Internet Usage and the Development of Social Skills Among Youths in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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Abstract The study was carried out to investigate Internet Usage and the Development of Social Skills among youths in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Gender and age differences, differences in the degree of social involvement, social tolerance, patterns of behaviour between internet users and non-users and the relationship between internet usage and social skills development was investigated. Six research questions turned into hypotheses guided the study. The survey research design was adopted. From a population of 9,343 regular year two undergraduates, 500 samples were drawn through stratified random sampling technique at equal gender basis from 5 out of 11 faculties of the University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. A validated Instrument, Internet Usage and Social Skills Development Questionnaire (IUSSDO) with reliability coefficient of .73 was used to gather data for the study. The t-test, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Pearson's Product Moment Correlation were used to analyze data at .05 level of significance. Results indicated significant gender and age differences in internet usage; significant differences in social skills development, social tolerance and pattern of behaviour between internet users and non-users while a strong relationship was established between internet usage and social skills development. It was concluded that internet usage negatively affected social skills development of youths. It was recommended among other things that parents, guardians, teachers, school counsellors and non-governmental organizations should encourage youths to be self-disciplined and relates to people in the real world in acceptable manners.

Keywords Internet Usage, Development of Social Skills, Social Tolerance, Pattern of Behaviour, Youth

1. Introduction

The dawn of the new millennium ushered into the world greater interconnectivity, accelerated knowledge and flow of data which know no national boundaries. The force fueling

this rapid transformation of isolated islands to interconnected super highways is Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Internet provides a new communication medium that enables access to vast amounts of information across a wide variety of dimensions [1]. Some researchers posit that the increased access to information provided by the internet has resulted in the rapid fall of postal communication services and the extraordinary penetration and accessibility of world wide web (WWW), turning the entire world into a global village [2, 3].

Knowledge is power; lack of it is debilitating. Knowledge empowers individuals, especially youths to form their own opinions, to act and transform conditions leading perhaps to a better quality of life. Access to right information at the right time gives the youths greater control over their destinies [4, 5].

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, newspapers, 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. It 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 is as if someone collected the world's entire knowledge and put it together on an easy to use interface, and hands it to anyone who is in need of it.

Various services of the internet and tools (chats rooms, e-mails, etc) provide users with a wide range of benefits and shortcomings; many of which the users are aware of and which they seek to fulfill their own goals [6]. Affonso [7] correctly noted that the great opportunity offered by the internet could be misused. This may sometimes come at the expense of other healthy activities such as homework or normal social exchange on the part of school youths.

It seems that the key to using internet is not technology but the individuals themselves. People's perception on using the internet are shaped by the existing value system of the society. This explain perhaps why Yen, Chen, Lee and Koh

[8] opined that there are significant differences in the perception of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) between different communities in the society. People use the internet in several different ways and for a variety of reasons [1]. As correctly noted by Ono and Zavoday [9], access to the internet improves opportunities for education, employment and civil engagement. However, the youths could learn other anti-social behaviour through the internet. As aptly noted by Agarwal and Karahanna [10], the potential of 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 behaviours since internet erases the identity of the person during the connection.

Social skills as used in this paper is conceptualize as the ability to interact freely and meaningfully with others both within and outside one's environment without much inhibitions or hindrances. Deficiency in social skills is portrayed in some negative attitude such as lacking patience to relate with others, shyness, timidity, alienation, fighting among other forms of violence.

Self-esteem and character development serves as the foundations for the acquisition of social skills. The youths must learn to respect themselves by developing habits of honesty, responsibility and self-control. With improved self-esteem comes a willingness to accept constructive criticisms, the courage to set goals and the desire to treat others as they would like to be treated.

Social skills development is one of the most important thing parents, teachers, school counselors and all adult members of the society owe the youths. Peggy [11], and Schumacher and Morahan [12] have correctly noted that no matter how gifted a youth is physically or mentally, such a youth's happiness and success in life will depend on the ability to get along with others.

The theoretical basis of this study is on social learning. According to Peretomode [13], social learning theorists assert that humans are social animals. Therefore, through cognitive interpretations of the world and the reinforcement or punishment of our responses in the world, enormous amounts of information and complex skilled performances are learned. Bandura cited in Peretomode [13], one of the foremost proponent of social learning theory has demonstrated in several studies that youths become more aggressive after watching an aggressive model in a film of an aggressive character. It has also been established that if violent models are shown receiving no reproof or punishment, some of the observing youths may learn dangerous things [13].

Statement of the Problem

Since the internet driven school reform has engulfed education, scholars and computer technologists have pondered on its matrix social impact [14-16]. With its rapid evolution, large numbers of applications, wealth of

information sources and global connections to locations, the internet has added even more uncertainties.

The advocates of Information Communication Technology (ICT) hail the multitude of advantages to reap such as disappearance of cultural barriers, availability of vast amount of information and services, absence of time restriction; permission of intercultural interaction; many free services on the internet and facilitation of communication around the world. The internet comes with promise to propel people into the future and cause dramatic improvement in students proficiency and worldwide understanding. So much of our planet is rapidly becoming connected via the internet that on line protocol has become an intrinsic part of technology based curriculum. But increasing reports concerning psychological addictive characteristics to internet use, along with speculations of its negative influence on functioning has brought to questions the enduring effects of this reform. Several researchers have documented that youths are much heavier internet users than parents and adults [4, 7, 17]. While adults tend to use the internet as part of their job, 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. Some researchers have argued that internet users will lose the savvy skills and patience to conduct social relations or cope in the real world, and that they will intensify the negative effect television has already had on their social skills[e.g. 2, 4]. Thus, it is assumed that societal members are encouraging youths to become social outlaws.

In dealing with Information Communication and Technology (ICT) today, youths are often portrayed as either victims or criminals. This has raised issues of safety and concern when dealing with the internet. Against this background, this study examines the relationship between internet usage and the development of social skills among youths in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between internet usage and the development of social skills among youths in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study aims at:

1. Determining gender differences in internet usage among youths.
2. Examining age differences in internet usage among youths.
3. Investigating how internet related activities affect the youths social life.
4. Examining the differences between internet users and non-users in terms of social tolerance.
5. Accessing how internet related activities have influenced the pattern of behaviour of youths.
6. Determining the relationship between internet usage and social skills development of youths.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study;

1. What gender difference exists in internet usage among youths?
2. To what extent does age influence internet usage among youths?
3. How does internet related activities affect the social life of the youths?
4. How does the internet affect the social tolerance or attitudes of the youths?
5. To what extent has the internet related activities affected patterns of behaviour of the youths?
6. Does any relationship exists between internet usage and social skills development of the youths?

Research Hypotheses

The following research hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:

1. There is no significant gender difference in internet usage among youths.
2. There is no significant age difference in internet usage among youths.
3. There is no significant difference in the degree of social life of internet users and non-internet users.
4. There is no significant difference between internet users and non-internet users in terms of social tolerance.
5. There is no significant difference between patterns of behaviour of internet users and non-internet users.
6. There is no significant relationship between internet usage and social skills development of the youths..

2. Research Methods

Design: This study adopted survey research design which aimed at collecting large and small samples from the population through which inferences and generalization could be made. Nwabara [18] and Udoh& Joseph [19] have asserted that the survey design typically employ observation of what is happening to the variables under investigation without attempting to control or manipulate them.

Population: The target population for the study consisted of all 9,345 regular year two undergraduate students in all the eleven (11) faculties of the University of Uyo (Academic Division, University of Uyo, 2013).

Sampling: A sample of 500 subjects (100 in each faculty) was selected through stratified random sampling technique from 5 out of the 11 faculties in the University of Uyo at equal gender basis for the study. This procedure ensured that all the cases in the defined population had equal and independent chance of being selected to participate in the study.

Instrument: A researcher-made instrument, Internet Usage and Social Skills Development Assessment Questionnaire (IUSSDAQ) was used for data collection for

the study. The questionnaire had two parts A and B. Part A contained personal data information of respondents while part B which was sub-divided into four sections, each with six items had a five point scale on the variables under investigation.

The face validation of the instrument was provided by three experts, two Measurement and Evaluation experts from the Department of Educational Foundation, Guidance and Counseling and one from the Department of Mathematics and Computer Science, University of Uyo. These experts dropped unsuitable, ambiguous and wrongly worded or constructed items before the instrument was put to use.

Cronbach's Alpha was used to calculate the reliability of the instrument and the obtained reliability coefficient of .73 was considered by these experts as high enough for the instrument to be used for the study.

Data collection was done by the researchers. This took a period of five days; one day in each of the five faculties randomly selected for the study. This ensured 100 percent return rate of the instrument. The questionnaire were scored and analyzed using t-test, One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Pearson Product Moment correlation at .05 alpha level after they were arranged according to the variables under investigation.

3. Results

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant gender difference in internet usage among youths.

Table 1. t-test of gender difference in internet usage

Variables	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	t-cal.
Male	261	23.18		
Female	239	21.12	5.41	5.63*

*Significant $P < .05$, df 498, critical t-value = 1.96

Analysis of data in Table 1 reveals that the calculated t-value of 3.09 at .05 level of significance and 498 degree of freedom was far higher than the critical t-value of 1.96. The null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that there is a significant gender difference in internet usage among males and females.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant age difference in internet usage among youths.

The result of the One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) in Table 2 shows a significant age difference in internet usage among youths. The calculated F-value of 15.43 at .05 level of significance and 2,497 degree of freedom was far higher than the critical F-value of 3.00. The null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that a significant age difference exists in internet usage among youths.

Table 2. ANOVA of age difference in internet usage

Age	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	
<20 yrs	160	8.57	2.37	
21 – 25 yrs	193	8.36	2.87	
26 yrs >	147	26	2.48	
Total	500	8.38	2.38	
Sources of Variation	SS	Df	M.S	F
Between groups	173.50	2	86.75	15.42*
Within groups	16863.11	497	5.63	
Total	17036.61			

*Significant $P < .05$, $df = 2, 497$, critical F-value = 3.00

Given the significant F-value of 15.42, a detailed multiple comparison test was carried out using Fisher's Protected t-test Analysis to ascertain which of the age bracket the difference lay in terms of internet usage. The result of analysis is as presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Fisher's analysis of the observed age difference

Age	<20 Yrs (n=160)	21-25yrs (n=193)	26 yrs and > (n=147)
< 20 yrs	8.59 ^a	0.2 ^b	0.5
21-25 yrs	0.18 ^c	8.57	0.48
26 yrs >	4.55*	4.80	8.09

MS residual = 5.63

Q = Group means are on the diagonal

B = Different between group means are below the diagonal

C = Fisher's protected t-value are below the diagonal

* = Significant at .05 level, $df = 493$.

Table 3 reveals that the difference in internet usage lay with youths whose age bracket are 26 years and above

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference in the degree of social life of internet users and non-internet users.

Table 4. t-test for difference in social life

Variables	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	t-cal
Internet users	280	25.97	4.96	
Non- users	220	21.45	4.37	10.81*

*Significant $P < .05$, $df = 498$, critical t-value = 1.96

Analysis of data in Table 4 reveals that the calculated t-value of 10.81 at .05 level of significance and 498 degree of freedom was significantly higher than the critical t-value of 1.96. The null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that there is significant difference in the degree of social life of

internet users and non-internet users.

Hypothesis 4: There is no significant difference between internet users and non-internet users in terms of social tolerance.

Table 5. t-test for difference in social tolerance

Variables	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	t-cal
Internet users	280	21.81	4.76	
Non-users	220	20.1	4.77	2.63*

*Significant $P < .05$, $df = 498$, critical t-value = 1.96

Analysis of data in Table 5 reveals that the calculated t-value of 2.63 at .05 level of significance and 498 degree of freedom was far greater than the critical t-value of 1.96. The null hypothesis was rejected. This means that there is social tolerance difference between internet users and non-internet users.

Hypothesis 5: There is no significant difference between the pattern of behaviour of the internet users and that of non-internet users.

Table 6. t-test for difference in pattern of behaviour

Variables	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	t-cal
Internet users	280	21.08	6.22	
Non-users	220	20.73	6.46	6.11*

*Significant $p < .05$, $df = 498$, critical t-value = 1.96.

The result of data analysis in Table 6 reveals that the calculated t-value of 6.11 at .05 level of significance and 498 degree of freedom was far greater than the critical t-value of 1.96. The null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that a significant pattern of behaviour difference exists between internet users and non-internet users.

Hypothesis 6: There is no significant relationship between internet usage and social skills development of youths.

Table 7. PPMC of internet usage and social skills development

Variables	$\sum x$ $\sum y$	$\sum x^2$ $\sum y^2$	$\sum xy$	t-cal
Internet usage x	5797	132815	95720	.677*
Social skills devt. y	4574	102326		

*Significant $P < .05$, $df = 498$, critical r-value = .088

Data analysis in Table 7 reveals that the calculated r-value of .677 at .05 level of significance and 498 degree of freedom was higher than the critical r-value of .088. The null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that a significant

relationship exists between internet usage and social skills development of youths..

4. Discussion of Findings

The result of data analysis on hypothesis one revealed a significant difference in internet usage among youths. This finding is supported by an earlier study finding by Fang and Yen [20], Hills et al [4] and Li and Kirkup [21] who noted that males dominate females in the internet and that while boys more frequently played games, used the computer for writing and e-mailing and surfed the internet than girls, girls were more frequent users of mobile phones. The observed difference in internet use between boys and girls can further be explained in terms of boys more than girls performing on-line transactions; using the internet as a destination for recreation and being more interested than girls in technology.

The result of data analysis on hypothesis two showed a significant age difference between internet usage among youths. This finding resulted in the rejection of the null hypothesis. Given the significant F-value, a detailed multiple comparisons Test was carried out using Fisher's Protected t-test to determine exactly which of the age bracket the difference lay in terms of internet usage. Result of the multiple comparison test revealed that those in age bracket of 26 years and above use the internet more. This finding is at variance with an earlier study by Hills et al [4] who noted that older people use the internet less than younger people. Fang and Yen[20] earlier study finding which is also at variance with the present study noted that the older the internet user is, the less proficient in internet use he will be while younger people appear to find it easier to navigate their way around the net. The difference in the finding of the present study may therefore be due to the fact that the undergraduate students were used as samples and that many of them particularly at the higher level download materials for course assignments and research works.

Result of data analysis on hypothesis three revealed a significant difference in the degree of social involvement of users and non-users. This finding is supported by earlier study findings by Davis [22] that noted that internet users have the tendency of neglecting friends, their academic work, family members and other personal responsibilities. These scholars noted further that health of internet users are affected and that they often have interpersonal problems which results in cutting down on their social engagements. Putman [23] study finding which also support the finding of the present study noted that there is decline in civic engagements and social participation by 35 percent in the United States of America by internet users as they do not vote, go to church or discuss government with neighbours. The researcher added that fewer internet users have dinner parties and generally get together less for civic and social purposes.

The analysis of data on hypothesis four revealed a

significant difference in social tolerance between internet users and non-internet users. This finding agrees with earlier study findings by Hashim [24], Scully [5] and Todd [25] who noted that internet users have the problem of social tolerance and poor communication. Human beings are social animals. Observation and interaction with peoples in social world reveals that cognitive interpretation is made. Consequently, enormous amounts of information and complex skill performances are learned. In consonant with the above view, Bandura (1986) in Peretomode [13] asserted correctly that the youths often become aggressive and intolerant after watching an aggressive character in a film episode.

The frequency and seriousness of delinquent behaviour among present day youths in Nigeria is alarming. Today, Nigerian youths stand accused of atrocities such as drug trafficking and addiction, armed robbery, rape, murder, etc. But their faces often look black and devoid of remorse. On the surface, they appear to be ordinary peoples. Youths in Nigeria today commit violent crimes sometimes over trivial matters because they lack social tolerance [26]. The scholars noted that this is because some of the youths imitate what they see on television screen which they erroneously belief to be real.

Result of data analysis on hypothesis five revealed that there is a significant difference in the pattern of behaviour of internet users and non-internet users. This finding support earlier study findings by Canary and Spitsbery [27], Cohen and Wills [28], Egger [29], Dvorak [30], Goldberg [31], Hills et al [4], McQueen and Fleck [32] who variously reported on the prevalence of internet addiction disorder. These scholars concluded that there exist addictive behaviour pattern among heavy internet users. Other studies [7, 20, 22] have also shown that internet addiction people not only behave differently than what society would consider normal, they also think differently from an average individual. They erroneously belief that internet is their only friend.

Analysis of data on hypothesis six revealed that there is a significant relationship between internet usage and social skills development. This finding agrees with earlier study findings by Hills et al [4], Potosky [1], and Walther, Anderson and Park [16] who stated that internet usage encourage some anti-social behaviours such as insults, swearing, hostility, violence, cultism, social disengagements etc. The conclusions of these scholars stressed that interpersonal effects are expected to accrue over time which could result to face-to-face interaction. They noted however that this could be abused.

5. Conclusion

Although the internet certainly has potential for educational use and day to day communication, it can and has been used for destructive purposes. The internet alters social interactions probably due to the long hours the youths spend on the internet playing games or watching

pornographic films. 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 impoverish 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 country, the more we are turning out social outlaws.

6. Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the findings and conclusion of the study:

1. Since internet usage has an adverse effects on social interaction, the youths should be encouraged to be self-disciplined especially in terms of time allocation to social and academic activities to avoid wasting much time at the cyber café. This is because some youths have formed the habits of staying all-night-long browsing the internet.
2. Parents, teachers, guardian, counsellors and voluntary organizations should encourage the youths to relate with people in acceptable manner in order to develop social tolerance among themselves and avoiding circumstances that will bring about social upheavals. They should be told to be accommodating.
3. All service providers should publish thoughtful and acceptable guidelines of conducts within their premises. Parents should take pains to talk to their wards and nurture them.
4. Religious organizations should take up this challenge and educate their members on the ills of pornography and other harmful practices displayed on our street via the internet.
5. The government should come up with a policy guiding the practice of service providers. Service providers should not just be given a free hand to operate. Rather, government should devise means of filtering and controlling all information that come into the internet through a central processing unit.
6. Both government and voluntary organizations should provide counseling centre for the youths. Most youths face diverse frustrating situations and end up running into wrong arms. Some may not want their parents, guardian or acquaintances to know what they are going through. They prefer a neutral person to confide in. This call for the need to establish counseling centres in schools and at the 31 local government headquarters in the state.

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