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SOCIAL MEDIA, YOUTHS AND CULTURE CHANGE AMONG ABU ZARIA UNDERGRADUATES

Abdul-Aziz HARUNA and Kabiru DANLADI, *Ph.D.*

Introduction

Ssocial media are Internet sites where people interact freely, sharing and discussing information about their lives, using a multimedia mix of personal words, pictures, videos and audio. Using these sites, individuals and groups create and exchange content and engage in person-to-person conversations. They are in many forms including blogs and microblogs, forums and message boards, social networks, wikis, virtual worlds, social bookmarking, tagging and news, writing communities, digital storytelling and scrapbooking, and data, content, image and video sharing, podcast portals, and collective intelligence. Some of the well-known sites include *Facebook*, LinkedIn, MySpace, *Twitter*, YouTube, Flickr, WordPress, Blogger, Typepad, LiveJournal, Wikipedia, Wetpaint, Wikidot, Second Life, Del.icio.us, Digg, Reddit, Lulu, etc.

The term social media according to Bohler-Muller & van der Merwe (2011) refers to web-based tools and services that

allow users to create, share, rate and search for content and information without having to log in to any specific portal site or portal destination. Kaplan and Michael (2010, pp. 59-68) see 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”. The tools are social because they are created in ways that enable users to share and communicate with one another.

New technological developments led to the creation of social media and the sites provide a platform in what is commonly referred to as life streaming which allows users to engage in ongoing and uninterrupted broadcasting of information and events through a set of digital media (Essoungou, 2010). *Twitter* and *Facebook* are such tools that enable people to stream their lives directly, in real time, via short messages called tweets and updates (Bohler -Muller & van der Merwe, 2011).

The advent of social media has brought about a change in our cultural norms because they connect people instantly from distant lands and serves as a platform to established new relationships among youths. It also enables coordination of common goals and ideals through powerful initiatives. Since their adoption, social media have been integrated into the daily lives of an increasing number of young people, scholars and commentators are debating the impact of these new media on the activities, social relationships, and worldviews of the younger generation (Mesch, 2008). Controversies about whether technology shapes values, attitudes, and patterns of social behavior are not new. In the recent past, the rapid expansion of television stimulated similar discussions of its cultural and social effects.

According to Davies and Cranston (2008), online social networking plays an increasingly important role in the lives of many young people, over 60% of 13 – 17 years of age profile on social networking sites (SNS) and many young people are spending upwards of two hours a night on online social

networking activities. They further states that Social Network Sites (SNS) like Bebo, *Facebook* and MySpace have driven a massive growth in young people's online social networking since the emergence of MySpace in 2003, and *Facebook* and Bebo in 2005 (alongside a range of other Social Network Sites that have developed over the period). However, these sites are likely the beginning of online social networking trends, which will continue to reshape much of young people's local and global communication with significant real-world consequences both positive and negative.

In this discourse, we examines how social media affect youth culture through the undergraduate students of Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria. The objectives of this chapter are as follows:

1. What are ABU youths doing with social media?
2. What benefits do ABU youths derive from the use of social media?
3. Do social media contribute to changing youth culture in ABU Zaria?

Social Media Use and Youth Culture in Nigeria

The print, broadcast and online are playing an ever-increasing role in people lives, having larger impact on peer and family interactions, romantic liaisons, and the psychological well-being of youth. The heightened presence and power of the media in teenage life and culture is bringing about changes in their lives (Russell, 2007). From a sociological perspective, the most striking feature of modern communication technology is its capacity to expand social relations beyond the clan, the tribe, and the local community. Individuals, different in background, orientation, and skill, clustered in and around urban centers, have become more interdependent, and though only indirectly, more active participants in political life.

John (2010) observes that global youth culture is a complex hybrid culture. It is an outlook and understanding of the

world among youths between the ages of 14 and 35 worldwide. It includes a shared taste in, and love of, mainstream popular trends in art, music, movies, fashion, technologies, etc. It is a largely media-driven culture and the result of the proliferation of film, television, other forms of media, as well as information and communication technologies and the Internet. The reality of this emergent culture is evident in changing youth values, habits, preferences, attitudes and worldviews. However, the world is now a global village, with the aid of information communication technologies such as social media and increasing pluralism, people share cultures and feel free to adopt lifestyles that appeal to them.

The rise in the use of social media especially by youths in Nigeria has produced a particularly dynamic culture. In this cultural matrix, global and local, as well as homogenising and diversifying, influences continuously merge in the lifestyles, performances, and sociopolitical practices of contemporary youth. And one can understand this by what Rheingold (2002, p. 10) described thus:

I began to notice people on the streets of Tokyo staring at their mobile phones instead of talking to them. The sight of this behavior, now commonplace in much of the world, triggered a sensation I had experienced a few times before the instant recognition that technology was going to change my life in ways I can scarcely imagine.

Facebook, 2go and to the large extent Blackberry pinging have become a bit of a phenomenon amongst the youth in Nigeria. In most Universities it is not uncommon to find young people walking around, or sitting in social centres, glued to their

mobile screens, not reading text messages or dialing but following the happenings in their *Facebook* and 2go „friendverse? (ANIE Workshop, 2012).

The social media create artificial or virtual communities of people, thus, people can make “friends” and “followers” on *Facebook* and *Twitter* and other sites. In addition, there are actual communities of people interested in art, travel, or whatever that people join on various social media sites. *Facebook* serves as a platform to consolidate romantic relationships at the workplace, home or schools (Okorie & Tunji, 2011).

Idakwo (2011) observes that the *Facebook* demographic data, as of July 3, 2010, indicates that there are about one million, seven hundred and eighteen thousand (1,718,000) Nigerians on *Facebook* (less Diaspora) and that it is among the top three most visited sites by Nigerians. Nigerian users on *Facebook.com*, increased from 99,720 in 2008 to 569,180 in 2009, and 1,718,000 in 2010.

Similarly, according to Social Bakers (2012), Nigerian *Facebook* users as at January, 2012 was estimated at 5,357,500, noting that in 2011, between June and December, it added about 600,000 users. In terms of age demographics, the 18-24 age range accounted for 36% of *Facebook* users, again 35% of users are between 25-34 while about 10% of its users are within the age range of 35-44 years. In terms of gender demographics, there are 68% male users and 32% female users in Nigeria on *Facebook*, this gives an insight into how Internet users in Nigeria are embracing social media.

However, social media usage has its disadvantages, because a lot of risk is involved. The case of Cynthia Udoka Osokogu (who lost her life in the hands of a face book friend she met for the first time) is a celebrated case of how, if not monitored, it will put its users in danger (Nigerian tribune, 2012). Not only that, the Daily Trust newspaper reported a case of two young lovers, who met on *Facebook* and found dead inside their

vehicle in May 2012 in Kano, Nigeria (Daily Trust, 2012). These are some of the dangers of social media.

Methods

A survey research method with focus group discussion was adopted to explore the youths attitudes towards online social networking. The study population was the undergraduate students drawn from four faculties (Social Sciences, Art, Administration and Sciences) of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. Questionnaire was used in data collection and sample size of 100 respondents was purposively selected. In addition, focus group interview of male and female undergraduate ages between 18-35 years was conducted in the two University campuses namely; (Samaru Main Campus and Kongo Campus) for the study. Descriptive statistics was used to analyse the quantitative data while the qualitative data was directly discussed. Descriptive research attempts to analyse, interpret and report the status of an institution, group or area.

Result

Below is a presentation and analysis of the data gathered from the survey of undergraduate students of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria Kaduna state Nigeria.

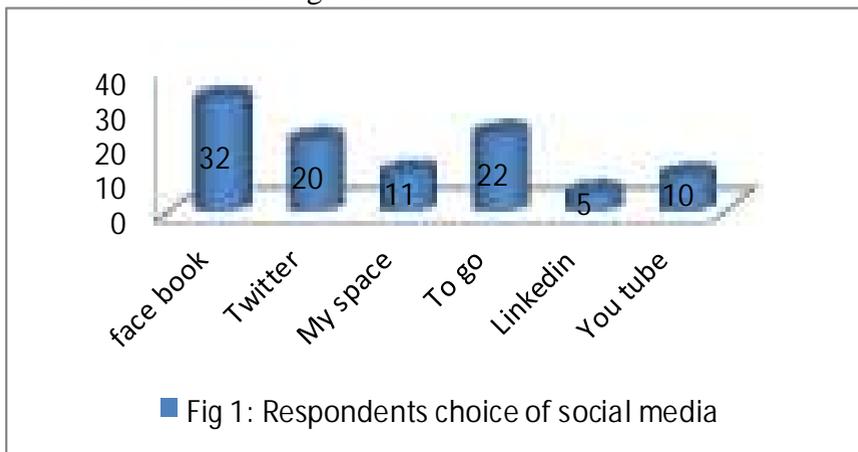


Figure 1 reveals that respondents most preferred social media tool was the *Facebook* (32%), followed by *To go* and *Twitter*, then others. This shows that *Facebook* is the more popular social media tool among the youths.

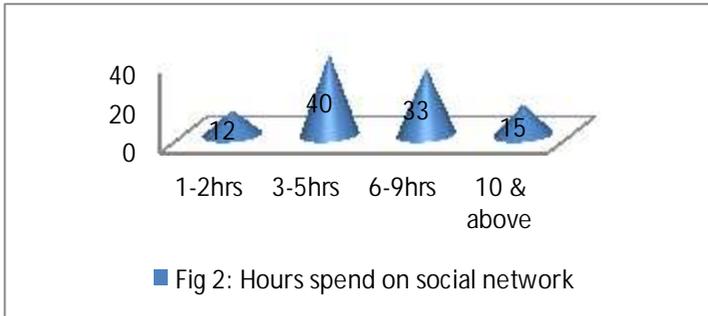


Figure 2, shows that many youths (40%, 33% and 15%) spend upwards of three hours per day on online social networking activities. This means the youths expend most of their spare time online instead of engaging in other activities such as reading.

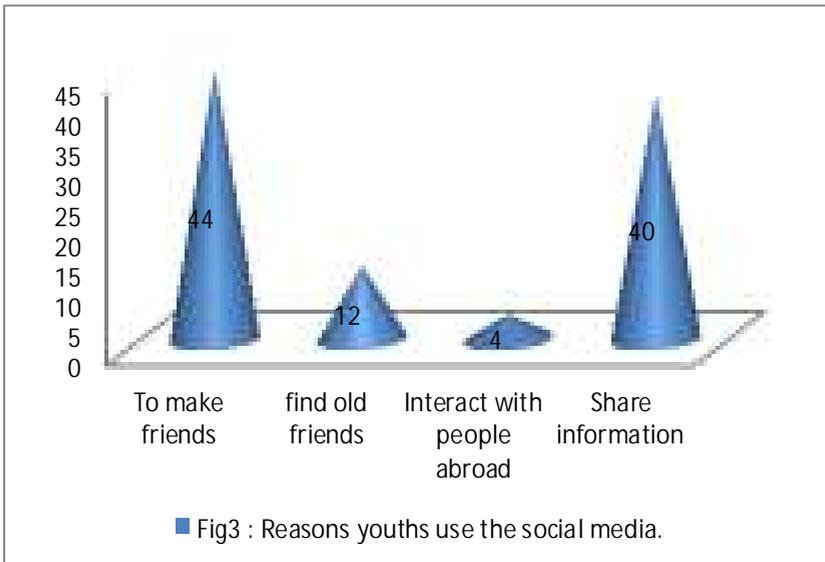
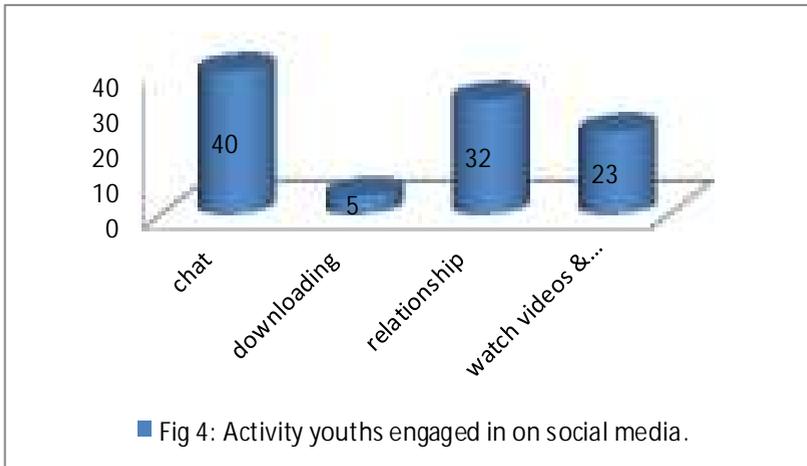
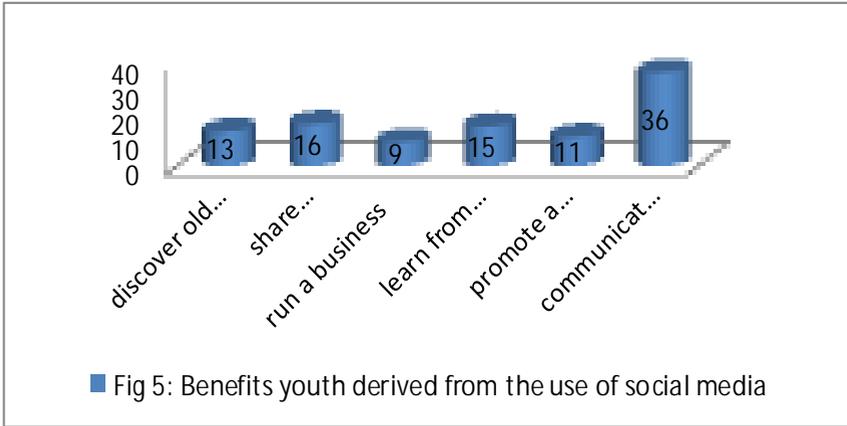


Figure 3, reveals that majority (44%) and (40%) of youths used the social media to make friends and share information among them. This can be said that online social networking tools presents many opportunities to young people by making it easier for them to, amongst other things: get connected to local and global audiences; stay in touch and communicate with peers; find and interact with people with shared interests; organise and co-ordinate political engagement and action; and to engage in self expression and learning.



In figure 4, 40% and 32% of the respondents confirmed that youths are mostly engaged in chatting and making relationships online followed by watching online video and pictures. This means that chatting, making relationships and watching videos online may impact on youths culture changing culture positively or negatively as well as exposing them to risk.



Data in Figure 5 reveal that 36% of the respondents indicates communicating with friends as the greatest benefit youths derive from using the social media. This also, reveals that youths use the social media for cheap communication through the interactive web-based application.

The Focus Group Discussion

Focus group interviews were conducted in two locations for male and female group categories on both campuses (Samaru and Kongo campuses). The groups comprise 10 participants each.

When respondents were asked for general remarks on youths and the social media, the male category indicated that online social networking can expose youth to risks. The female category on their part believed that youths can become addicted to the social media. The two groups however, agreed that youths today, because of excessive use of social media they find it difficult to adjust to normal everyday life.

Both groups also agreed that social media has been beneficial to the youth in terms of communication and interaction with friends. The male group category believed that social media exposes youth to virtual relationship which may also be risky.

Discussion of Findings

From this study *Facebook* was found to be the more popular social networking site among the youth with 32% indicating *Facebook* as the most used social medium. This concurs with Idakwo (2011) findings where he stated that *Facebook* is among the top three most visited sites by Nigerians.

The study also reveals that youths consume most of their time on social networking with 40% spending three hours and above. According to a news report by the American popular TV station, ABC, 350 million young people on *Facebook* spend at least an hour on the site each day. However, many of these *Facebook* enthusiasts spend much more time on this site keeping up with their friends. In the report, a sixteen year old Neeka Salmasi was asked about *Facebook* and she said “*Facebook* is like an addiction. You get on to update your status and next thing you know two hours have passed.” She indicated that it makes her neglect her chores and her homework, which consequently led her to poor performance in school, and she became obsessed with constantly checking her *Facebook*. Many young people are experiencing these symptoms of addiction as well. In a recent Pew poll, 48 percent of young people said that they check *Facebook* periodically during the night or first thing in the morning (Gilliam, 2011).

Further findings from the FGD reveal that excessive use of social media exposes youths to virtual relationship which may be risky. This could be inform of inappropriate content; inappropriate or offensive conduct on social networks; criminal activities such as identity theft; and inappropriate contact (online) from strangers which may include grooming and in the most serious cases, sexual abuse.

Furthermore, many respondents noted that online social networking is not a distinct activity, but is part of day -to- day life, communication and interaction with peers, which can also lead to some 'risks' crossing over to the adulterated culture.

Conclusion

From the findings of this study, we can conclude that social media are widely used among the youths and they use the platform to connect and maintain existing relationships. Many users of social media use the platform to communicate based on existing relationships. We also conclude that youths spend more of their time on the social media. Furthermore, social media exposes youths to risk of changing culture in terms of relationship, interactions, appearance and attitudinal change.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusion of this study, it is recommended that:

1. Since youths are found to be the major users of the social media, it is recommended that the application can be utilised for sharing knowledge on health, environment, science and others among the youths.
2. Youths should be careful with the kind of friends they meet on social media so as not expose themselves to risk of losing their lives or valuables.
3. Government should examine safety implications of social media use by youths for security reasons.
4. Social media have mainstream media for youths. Therefore, further researches to explore positive opportunities the social media provide, thereby encouraging youths to obtain the advantages.

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