

Peer Influence and Social Networking as Correlates of Internet Use among Undergraduate Students: Evidence from Enugu State, South East Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined peer influence and social networking as correlates of internet use among undergraduate students in Enugu State, South East Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to determine the relationship between: peer influence and internet use among undergraduates; and social networking and internet use among undergraduates. To achieve these objectives, the study adopted correlation survey design. The population of the study consisted of 44,152 undergraduates, while a sample of 1,199 undergraduates was used for the study. Two researcher developed questionnaires were used for data collection. The instruments were face validated by experts in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, while their internal consistency was established using Cronbach Alpha. The findings indicate that there is significant positive relationship between the abovementioned social factors and internet use among undergraduate students. Based on these findings, the study made some policy recommendations, among which are that lecturers should discharge their duties as academic advisers and counsellors effectively while parents should monitor their children closely to ensure that they are not exposed to excessive internet use arising from the aforementioned social factors.

Key words: Peer influence; Social networking; Internet use; Undergraduate students; Correlation survey

1. Introduction

The advent of internet marked the beginning of an era of global technological revolution, which has stealthily and intricately enmeshed all facets of our lives. The present generation, which is sometimes called “the internet generation”, relies heavily on internet, and its usage has become quite indispensable even in developing countries like Nigeria. The internet is an information super highway that connects people, data and other computers (Potosky, 2007). Indeed, numerous descriptions of the internet that abound in the literature are consistent with this definition. For instance, Alio and Aneke (2015) characterized the internet as an international network or an information superhighway which connects computers from different geographic locations to share information and resources. Sometimes, the internet is simply called “the Net”

to underline the fact that it is a worldwide system of computer networks, a network of networks in which users at any one computer can, if they have permission, get information from any other computer and sometimes talk directly to users at other computers (Rouse, 2018).

The foregoing descriptions of the internet indicate that it is a worldwide, publicly accessible network of thousands of computers and computer networks, and that through interconnected computer networks, the internet enables individuals and organizations to share information, resources, and services. The internet is not owned or operated by any single individual or institution. It is a public, voluntary, and cooperative effort between the connected individuals and institutions. It was originally developed in 1973 by an American computer scientist, Vinton Cerf, as part of a project sponsored by the United States Department of Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA). It began as a computer network of ARPA (also known as the ARPAnet) that linked computer networks at several universities and research laboratories in the United States (Rouse, 2018). Presently, it provides a new communication system or medium that enables access to vast amounts of information across a wide variety of dimensions (Esen, Aktas & Tuncer, 2013). In fact, the last two decades have witnessed explosive growth in internet use worldwide and this trend is expected to continue for the foreseeable future as the present generation relies heavily on the use of the internet, and this is rapidly increasing even in the less developed countries.

The population of internet users has grown tremendously across the globe in the last two decades, especially in developing countries like Nigeria where the internet was virtually non-existent in the early 1990s. The World Development Indicators published annually by the World Bank documents the statistics of internet users from all locations across the globe (World Bank, 2024). The statistics indicate that there were 120 million users of the internet in the world as of 1997, accounting for 2.04 percent of world population. However, from 2012 to 2022, the number of people using the internet had rapidly increased from 2.39 billion to 5.12 billion, representing 33.5 and 64.4 percent of world population, respectively. In Nigeria, this World Bank statistics indicate that 19 thousand people were using the internet in 1997, accounting for 0.02 percent of the country's population. However, from 2012 to 2022, the number of people accessing the internet in Nigeria had swiftly risen from 27.38 million to 77.48 million, representing 16.1 and 35.46 percent of the population, respectively. Clearly, these statistics indicate that the number of internet users in Nigeria has risen greatly, particularly in the last decade.