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## A STUDY OF SOCIAL NETWORK ADDICTION AMONG YOUTHS IN NIGERIA

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### **ABSTRACT**

For most people, social networking sites are harmless platforms that allow for social interaction and personal expression. For others, social media has become more than an entertaining form of engagement; it has become an increasing compulsion. The purpose of this paper is to examine whether youths are becoming addicted to social networking sites to keep up interpersonal relationship. The survey research method was used with standardized questions drawn up. Eight higher institutions in Oyo state were used and the sample population drawn from them. Data gathered was analyzed using frequency count and simple percentages. It was gathered that majority of the respondents showed a tendency towards addiction to social network sites and so could not do without going through their online profiles daily. Recommendations were then made that more time should be spent on face to face interaction rather than on online communication, other social interests outside the internet that would sustain close interpersonal relationships should also be built upon.

**Keywords:** *Social networks, Addiction, Social networking sites, Youths, Internet*

### **INTRODUCTION**

On the internet, people engage in a variety of activities some of which may be potentially addictive. (kuss and Griffiths, 2011). The mass appeal of social networks on the internet could be a cause for concern, particularly when attending to the gradually increasing amount of time youths spend online. Social networking sites are virtual communities where users can create individual public profiles, interact with real life friends and meet other people based on shared interests. They allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they have a connection and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. Social networking sites offer individuals the possibilities of networking and sharing media content, therefore embracing the main web 2.0 attributes against the framework of their respective structural characteristics (Jenkins, 2006). The internet has an indescribable power to influence, connect and mobilize youths. Some youths have lost their control over social media usage and begun having problems with their functionality in social, vocational and personal circles as the internet has taken over total control of their lives. Idakwo (2011) posit that school work and social interaction have been affected at the advent of these social media. Undergraduates spend more time on Facebook, Twitter and other social networks through smartphones that are now in abundance among these youths. Many youths cannot go for two-three hours without checking and updating their profiles on these social networks even at the detriment of other activities such as educational and career pursuit. Morahan-Martin and Schumacher (2000) explain internet addiction as the excessive use of the internet and the failure to control this usage which seriously harms a person's life. Excessive mental

preoccupation with internet usage, repetitive thoughts about limiting or controlling the use, failure to prevent the desire for access, continuation of using the internet though functionality is being ruined at various levels, spending more and more time on the internet, craving for using the internet when access is not available are the remarkable problems with internet addiction (Adedeji, 2011). The internet is a seductive place, especially for today's linked-in teens that are far more likely to add graffiti to their friends Facebook wall than they are to actually get on their bicycle and ride over to that same friend's house. One has to admit it would be a challenge to connect face-to-face with someone one has never met in person and who lives in a different time zone or area. Therein lies the problem and makes the internet perfect for teens as social networking sites let them represent themselves as whomever or whatever they want. Everything is edited by them, chosen specifically to present the face they want the world to see (Cabral, 2011). Today's youths have grown up understanding the power of the internet and as a result they feel a constant pressure to be connected with their peers through maintaining a continuous connection with technology. Their connectedness is creating new kinds of peer-to-peer relationships that are considerably different from what used to be the norm.

## **SOCIAL NETWORKS**

Social networking became very popular during the past few years. According to Downes (2005), social networks are the conjunction of personal ties which are combined by a set of relations. Daily thoughts can be expressed and discussions can take place about these thoughts and new ideas come up with on social networks. Photographs and videos can be shared, tagged and updated in addition to personal details, look for jobs and even find one and the real world can be experienced within the virtual environment of a social network.

The first social networking site SixDegrees.com was launched in 1997 and it allowed users to create profiles, list their friends and surf the friend's list (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). From 1997-2010, there are some 1.5billion users of social networking sites. Facebook tops the list with over 901million users. Majority of users fall within the 16-44 years age bracket.

List of top 10 social networking sites

Facebook	Netlog
Twitter	Google+
Eskimi	Badoo
LinkedIn	2go
MySpace	Pinterest

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The World Wide Web is altering human social interaction and the way the brain processes information. Consequently, scholars dive into the potential of internet addiction and the internet's effect on other behavioural changes. Majority of research focus on the true aspects of addiction and assess whether internet addiction actually exists (Nauert, 2010). Although research is scanty in accessing whether youths are addicted to social media use, some scholars have done some work on it and various researchers have tested social media addiction with a small sample. The International Centre for media and Public Agenda at the

University of Maryland carried out a research concerning Generation Y's dependence on Social media. Generation Y is defined as those born between the mid 1970s and the early 2000s. This population has grown up with a majority of technological advances such as computers and the internet (Cabral, 2011). The centre used a 'technology blackout' and sampled 200 students who gave answers ranging from 'in withdrawal, craving, very anxious, extremely antsy, miserable, jittery and crazy' to describe their feelings during the 'technology blackout'. The main conclusion was that the students could function without technology but completely refuse to remove it from their lives. A study conducted by Pew Internet and American Life project in 2007 found that majority of youths, over 79% cannot tear themselves away from the use of social networks and must update and view their profiles daily (Lenhart & Madden, 2007). According to Gaudin (2009) in a survey of 3500 United Kingdom companies, 233 million hours are lost every month as a result of employees wasting time on social networking sites. Lenhart (2007) in a study of 935 participants in America revealed that 55% of youths used social networking sites in 2006. The main reasons reported for this usage were 'staying in touch with friends' and 'using them to make new friends'. Furthermore, over half of the youths from the study visited their SNS at least once a day which is indicative of the fact that in order to keep an attractive profile, frequent visits are necessary and this is a factor that facilitates excessive use. Subrahmanyam et al (2008) in a US survey of 131 Psychology students indicated that 78% used Social Networking sites with 57% of these using SNS on a daily basis. They mainly read/responded to comments on their 'walls', sent/responded messages/invites and browsing friend's profiles/walls/pages. These findings corresponded with another research carried out by Pempek et al (2009) from a different study on another university student sample.

Azeez (2011) posit that the phenomenon of virtual instant messaging replacing face to face conversation with friends can be explained by discovering that using social networks for social interaction relieves many aspects of group anxiety. The infinite possibilities of the web help define alternative realities where anonymity is welcomed and potentially psychologically rewarding. Zinz et al (2009) believe that youths are exposed to a higher risk of social network addiction because of their vulnerability since they are adjusting to a massive amount of developmental and life changes and this susceptibility and exposure to an abundance of new things are aided by the use of technology and social networks that ease new connections and relieve societal pressures. Karaiskos et al (2010) argued in a study at the university of Athens that a woman who had gone as far as losing her job on account of her compulsion to check and update her profile on Facebook, could be identified as a 'social network addict'. Another study carried out at a Czech university analyzed Facebook-related academic procrastination. Though based on a sample too small to draw any general conclusions, one interesting finding of the research was that people tended to be unaware of just how much time they really spend on social networking sites, and the effect this might have on their academic performance (Young, 1998). There are many factors that determine the characteristics on internet and social network addictions in different parts of the world. The nature and scope of these problems are not only affected by technological advancement and the number of computers connected to the internet per capita and other such quantitative data, but cultural factors are also a key in determining the local incidence of

these addictions. In an article on the Daily Trust newspaper, Itodo (2011) posits that there seem to be an alarming rate of social networking obsession among youths today; a trend that could affect their academic, social and spiritual lives negatively if not properly controlled. Many concerned parents have expressed grave concern that they could hardly get the attention of their children and wards, as they seem to have been carried away by the fascinating world of social networks. Some youths are such social freaks that they have now carved out for themselves a world of fantasy and illusion for detached from reality. Bello (2012) of the Sunday Observer observes that if the dangerous trend of social network "obsession" if left unchecked could further affect an already collapsing education system in Nigeria. The reason students are performing poorly in school these days might not be far-fetched. While poor quality of teachers can quickly take the blame, one might think harder if the phrase "Facebook frenzy" has not been heard of. It is a good thing that young Nigerians are embracing ICT but such change comes with its consequences. As many Nigerian students assignment and reading times suffer neglect while they spend more time with their friends, this affect their academic performance. The downward slide in performance of secondary school students in national exams like WAEC & NECO is a further testimony to this fact.

**METHODOLOGY**

The descriptive survey method was used with structured questions designed in line with the research objective. The sample population was drawn from eight (8) higher institutions in Oyo State – University of Ibadan, Lead City University, Ajayi Crowther University, Emmanuel Alayande College of Education, Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, School of Surveying and Federal College of Education, Special. One hundred and twenty (120) copies of questionnaire were distributed to respondents that were randomly selected from each of the institutions. A total of one thousand (1000) copies of questionnaire were distributed to the respondents though the researchers were only able to retrieve eight hundred and eighty four (884) of them. The instrument was designed in two parts, namely demographic and structured questions requiring Very often (VO), Often (O), Sometimes (S),Never (N). Data analysis was done using frequency count and simple percentage.

**OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

- To determine the social networking sites favoured by students
- To determine the frequency of use of social network sites by youths
- To determine whether youths are addicted to social media
- To determine the level of addiction of youths to social networks.

**ANALYSIS OF RESPONDENTS BIOGRAPHICAL DATA**

Table 1: Gender Distribution of Respondents

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Cumulative percentage</b>
<b>Male</b>	552	62	62
<b>Female</b>	334	38	100
<b>Total</b>	886	100	

This table shows that there were more male respondents than female respondents indicating that males make use of social networks than females.

Table 2: Respondents' age Distribution

<b>Age range</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Cumulative percentage</b>
<b>16-22</b>	354	40	40
<b>23-30</b>	315	35.5	75.5
<b>31-40</b>	169	19.1	94.6
<b>40 above</b>	48	5.4	100
<b>Total</b>	886	100	

This table shows that majority of the respondents are youths since they fall between the 16-40 age bracket. This shows that the target audience was reached and that the bulk of those who use social media.

Table 3: Social network used

<b>Social network</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Facebook</b>	802	98.4
<b>Twitter</b>	624	65.9
<b>LinkedIn</b>	316	22
<b>Eskimi</b>	428	32
<b>2go</b>	214	16
<b>Badoo</b>	316	22

The result here shows that majority of the respondents use almost all of the social networks used in the study but with Facebook and Twitter having the largest number of users.

**SECTION B**

**Analysis of other research question**

Likert scale has been employed in the analysis of these research questions. The following rating scales have been used:

- Very often / strongly agree 4
- Often /agree 3
- Sometimes / Disagree 2
- Never / Strongly Disagree 1

**Table 4:** How often respondents use social networks

	<b>Response</b>	<b>points</b>	<b>total</b>
<b>Very often</b>	304	4	1216
<b>Often</b>	396	3	1188
<b>Sometimes</b>	128	2	256

<b>Never</b>	58	1	58
<b>Total</b>	886		2718

2718

886 = 3.6

Since the result of the analysis is 3, this implies that majority of the respondents use social networks often.

**Table 5:** overspending time on social network sites

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Point</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Very often</b>	222	4	884
<b>Often</b>	264	3	1095
<b>Sometimes</b>	192	2	382
<b>Never</b>	208	1	209
<b>Total</b>	886		2570

2570

886 = 2.9 Approximately 3

This table indicates that majority of the respondents often overspend time on social network, since the result of the analysis is approximately 3.

**Table 6:** Influence of social network sites on productivity.

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Point</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Very often</b>	112	4	448
<b>Often</b>	256	3	768
<b>Sometimes</b>	313	2	626
<b>Never</b>	205	1	205
<b>Total</b>	886	1	2047

2047

886 = 2.3 Approximately 3

Since the result of the analysis above is approximately 2, this implies that the respondents believe that social network use sometimes affect productivity.

**Table 7:** Emotional state of respondents on inability to use social networks

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Point</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Very often</b>	186	4	744
<b>Often</b>	391	3	1173
<b>Sometimes</b>	128	2	256
<b>Never</b>	181	1	181
<b>Total</b>	886		2354

2354

886 = 2.65

The result of the analysis here is approximately 3, this implies that majority of the respondents feel agitated whenever they are unable to use social networking sites.

**Table 8:** level of addiction to social networks

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Point</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Strongly agree</b>	235	4	1420
<b>Agree</b>	213	3	639
<b>Disagree</b>	132	2	264
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	108	1	186
<b>Total</b>	886		2509

2508

886= 2.83.

Since the result of the analysis is approximately 3, majority of the respondents agreed that they are addicted to social network sites.

**Table 9:** Inability to stop use of social networking sites

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Points</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Strongly Agree</b>	566	4	2264
<b>Agree</b>	216	3	648
<b>Disagree</b>	86	2	172
<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	18	1	18
<b>Total</b>	886		3102

3102

886 = 3.5

The result shows that majority of the respondents strongly agree that they have not been able to stop or reduce usage of social network sites.

**FINDINGS**

- Youths between the ages of 16- and 30 spend inordinate number of hours on social networking sites.
- Majority of the respondents check social networking sites to update their profiles and do other things instead of what they had originally set out to do on the internet.
- Majority of the respondents spend more time on social networking sites and so this affects their productivity negatively.
- Majority of the respondents become agitated if they are not able to access their social networks at least twice daily.

- Majority of the respondents say that others have often complained about the number of hours they spend on social networks.
- Majority of the respondents believe that they are addicted to social networks.
- Majority of the respondents have very often tried to stop or cut down on using social networking sites without success. They keep going back to it even after promising themselves they wouldn't.

## **CONCLUSION**

The findings of this study indicate that youths in Nigeria are spending too much time on social networking sites at the detriment of other necessary things such as their studies. Youths' use of these social networking sites even point towards obsession. They have made social media their top priority and continue to need more usage in order to feel satisfied. Social networking sites have allowed for a significant change in the social, interpersonal and personal behaviour of youths today. They have become an essential medium for communication and entertainment among young adults and though they have started to affect the daily activities of normal human interaction and productivity, they have come to stay and their usage is not going to decrease anytime soon since there is a prediction on their increase. The use to which youths of these days put social networking sites seems to be the issue. Too much of everything is bad and even every good thing if over-used tends to have a negative effect on the user. Effort should be made to limit time spent online especially viewing social networking sites. More time should also be devoted to face to face interaction instead of the online/virtual community that has become the norm. Believing there is a problem with social networking site use and consciously finding a solution will go a long way in curbing addiction.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Social networks are here to stay no matter what one says, however, the use to which it is put should be of concern to everyone. Youths in Nigeria should realize that virtual friendship cannot take the place of physical friendship and should therefore spend more time in cultivating face-to-face relationships. The virtual world is not real and spending such inordinate time on it at the detriment of other duties would be a waste of time and resources. Use of social networks should be reduced and more time spent on productive ventures. Too much time spent online affects ones productivity both physically and emotionally and should therefore be reduced. The danger posed by placing too much information online cannot also be overemphasized and youths should desist from this.

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