs) of its users negatively. Karpinski (2009) observed that students whose CGPAs were between 3.5-4.0 were non users of facebook while the CGPAs of its users were between 3.0- 3.5. Thus, [26] concluded that online SNSs users study less and generated lower grades eventually. Similarly, [27] declared that the extensive use of online SNSs especially facebook have detrimental impacts on the academic performance of students. However, many researchers have also found out that there is a positive relationship between the use of online SNSs and the academic performance of students. For instance, [27] discovered that students who use online SNSs scored higher in reading skills test and they also had higher grades than the non-users. In addition, [28] stated that online SNSs serve as a means of interaction between teachers and students. Also, [29] revealed that the use of facebook helps to resolve psychological problems such as low life-satisfaction and low self-esteem. However, a study conducted by [30] on the usage and implications of social networking sites to a non-random sample of 445 students at the Saint Cloud State University campus in Minnesota revealed the excessive use of SNSs amongst the college students affect their academic performance adversely. Conversely, [31] carried out an assessment on

the use of social media for collaborative study and social interaction amongst a set of students. The research exposed that the use of SNSs facilitate learning, collaborative project, attract students as well as motivate them during the learning process. Similarly, [2] conducted a research on the experiences and impact of using social media on academic performance through collaborative learning at the Universiti Teknologi Malaysia on 80 undergraduate and post graduate students via a survey questionnaire. The study uncovered that the use of SNSs enhances interaction amongst their peers and teachers during lessons; it boosts students' levels of confidence, and also enhances their performance academically. In addition, a similar study was conducted in Pakistan on the impact of SNSs on students' academic performance and attitudes amongst 300 students [32]. The study found out that there is a positive relationship between the usage of social networking sites, student's academic performance and student's attitudes as most of the students reported that they learnt from group pages which enabled them to achieve their goals.

In the Nigerian Context however, [33] discovered that most Nigerian students are obsessed with the use of online SNS for social communication at the detriment of their studies. Thus, an average Nigerian youth spend about 6 -7 hours on the Internet daily chatting, updating their facebook profile as well as checking their electronic mails at the detriment of their studies [34]. However, Ogedebe et al. [35] revealed that that the more time a student spends on an online SNS does not affect his academic negatively at school. Moreover, [36] conducted a study on 1596 randomly selected students of Benue State University, Makurdi in Nigeria on the impact of social network usage on the academic performance. The study revealed that the time spent on social media, the frequency of visit and the total number of online friends has a statistically significant relationship with a student's academic performance. Hence, the study suggested that the access to social media should be restricted and controlled, and leisure time should be directed into studying. Also, a study conducted by [33] on 884 students of different universities in Nigeria revealed that youths spent too much time on SNSs at the detriment of other necessary things such as their studies. In lieu of the points discussed above, it is pertinent to examine if students use online SNSs to enhance their academic activities.

3. METHODOLOGY

This section presents the methods of the study.

3.1 Study Instrument

A research questionnaire titled “The Use of SNSs to enhance the Academic Activities of Students” was designed. The questionnaire included the users’ choices of SNSs, use of social network sites for academic enhancements such as for doing assignments, raising questions, as well as the extent of involvement in social network sites. The questionnaire was divided into five (5) sections which included the demographic characteristics of the respondents, the type of SNS they used, the frequency of use, the purpose of using the SNS and the influence of the SNSs on their academic performance.

The procedures for designing the questionnaire are highlighted below and depicted in Fig. 1. A thorough understanding of the research problem through literature search was performed at stage 1. Diverse books, online materials as well as related journal articles served as the literature used for the study. In addition, the objectives of the study were formulated at stage 1. The major objective of the research was to examine if students used SNSs to boost as well as enhance their academic activities. The choice of the questionnaire respondents was also determined at stage 1. The respondents were chosen based on the proximity and the convenience of the authors. Similarly, the sampling technique used for the study was decided at this stage. The questionnaire employed a purposive sampling technique. This was to ensure that the respondents were registered with at least one SNS. The questions for the questionnaire were developed at stage 2. The scales for answering the questions were determined at stage 3. This study used the Yes and No scale. The validity of the questionnaire was established at stage 4. The questionnaire was given to a panel of experts to validate for the appropriateness of the questions. The questionnaire was also validated to ensure that the questions are clear, concise and free from ambiguity. In addition, the questionnaire was validated to ensure that the questions are meaningful and related to the research problem.

The method used to validate the questionnaire was content validity. The content validity was performed to ascertain whether the content of the questionnaire was appropriate and relevant to

the study. Content validity usually ensures that the content of the questionnaire reflects a complete range of the attributes under study and it is carried out by seven or more experts [36]. In order to estimate the content validity of the questionnaire, the authors clearly sought seven purposively selected experts opinion in the field of computing, and questionnaire design. Each expert independently rated the relevance of each item on the questionnaire using a 4-point Likert scale (1=not relevant, 2=somewhat relevant, 3=relevant, 4=very relevant). The questionnaire was administered to its respondents at stage 5.

3.2 Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling method was used and the total population consists of Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) level 2 Computer Science students which had a total population of 125 students. The criterion for selecting the respondents purposively was to ensure that they were registered with at least one SNS. However, only 100 of the students were registered with at least one SNS.

3.3 Participants

A total of 100 respondents which consisted of 55 males and 45 females between the age brackets of 16-25 years were chosen for the study. NCE level 2 Computer Science students of Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo were chosen because of the convenience of the authors. All questionnaires were duly filled and returned.

3.3 Data Analysis

The data collected was analyzed using simple percentage method.

4. RESULTS

This section presents the results of the study. Table 1 presents the demographic information of the respondents.

The result on Table 2 revealed that 55% of the respondents were males while 45% of the respondents were females. 67% of the respondents were between 16-20 years of age while 33% of the respondents were between 21-25 years of age. The mean age of the respondents was 18. The study revealed that 100% of the respondents were single. The table also presents the distribution of the respondents by religion. The table showed that the majority of

the respondents were Christians representing a total of 74%, while 26% of the total respondents were Muslims. Table 2 presents the users' choices of the SNSs.

Table 2 showed that 53% of the respondents preferred facebook alone. This accounted for 30% of the female respondents and 23% of the male respondents. This showed that the female students deployed facebook more than their male counterparts. 7% of the respondents used facebook in conjunction with instagram which accounted for 3% of the male respondents and 4% female respondents respectively. Table 2 also showed that females deployed facebook and twitter more than their male counterparts. This accounted for 3% of the male respondents and 6% of the female respondents. 25% of the respondents had facebook, instagram and twitter accounts. This accounted for 11% of the male respondents and 14% of the female respondents. Similarly, 3% of the total respondents used facebook and LinkedIn, this accounted for 2% of the male respondents and 1% of the female respondents. This showed that the male respondents deployed LinkedIn more than their female respondents. From Table 2 above, it can also be deduced 47% of the total respondents used facebook in conjunction with other SNSs. This shows the popularity of facebook among students. In general, the study revealed that female students use SNSs more than their male counterparts.

Table 3. presents the frequency of the use of SNSs amongst the respondents.

71% use SNSs everyday, 10% of users use the sites monthly, 9% use the sites weekly, 7% use the sites once in a while and 3% seldomly use the sites. Table 4 presents the analysis of the data collected on the use of SNS for Social

Communication. 73% of the respondents use SNSs for keeping in touch with friends, 75% of the respondents use SNSs for keeping in touch with family members and relatives, 71% of the respondents use SNSs for searching for more friends while 52% of the respondents use SNSs for connection to people.

Furthermore, Table 5 presents the summary of analysis on responses on the use of SNSs for academic purposes. 34% of the respondents use SNSs for general group discussion and ideas exchanging, 43% of the respondents use SNSs for connecting with classmates about school life, 26% of the respondents use SNSs for asking questions or responding to questions while 18% of the respondents use SNSs for assignment preparation and arguments. This shows that a greater percentage of the respondents use SNSs for social communication than for academic purposes.

Table 6 presents the analysis of the data collected on the impact of SNSs on students' academic performance.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Characteristics	Frequency
Sex	
Male	55
Female	45
Age	
16-20	67
21-25	33
Marital status	
Single	100
Married	0
Religion	
Islam	26
Christianity	74

Table 2. Students' choices of social network sites

SNS	Frequency (males)	Frequency(females)	Total frequency
Facebook alone	23 (23%)	30(28%)	53
Facebook and instagram	3 (3%)	4 (4%)	7
Facebook and twitter	3(3%)	6(6%)	9
Facebook and Google+	0(0%)	1(1%)	1
Facebook, instagram and twitter	11(11%)	14(14%)	25
Facebook and LinkedIn	2(2%)	1(1%)	3
Facebook and others	2(2%)	0(0%)	2
Total	44 (44%)	56 (56%)	100

Table 3. Usage of social network sites

SNS usage	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Once in a while	07	7
Monthly	10	10
Weekly	9	9
Everyday	71	71

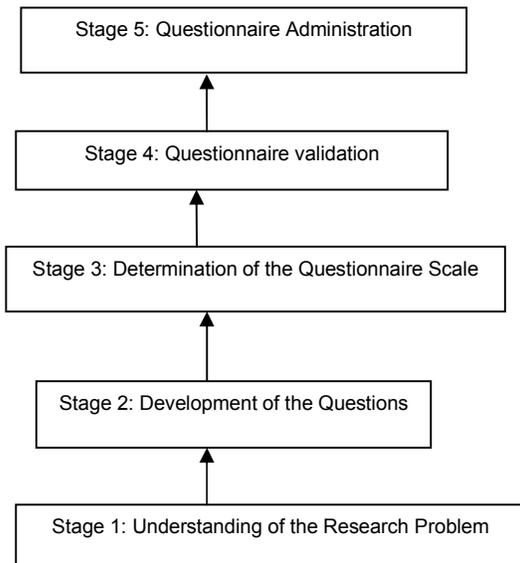


Fig. 1. The Procedures for designing the questionnaire

43% of the respondents reported that SNSs broaden their knowledge in computing, 53% of the respondents testified that the use of SNS has improved their reading skills. 67% reported that use of SNSs has enhanced their learning capabilities through interactions with experienced computing professionals and colleagues. This is probably because a larger percentage of the respondents spent more on SNSs on a daily basis. Hence, they are more likely to have more contacts as well as more opportunity to come across academic discussions on SNSs. In addition, 54% of the respondents reported that the constant use of SNSs usually cause procrastination of academic activities such as assignments. 55% of the respondents agreed

that the use of SNSs has increased their grammar and vocabulary usage while 31% of the respondents believed that their poor writing capabilities are due to the use of slangs during social networking.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings from this study are quite revealing. The study revealed that facebook is the most popular SNS amongst students. The study also revealed that female students deployed SNS more than their male counterparts. This is however in contrast with the studies carried out by [20] and [21] which showed that male students use SNSs more than their female counterparts in the Nigeria context. The study showed that a large percentage of students use SNSs on a daily basis. This finding agrees with that [34] which also agreed that majority of students visit SNS daily. This study has also shown that students use SNSs for various purposes such as for keeping in touch with family members and friends, group discussion and ideas exchanging, connection with classmates about school life, asking questions or responding to questions as well as for assignment preparation and arguments. This is in line with the [10] and [11] who affirmed that SNSs can be used to facilitate communication and enhance academic activities. The study however revealed that a majority of the students prefer to use SNSs more for social communication rather than for academic purposes. In spite of this, the study revealed that SNSs boost academic performance by improving students reading skills, increasing grammar and vocabulary usage as well as facilitating interactions amongst students and other professionals. This relates with the results of [2] and [27]. Boogart et al. [27] found out that students who used SNSs scored higher in reading skills test and they also had higher grades than the non-users. However, the present findings of this study differ from that of [36] which revealed that the use of SNSs affects students' academic performance adversely.

Table 4. Summary of analysis on responses on the use of SNS for social communication

SNS function	Purposes	Yes (%)	No (%)
Social communication	(i) keeping in touch with friends	73	27
	(ii) keeping in touch with family members and relatives	75	25
	(iii) searching for more friends	71	29
	(iv) connection to people	52	48

Table 5. Summary of analysis on responses on the use of SNS for enhancing academic activities

SNS function	Purposes	Yes (%)	No (%)
Academic purposes	(i) general group discussion and ideas exchanging	34	66
	(ii) connecting with classmates about school life	43	57
	(iii) asking questions or responding to questions	26	74
	(iv) assignment preparation and argument	18	72

Table 6. Summary of analysis on responses on the influence of SNSs on students' performance

S/N	Item on the questionnaire	Yes(%)	No(%)
1	SNSs broaden my knowledge in computing	43	57
2	Use of SNS has improved my reading skills	53	47
3	Use of SNSs has enhanced my learning abilities through interactions with experienced computing professionals and colleagues	67	33
4	My constant use of SNSs usually cause procrastination of my academic activities such as assignments	54	46
5	Use of SNSs has increased my grammar and vocabulary usage	55	45
6	My poor writing capabilities is due to the use of slangs during social networking	31	69

6. CONCLUSION

SNSs are one of the most important communication tools among students because they enhance relationship, learning motivation as well as collaborative activities amongst students in tertiary institutions. In view of this, this paper investigated if students use SNSs to enhance students' academic activities in tertiary institutions in the Nigerian context. The scope of the study was limited to Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo. The study population comprised of 55 males and 45 females which resulted in a total of 100 respondents. A well structured questionnaire was used to elicit data from the respondents. The data collected was analyzed using simple percentage method.

The result of the study revealed that there are gender differences in social networking use. The study showed that the female students tend to participate more in social networking activities than their male counterparts. The study also revealed that the students used SNSs for various purposes such as communication, entertainment as well as academic activities, although the students used SNSs more for communication than for academic activities. On the other hand, the study revealed that the use of SNSs improves students' reading skills and also

facilitates their learning capabilities through interactions with experienced computing professionals and colleagues. This is probably because a larger percentage of the respondents spent more time on SNSs on a daily basis.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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