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RESEARCH ARTICLE

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF UNDERGRADUATE'S USE OF INTERNET FOR SOCIO-ACADEMIC REASONS

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Abstract

The internet today is a universal entity whose nature cannot be quickly defined. The internet has provided essential services in the education sector. Perhaps, people in academia rely heavily on the internet for academic purposes. However, observation suggests that a large number of students use the internet for purposes other than academics. The present study aimed to determine the differences in internet use for social or academic purposes among undergraduates in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. A total of two hundred undergraduates comprising male and female drawn from three tertiary institutions participated in the study. The participants completed a self-report measure on internet use for academic and non-academic purposes. A 2x2 contingency Chi-square analysis revealed that female participants used the internet more for non-academic purposes when compared to their male counterparts. A one-way ANOVA showed that the participants differ significantly on the use of the internet for academic purposes according to their levels of study. Discussion and conclusions are discussed.

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Introduction:-

Today's internet is a worldwide entity whose nature cannot be quickly defined (Ugwulebo & Okoro, 2016). Indeed, the internet has transformed the computer and communications world more remarkably. The internet has profoundly influenced our lifestyle, making digital literacy one of the prominent elements of today's children's development (Othman et al, 2019). The emergence of the internet, especially in developing countries like Nigeria, has become an excellent resource for information sourcing and social interaction, and many more. The web is an instrument for data dispersal and a medium for collaboration and interaction regardless of geographic area.

The internet has been a vital instrument for facilitating academic activities in Nigeria's higher education (Tayo, Adebola, & Yahya, 2019). The presence of smartphones and other devices set the stage for this unprecedented integration of learning and information infrastructure. Accordingly, Hussain (2012) noted that the use of the internet in academia had enhanced didactic advances in teaching, education, and research dissemination. For example, open access journals, magazines, and other information resources enhance learning (Apuke & Iyendo, 2018; Renuka, 2017) and improved student's academic performance and GPA (Ogedebe, 2012). Previous research has studied the trend and pattern of internet usage in tertiary institutions and its accompanying implication on teaching and learning (e.g., Imaza & Orhan, 2010; Ayub, Hamid, & Nawawi, 2014; Chandran, 2000; Apuke & Iyendo, 2017). Also, Salako and Tiarniyu (2007) argued that the internet is recognized globally as a technology dominated by young people,

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particularly students who are more inclined to exploit internet resources for education, social interaction, and entertainment.

Although technology has proved to be pivotal in academia, it is observed that students in higher education embrace technology for varied purposes. The use of the internet for non-academic purposes seems to be higher than its use for academic purposes (Renuka, 2017). Students have been constantly devoted to the internet for purposes other than their studies (e.g., Junco & Cotton, 2012; Lenhart, Purcell, Smith & Zickuhr, 2010; Rideout, 2012; Owusu-Acheaw & Larson, 2015; Christakis & Moreno, 2009). This further supports the notion that the internet could be doing more harm than good among undergraduates. For instance, Ayub et al., (2014) reported that social network apps, including Facebook, Twitter, and others, moderate internet use for socializing and academics. Accordingly, Alakpudia (2010) associated students' poor reading skills and examination failure to internet use. Regardless of the importance of the web to learning (Tayo et al. 2019), research has underscored incorporating the technology into activities other than academic purposes (Rithika & Sara, 2013). Perhaps, the dependence on the internet could negatively impact language use and creative writing skills (Hashem & El-Badawy, 2015). Previous research has studied internet use among Nigeria's undergraduates and its advantage on learning (e.g., Udende & Azeez, 2010; Nwokedi, 2007; Ogedebe, 2012; Jagboro, 2004; Awoleye, Siyanbola & Oladapo, 2008; Jagboro, 2003; Oyedun, 2007). The internet's impact among undergraduates in higher education in Nigeria has both its positive and negative sides. For example, Mamudu and Oyewo (2015) noted that it is almost impossible for students to part with their phones. Many students perceived the internet as their freedom and an avenue to explore the world socially rather than utilize it for academic growth. The trend could have a negative implication for the broader society if not checked. Ezemenaka (2013) stated that most individuals would experience symptoms related to substance withdrawal following a divorce with their smartphones. Surprisingly, most students in tertiary institutions are found in this category. This present study is aimed to analyze the internet use purpose among a sample of undergraduates from some selected tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Specifically, the study intends to study gender and year of study as factors that could moderate internet use purposes among the undergraduates. Therefore, it is hypothesized that females will be found to use the internet for non-academic purposes more than their male counterparts. Also, it is hypothesized that internet use for academic and non-academic purposes will vary depending on student's years of study.

Method:-

The research adopted a cross-sectional survey. The study was limited to three public tertiary institutions in Enugu State, Nigeria. The population comprised males and females undergraduate students in their different levels in these institutions. A total of two hundred (200) students (100 males) and (100 females) participated in the study.

Measure:-

Data was collected using a self-developed questionnaire designed to measure internet use purposes among the undergraduates on a four-point scale. The instrument contains questions such as "I always make sure that my device is subscribed" "I prefer reading the hard copy of my textbooks than the online copy." The scale's reliability was ascertained following a pilot study using participants outside the study population, and the Cronbach Alpha .89 coefficient was obtained, indicating that the instrument was reliable.

Procedure

The researchers employed and trained research assistants who assisted in administering and collecting the research instruments in all the tertiary institutions from which participants were selected. The researchers obtained authorization letters from the concerned institutions' management before commencing invitations to participate and further distribute the instruments.

Result:-

Table 1:- The table shows the Chi-square 2x2 contingency proportion of internet use for academic and non-academic purposes among male and female participants

Participants gender * Participants use of the Internet for Academic vs. Non-Academic Purpose Crosstabulation

Participants use of the internet for

Academic vs. Non-Academic

Purpose

			Male			Female		
Observed	%	Expected	Observed	%	Expected	Observed	%	Expected

Internet use for Academic Purpose	84	84.0	57.5	31	31.0	44.5
Internet use for Non-Academic Purpose	6	16.0	42.5	69	69.0	55.5

From the above table, all the expected cell counts were greater than five. A Chi-square revealed a statistically significant difference in the proportion of internet use for an academic purpose for the male when compared to their female counterpart. $X^2(1) = 57.473$, $P < .05$.

To determine if the internet use for academic and non-academic purposes differs for participants in different study levels. According to their study level, the table shows the mean and standard deviation of the participant's internet use for academic and non-academic purposes.

Table 2:-The table shows the participants use of the internet for Academic vs. Non-Academic Purpose.

Participants Study Level	N	Mean	SD
Year 1	61	1.09	0.28
Year 2	51	1.44	0.51
Year 3	44	2.01	0.01
Year 4	44	2.01	0.01
Total	200	1.58	0.49

From the table above, the internet use for academic purpose increased from year 1 ($n = 61$, 1.09 ± 0.28) to year 2 ($n = 51$, 1.44 ± 0.51) to year 3 and 4 ($n = 44$, 2.01 ± 0.01).

Table 3:-Table showing the result of the one-way ANOVA conducted on the data.

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	Sig
Between groups	31.775	3	10.592	121.402	.000
Within groups	17.100	196	.087		
Total	48.875	199			

The table above shows the result of the one-way ANOVA conducted to determine if there is a difference between the different levels of study on internet use for academic purposes. The result indicated a statistically significant difference in study levels at $F(3, 196) = 121.402$, $P < .05$. Meaning that internet use for non-academic purposes declines as students progress in their level of study.

Discussion:-

The study aimed at comparing internet use among undergraduates in tertiary institutions and the Chi-square analysis revealed a statistically significant difference in the proportion of internet use for an academic purpose for the male when compared to their female counterpart. $X^2(1) = 57.473$, $P < .05$. meaning that the male uses the internet more for academic purposes compared to their female counterpart. Thus, the study's hypothesis that the female undergraduates will show more use of the internet for non-academic purposes was confirmed. This finding agrees with the previous research (e.g., Tsver, Swamy, & Nyaruwata, 2014; Bressers & Bergen, 2002). This means that while the internet is beneficial in academia, female undergraduates spend more time on the internet for other purposes than academic purposes. Probably, the female pays more attention to social media engagements such as Whatsapp, Facebook, and Twitter activities.

Nevertheless, it does not mean that boys are free from the trend. Although, reports of gender differences in internet use are conflicting. For instance, this current result contradicts the findings of Rafi et al. (2019), Fortson et al. (2007), and Odell et al. (2000), who found the males use the internet more for non-academic reasons. Furthermore, the current study provides evidence that internet use among undergraduates for academic purposes differs according to their study levels. The one-way ANOVA showed that undergraduates in their first year of study mostly use the internet for purposes other than academic reasons compared with students at higher study levels. This result supports the hypothesis that internet use for educational purposes will vary among different study levels. Meaning that the use of the internet for other purposes than for academic is prevalent among the year one and year two students but more in the first year. The finding supports the report of (Mashiri, 2013) who found final year students use the internet for academic purposes more than first years. The probable reason for this could be attributed to the fact that

students in their early years experience less academic work-loads and have not entirely understood academic demands.

Conclusion:-

The current study aimed to investigate the internet use for social and academic purposes among undergraduates. The findings revealed a gender difference in internet use among the respondents. Females were found to use the internet more for non-academic purposes when compared to their male counterparts. Also, the findings showed that internet use for academic purposes differs among the respondents according to their level of study. The study implies that the prevalence of internet use for non-academic reasons could negatively impact the girls' academic and psychological functioning more than the boys. At the same time, loss of academic period within the first year of study could have a devastating effect on the later study level. However, the study concludes that institutional interventions aiming to reduce internet use for non-academic purposes should focus more on females but not ignore the male. Tertiary institutions should continually enlighten the younger students on the importance of the internet on academics.

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