

EVALUATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA UTILIZATION TRENDS AMONG YOUTHS IN MAKURDI METROPOLIS, BENUE STATE

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Abstract

This study evaluated social media utilization trends among youths in Makurdi Metropolis. The study sought to investigate the trends of social media usage among youth in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State. The Uses and Gratification Theory was harnessed to support the study. The work adopted the survey research method using questionnaire as instrument of data collection. The study found that Facebook is the most used social media platform by Makurdi youth and their favourite features are messaging and user interaction. It was also found that Makurdi youth are regular and frequent users of social media. Makurdi youths use social media basically for sports, entertainment and to communicate with others. Lastly, findings further revealed that the positive impact of social media on Makurdi youth is interactivity and entertainment, while the negative impact is addiction and time wastage. The study concludes that Makurdi youth heavily use social media, especially Facebook for communication, entertainment, and sports, offering benefits like interactivity but also challenges such as addiction, highlighting the need for digital literacy to maximize positive outcomes. The study amongst others recommended that Government and institutions of learning should implement comprehensive educational programs aimed at enhancing digital literacy among youth.

Key Words: Social media, Trends, Youths.

Introduction

The rapid expansion of social media has significantly transformed how young people communicate, access information, and participate in everyday life. Okafor and Nwankwo (2022) explained that digital platforms have become central to youth interactions across developing societies, including Nigeria. They noted that social media now supports activities ranging from entertainment and learning to entrepreneurship and civic engagement. However, Adekunle and Ojo (2023) observed that these platforms also expose young people to challenges such as misinformation, cyberbullying, addiction, and weakened interpersonal relationships.

Mobile phone adoption has further accelerated this digital shift. Eze and Ibrahim (2021) emphasized that although mobile phones enhance communication, their excessive use have raised concerns about mental health, social wellbeing, and growing behavioural dependency among youth. Recent data released by the Digital Nigeria Research Group (2024) indicates that millions of Nigerian youths actively engage on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, underscoring the need to understand their online behaviours.

Statement of the Problem

Research on social media usage in Nigeria has mainly focused on large urban centers. Salihu and Tanko (2023) argued that smaller cities remain understudied despite their unique socio-cultural contexts. They noted that localized research is necessary to capture the varied digital experiences of young people across regions. Therefore, examining social media usage trends among youth in Makurdi metropolis is crucial for understanding the specific patterns, challenges, and opportunities that shape their digital lives.

The growing dependence of youths in Makurdi metropolis on social media for communication, information, and entertainment has raised concerns about how their usage patterns influence academic performance, social interaction, behaviour, and exposure to risks such as misinformation, cyberbullying, and online addiction. Yet, there is limited empirical insight into the specific ways young people in this urban setting use these platforms, the purposes they serve, and the challenges they encounter. This gap makes it

difficult for educators, policymakers, and community stakeholders to understand the real implications of social media on youth wellbeing. Therefore, this study examines the actual trends, motivations, and effects of social media usage among youth in Makurdi metropolis to generate evidence that can guide informed interventions.

Objectives of the study

The broad objective of this study is to evaluate the trends of social media usage among youths in Makurdi, Benue State. The specific objectives are:

- i. To identify the social media platforms commonly used by youths in Makurdi, Benue State.
- ii. To examine the frequency and duration of social media usage among youths in Makurdi Metropolis.
- iii. To determine the types of content accessed and the purposes for which youths in Makurdi, Benue State, use social media.
- iv. To evaluate the potential effects of social media usage on youths in Makurdi, Benue State.

Literature Review

Social Media

Social media is a multifaceted concept, and scholars have defined it from various perspectives. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p. 61) describe social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content." This definition highlights the technological underpinnings of social media and its reliance on user participation. Similarly, Kietzmann (2011) emphasizes the social aspect, defining social media as platforms that enable individuals and communities to share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content.

From a communication perspective, Boyd and Ellison (2007) define social media as web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system and articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection. Also, Treem and Leonardi (2013) propose that social media are tools that facilitate visibility, persistence, editability, and association, focusing on their communicative affordances. Finally, Van Dijck and Poell (2018) consider social media as platforms embedded in the logic of connectivity, datafication, and commodification, linking their definition to societal and economic processes.

These definitions share several commonalities, yet they diverge in their emphases. All agree on the participatory nature of social media, highlighting its role in enabling user interaction and content sharing. Kaplan and Haenlein's (2010) focus on Web 2.0 technology underscores the historical and technical roots of social media, while Kietzmann et al. (2011) and Boyd and Ellison (2007), concentrate on its functionality and social impact. Treem and Leonardi's (2013), definition stands out for introducing the concept of communicative affordances, which extends the discussion beyond the platforms themselves to the practices they enable. Finally, Van Dijck and Poell (2018) broaden the scope by linking social media to larger sociopolitical and economic contexts, offering a critical lens on their pervasive influence.

The mass media are increasingly serving the needs of the people across the globe in different ways. Moving away from traditional mass media, social media have been adopted from its inception by people as tool for interaction and entertainment. With modern technology, people do not have to wait for some time before feedback is made. Various empirical studies conducted over the years leave little doubt that, given exposure, media content can and does influence youngsters' level of socialization, beliefs and behaviours. Indeed, the evidence is so ample that few mass communication scholars hesitate to list social media as equal in importance to most other socialization agents like parents, schools and churches.

While working on the impact of the media, people's everyday life and the influence it is having on them, Lewis (2010), rightly observes that users of social media are no longer passive consumers. They could be creators or producers of information. Internet platform of Facebook allows the average person to create

content that can be shared with a worldwide audience. Dwyer (2016) cited in Lewis (2019), was more specific from his findings, which indicates that youths use social networking to help them maintain relationships with friends. Maintenance of already established virtual community through Facebook and MySpace in particular has also been acknowledged by Boyd and Ellison (2020). According to these authors, even bloggers who choose to be anonymous to the broader public are part of identifiable circle of bloggers who respond to each other and also meet in real life.

Youth

There seems to be no standard global definition of a youth. Africa and the global south and of course many countries of the world, have long insisted that youth is not a range of ages but defined by a diversity of culturally defined social processes that mark the transition from child to adult. It is against this background that the writer finds it pertinent to look at some notable and popular definitions of a youth and to examine the impacts of the narrow definition of youth in Nigeria.

The United Nations stated that "Youth" is best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood's independence and awareness of our interdependence as members of a community. Youth is a more fluid category than a fixed age-group. The Commonwealth defines youth as 15-29 years of age. The African Youth Charter defines youth as any individual between 15-35 years of age and seeks to resolve longstanding debates about defining youth within the African context and based on Africa's development realities (Mohammed, 2020).

In Nigeria, prior to the emergency of the National Youth Policy 2019, The Nigerian national youth policy (2009), defined youth as between 18-35 years. However, the 2019 National Youth Policy has changed the above classification. By the new Policy, a youth in Nigeria is a person between 18-29 years. This explains why NYSC is limited to graduates under the age of 30years (Onuoha, 2020).

Furthermore, the term "youth" is commonly used to refer to individuals between the ages of 15 and 35 years (Oduwale, 2015). However, it is essential to note that definitions can vary depending on the specific context and the purpose for which the term is being used. While a specific age range is usually used to describe the youth population, various factors, such as sociocultural practices, economic disparities, and educational dynamics, influence the definitions. his study however adopts this particular definition.

Social Media Use

In recent years, the advent of social media has revolutionized the way Nigerian youths interact, communicate, and engage with the world. Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, have become an integral part of their daily lives (Yusuf, 2016). Nigerian youths utilize these platforms for various purposes, including social networking, information sharing, and promoting causes they are passionate about.

Social media also provide Nigerian youths with a platform to express their opinions, engage in online activism, and mobilize for collective action (Ogunseitan, 2018). It enables them to connect with like-minded individuals, both within Nigeria and globally, fostering a sense of community and solidarity. Moreover, social media serve as a medium for Nigerian youths to showcase their talents, skills, and entrepreneurial endeavours (Aliyu & Solomon, 2019). Many young Nigerians have successfully utilized social media to build personal brands, market their products or services, and gain recognition in various fields.

However, along with the benefits, there are also concerns about the excessive use and potential negative consequences of social media among youths. Sadock and Brandon (2021), point out that prolonged social media use can lead to heightened anxiety, depression, and social comparison, especially when young individuals constantly compare their lives and appearances to an idealized online version. They emphasize that excessive social media consumption, particularly through scrolling feeds and chasing likes, can inhibit deep work and hinder intellectual growth among youths.

Interestingly, social media has become an inseparable part of the lives of today's youths, offering a variety of benefits such as enhanced communication, networking, and self-expression. However, it is crucial to

acknowledge the potential negative consequences of excessive social media use, including mental health issues and decreased productivity. By being aware of these concerns and adopting a more mindful approach to social media usage, young individuals can make the most out of these platforms while safeguarding their wellbeing and optimizing their personal growth.

Empirical Review

Naan (2022), carried out a study on the relationship between Facebook activity and academic performance among Nigerian undergraduates' students in Kogi State University, Ayigbain focus. The study examines the relationship between Facebook activity and academic performance for Nigerian undergraduate students. The survey method was employed with the instrument of data collection being the questionnaire. The result of the study suggested that Facebook activities did not have a statistically significant contribution on the respondents' semester grade point averages. The findings of the study suggested that undergraduates were not academically influenced by multi-tasking Facebook activities and assignments. The amount of time spent studying was identified as the best predictor of GPAs within this study, which proves that Facebook has the potential to positively influence tertiary institutions' students' academic performance, thus, it is imperative for institutions of higher education to be proactive in utilizing social media technologies as a positive academic resource.

Surma, (2020), examined the Uses and Gratification of Social Networking among Youths in Makurdi metropolis which was aimed at finding out what use the youths make of social media and the effects of social networking on the youth in the society adopted the survey research design method using the questionnaire as the instrument of data collection. The researcher found that youths use social media for chatting and interacting with friends, family and relations, connecting people in business and getting first-hand information. These findings also indicated that, the benefits youths derive from social media include; spreading and receiving information; hooking up with friends, coordinating and connecting business associates and most importantly, educational benefits.

Adisa (2020), conducted research on the changing media landscape and the changing social context of media use. The core objectives of the study were; to determine the most frequently used social network site ordinary citizens to share information with others; to determine how much time that they devote to the networking sites and determine the number of persons involved in social networking in recourse to their demographic details particularly age. The survey method was employed for this study. Amongst the findings from the study, it was discovered that irrespective of the fact that there are numerous social networking sites, most (60.8%) of the respondents use Facebook as their favourite platform. In trying to find out those who constitute the largest number respondents interact with, data on table 5 is quite revealing. The data showed that as many as 93.3% of those who interact with respondents are friends and almost half of the respondents (43.5%) network with more than 500 people. Also, it was revealed in the study that majority of people use the social media to share ideas with friends. While few (17.3%) respondents indulge in chatting and a negligible number of 39 (13.8%) respondents use it for dating, as many as 189 of them representing 66.8% use the platform to share ideas and for educational purpose.

Theoretical Framework: Uses and Gratification Theory

The Uses and Gratifications Theory, introduced by Katz and Blumler in 1972, emphasizes that media audiences are active participants in interpreting media messages, rather than passive recipients. The theory focuses on how individuals use media to fulfill specific needs, shifting the perspective from media production to media consumption. It explores questions such as "who uses which content, from which media, under which conditions, and for what reasons?" Amarasinghe (2010) posits that social media usage correlates positively with the gratification users derive, as individuals are motivated by intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Nyland and Near (2007) identified five key motives for social media use: meeting new people, entertainment, social events, maintaining relationships, and media creation. This theory is particularly relevant to studies on social media usage, as it helps researchers understand patterns of use and

the specific needs that drive online interactions, offering insights into the motivations of specific demographics, such as youth.

Research Methodology

This study adopted the survey design. The researcher chose survey method of research for this study because according to Osuala (2017), the method can be used to study both large and small populations by selecting and studying samples chosen from the population to discover the relative incidence, distribution and interrelations of sociological and psychological variables.

The population of this study comprised of all youths in Makurdi metropolis. According to National Bureau of Statistics projected population (2024), Makurdi youths have a population of 187,000. This forms the population of the study.

In order to maintain a sizeable coverage for this study, Taro Yamane (1967) formula is adopted to get 400 as sample size. Purposive sampling was adopted to select five major areas in Makurdi metropolis; High Level, Wadata, Wurukum, Benue State University and Joseph Saawuan Tarka University. These areas were selected based on the fact that they are mostly populated by youths.

The research instrument adopted for this study was the questionnaire. From the 400 questionnaire, 80 copies were administered in each of the five areas selected (High Level, Wadata, Wurukum, Benue State University and Joseph Saawuan Tarka University), bringing the total to 400. The answered questionnaires were sorted out and data was thereafter presented by means of tabulation and simple percentages for easier comprehension.

Data Presentation and Analysis

A total of 400 questionnaires were administered on the respondents and 392 representing 98% returned back, meanwhile 8 questionnaires representing 2% suffered mortality. The analysis is therefore based on the 392 respondents.

Table 1: Respondents' Sex

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	277	70.6
Female	115	29.3
Total	392	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 1 is a distribution of respondents according to sex. From the table, the majority of 277(70.6%) of the respondents are male, while the remaining 115(29.3%) of the respondents are female. This therefore, signifies that majority of the respondents sampled for this study are male.

Table 2: Respondent's highest academic qualification.

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
SSCE/WASSCE	71	18.1
NCE/ND	113	28.8
HND/B.SC	156	39.7
M.SC and above	52	13.2
Total	392	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 2 is a distribution of respondents based on their highest academic. The result shows that 71(18.1%) of the respondents have SSCE/WASSCE, 113(28.8%) of the respondents have NCE/ND, 156(39.7%) of the respondents are B.Sc./HND holders, while the remaining 52(13.5%) of the respondents have M.Sc. and above. This goes to say that all the respondents sampled for this study are educated enough to provide accurate answers to questions in the questionnaire.

Table 3: Responses on respondent's favourite social media platform

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Facebook	330	84.1
WhatsApp	32	8.1
Instagram	3	0.7
X	0	0
TikTok	27	6.8
Total	392	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 3 is a distribution of respondents' responses based on their favourite social media platform. Majority of 330(84.1%) of the respondents affirmed that its Facebook, 32(8.1%) of the respondents chose WhatsApp, 3 (0.7) of the respondents said X, while the remaining 27(6.8%) of the respondents went for TikTok. This implies that the social media platform mostly used by respondents is Facebook.

Table 4: Responses on how often respondents spend time on social media

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Regularly	277	70.6
Occasionally	115	29.3
Rarely or never	0	0
Total	392	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Data in table 4 is the distribution of respondent's responses on how often respondents spend time on social media. Majority of 277(70.6%) of the respondents said regularly, 115(29.3%) of the respondents said occasionally. This implies that the respondents sampled for this study are regular social media users.

Table 5: Responses on the kind of social media content respondents are mostly interested in

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Communicate with others	91	23.2
Education	73	18.6
Sports	147	37.5
Fashion	9	2.2
Politics	72	18.1
Total	392	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 5 is a distribution of respondents' responses based on the kind of social media content respondents are mostly interested in. 91(23.2%) of the total respondents said communicating with others, 73(18.6%) of the respondents said education, majority of 147(37.5%) of the respondents opted for sports, 9(2.2%) of the respondents chose fashion, while the remaining 72(18.1%) of the respondents said politics. This signifies that respondents under study are mostly interested in sports, closely followed by communication with others.

Table 6: Responses on the impacts (positive/negative) respondents derive in the usage of social media

Options	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Increased access to information/knowledge	31	9.7
Interactivity/entertainment	180	45.9
Self-expression/creativity	25	6.3
Addiction/time wastage	156	39.7
Total	392	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Data in table 6 is the distribution of respondent's responses on the positive impacts respondents derive in the usage of social media. 31(9.7%) of the respondents said increased access to information and knowledge, majority of 180(45.9%) of the total respondents affirmed its interactivity and entertainment, 25(6.3%) of the respondents said self-expression and creativity, while 156(39.7%) ticked addiction/time wastage. This implies that respondent's positive impact of using social media is interactivity and entertainment while addiction/time wastage are the negative impacts.

Discussion of Findings

Finding of the study revealed that Facebook is the most used social media platform by Makurdi youths and their favourite features are messaging and user interaction. This agrees with the research carried out by Naan (2022) on the relationship between Facebook activity and academic performance among Nigerian undergraduates' students in Kogi State University, Ayigbain focus. The study examines the relationship between Facebook activity and academic performance for Nigerian undergraduate students. The analysis showed the strength of the relationship between the predictor variable (average daily minutes of using Facebook and, demographic data, academic data, daily minutes of multi-tasking and types of Facebook activities used while multiple-tasking) and the criterion variable (Semester Grand Point Average)

This study also found that Makurdi youths are regular and frequent users of social media. This finding is related to the study carried by Adisa (2020) on the changing media landscape and the changing social context of media use. The core objectives of the study were; to determine the most frequently used social network site ordinary citizens to share information with others; to determine how much time that they devote to the networking sites and determine the number of persons involved in social networking in recourse to their demographic details particularly age. Amongst the findings from the study, it was discovered that irrespective of the fact that there are numerous social networking sites, most (60.8%) of the respondents use Facebook as their favourite platform and the youth under study are regular and frequent users of social media.

This study further found that Makurdi youths use social media basically for sports, entertainment and to communicate with others. This is in agreement with the assumptions of Uses and Gratification Theory, which proposes that people use the media to satisfy specific needs, desires or gratifications. The theory indicates a positive relationship between social media usage and the level of gratification derived from such activity.

Additionally, this study reveals the positive impact of social media on Makurdi youth is interactivity and entertainment, the negative impact is addiction and time wastage. This finding relates to the study by Kuss and Griffiths (2017) on Social Networking Sites and Addiction: Ten Lessons Learned, the study aimed to explore the phenomenon of addiction to social networking sites and identify key lessons from existing research. The study highlighted that excessive use of social media can lead to addiction-like symptoms, including salience, mood modification, tolerance, withdrawal, conflict, and relapse.

Conclusion

The study on social media utilization trends among youths in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State reveal significant insights into their preferences, behaviours, and perceived impacts. Facebook emerges as the dominant platform among Makurdi youth, primarily utilized for messaging and interactive features. The findings underscore the pervasive and regular nature of social media engagement among this demographic, predominantly driven by interests in sports, entertainment, and communication. While social media offers benefits such as enhanced interactivity and entertainment value, it also poses challenges like addiction and time inefficiency. Addressing these concerns through promoting digital literacy emerges as a crucial strategy to mitigate adverse effects and harness the potential benefits of social media for youth in Makurdi.

Recommendations

- i. The Benue State Ministry of Youth and Social Media Advocacy Groups should organize workshops and campaigns to educate youths on responsible social media use, emphasizing time management and avoiding addiction.
- ii. Schools, universities, and youth organizations should guide youths toward educational, informative, and skill-building content on social media, while still accommodating interests in sports and entertainment.
- iii. Community leaders and government agencies should encourage youths to use platforms like Facebook for constructive communication, networking, and civic participation.
- iv. The Benue State Ministry of Youth, academic institutions, and research organizations should conduct periodic assessments of social media usage among youths to identify trends, potential risks, and opportunities for maximizing benefits.

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