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Social Media Networks as Correlates of Information Seeking Behaviour of Postgraduate Students in Universities in Sokoto State

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ABSTRACT

Information seeking behavior of postgraduate students is an activity that is undertaken to understand how they seek knowledge, the methods and pattern they seek for information and the challenges they faced while using it. Hence, this study was motivated based on the influenced of social media networks (SMN) as well as the information seeking behavior of postgraduate students and to observe their occurring changes, and how much they have evolved overtime. Thus, the researcher identified types, effects and challenges of SMN by postgraduate students in universities in Sokoto State. Descriptive research design was used with stratified random sampling technique in selecting postgraduate students from two universities in Sokoto state. The data was collected using questionnaire, with a total of (300) copies of the questionnaire were given to the respondents in the study area. The results showed that postgraduate students partake in numerous SMN activities. It was clearly showed that the use of SMN enhances information seeking behavior of postgraduate students. It also established that there is positive correlation between social media and information seeking behavior of the postgraduate students. The study concludes that the most used social media platforms are WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter; these platforms are used mainly for socialization, information, and academic purposes and recommend that postgraduates should set their priority right by taking advantage of social media more for learning, online discussion, seeking academic help from academic faculty, downloading materials for reading and research purpose, and for solving academic related problems. They should also invest their time wisely and concentrate more on their studies rather than spend their precious time on social media platforms for non-beneficial engagement among others.

Keywords: Social media, Networks, Information seeking behaviour, PG students, Sokoto

Introduction

Information is a very crucial tool that can be used in the realization of any objective in any information center or library. Information seeking behavior (ISB) according to Harrold (2019) is the act of seeking information in order to answer a specific query or satisfy information curiosity of an information user. It can also be seen as the purposive seeking for information in any manner as a result of a need to satisfy some goals. ISB is a broad term covering all aspects of information seeking, including passive or undetermined information behavior and in the course of seeking; a user of information may interact with manual or computer-based information systems. ISB are those activities a person may engage in when identifying his or her needs for information, searching for that information and using or transferring that information in any way the user sees fit. A user may seek for information in different manners from reading printed materials to searching online for already published work or making a research on a particular field to acquire more knowledge. ISB is a specific concept which focuses on searching, finding, and retrieving information.

On the other hand, social media networks are interactive computer-mediated technologies that create and sharing information. The variety of stand-alone and built-in social media services currently available, however, there are some common features: Web 2.0 Internet-based applications, user-generated content such as text posts or comments, digital photos or videos, and data generated through all online interactions, is the lifeblood of social media. Users create service-specific profiles and identities for the website or app that are designed and maintained by the social media organisation, and social media facilitate the development of online social networks by connecting a user's profile with those of other individuals or groups (Moinuddin, 2021).

Library users usually access social media services via web-based apps on desktops and laptops, or download services that offer social media functionality to their mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets(Nam & Hwang, 2021). SMN sites are online platforms through which individuals, groups and organisations create presence and share information through texts, photos, music videos etc. Social media platforms are also one the fastest mode/medium of public awareness, and tag information provided (Thelwall & Thelwall, 2020) about what is going on all over the world in the fastest mode. Examples of social media are *Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter and Instagram* which are renowned forums of message sharing to the public about the latest updates of the situation (Ali & Bhatti, 2020).

Scholarly information resources using social media have become the most satisfying information in academic communities by postgraduate students. Several studies reveal SMN can be used for numerous purposes that enhance the learning process, improve academic performance and facilitate research among PG students. It has facilitated the creation or sharing of information, ideas, career interests and other forms of expression via virtual communities and networks (Ferreira & Sousa, 2020). Notwithstanding, the great impact of SMN to learning and research guarantee high usage by academicians and SMN emerged as a result of the revolution of ICT in order to make information dissemination easier among users particularly the postgraduate students. Sharot and Sunstein (2020) placed the question concerning the way people seek and use information among three 'big questions' of information science. This strong interest in information behavior has been proved not only by empirical research but also by developments in information behavior theory. However, there is the death of literature on SMN as a correlate of information seeking behavior especially among postgraduates. Therefore, this study is focused in examining the extent to which SMN influenced the information seeking behavior of postgraduate students in universities in Sokoto State.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to investigate SMN as correlate of information seeking behaviour of postgraduate students in universities in Sokoto state. The specific objectives are to:

1. identify the types of SMN used by postgraduate students in universities in Sokoto state;
2. examine the effects of SMN as an influence on information seeking behavior of postgraduate students in universities in Sokoto state; and
3. identify the challenges facing the postgraduate students in utilizing SMN in universities in Sokoto state.

Review of Related Literature

Social media is a "forms of electronic communication (such as websites for social networking and micro blogging) through which users creates online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (such as videos)". Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) sees social media as a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that which allow the creation and exchange of user generated content. It is often used to describe the collection of software that enables individuals and communities to gather, communicate, share, and in some cases collaborate or play. According to Robert (2017) the emergence of social media was an invading crusade that was inevitable and has now become a part of the fundamental right of every individual in the 21st century because it is integrated into every aspect of our lives, albeit formerly considered inappropriate in respect to the cultural and religious sector but now accepted as a growth process and a means of survival in unforeseen yet conditional situations. Although the promising values of social media has captivated the attention of the populace, this study is narrowed but concentrated on the negative and positive impacts it has impacted in the educational sector particularly on postgraduates.

Studies of the relationship between social media participation and academic performance have revealed conflicting results. According to a survey conducted by Francis (2018), *Facebook* and *YouTube* dominate the social media landscape, as notable majorities of U.S. adults use each of these sites. At the same time, younger Americans (especially those ages 18 to 24) stand out for embracing a variety of platforms and using them frequently for academic purpose. Allcott, Gentzkow and Yu (2019), stated that the more worrisome aspect of the social media is its potency to be used to spread fake news, with its significant negative effects on the society and on people's decisions and behaviors instead of yielding positive outcome with academic advancement.

Information need is the trigger and driver of information seeking and human information behavior has been one of the central areas of interest of information science. On the other hand, information science has always been closely related to problems of scholarly communication, both in its pure (fundamental) and applied research. These two fields of interest (information behavior and scholarly communication) have resulted in much published research on how scholars behave while seeking information and what can be done to make the process more effective and efficient. Bates (2019) placed the question concerning the way people seek and use information among three 'big questions' of information science; this strong interest in information behavior has been proved not only by empirical research but also by developments in information behavior theory (Wang, Yang & Wu, 2021).

Researchers use information seeking behavior for different purposes such as discussions, seminars workshops, conferences, and other research activities. It is consisted of

identification of needed information, choosing information sources and adopting diverse techniques to fulfill information needs. Savolainen (2019) indicated that information seeking behavior encompasses activities that facilitate accessing, retrieving, searching, and evaluation of information. The techniques utilized for information accessing from online or library resources known as searching behavior. Ndukwe et al. (2023) focused on information-seeking behaviour of postgraduate students in the faculty of education, University of Ibadan. The findings of the study revealed that lecture notes and handouts, school library, using the Internet, consulting and photocopying colleagues' notes, textbooks, thesis/dissertations, print journals, research articles, review articles, research reports and seminars are the major sources of information available to postgraduate students of faculty of education, University of Ibadan. The findings of the study also revealed that the majority of the postgraduate students from the faculty of education seek information through the Internet. Information seeking starts with the needs of users, followed by needs analysis, collection and filtration, with the needs information finally transmitted to users. Sources of information include domain experts, knowledge workers, traditional paper files, document databases, digital media, and the Internet.

Thus, information seeking behavior signifies researchers' behavior patterns exhibiting information need and choice of where and how to identify and utilise information. Such behaviors also consisted of identification and selection of information sources, formulation of research questions or problem, extraction or evaluation of information. For information seeking, the research students utilise different sources including the Internet, teaching faculty, supervisor and libraries. Out of these, libraries are regarded as the dominant source among the research students because of their significant contributions. Libraries, which house thousands of concurrent information materials in respect to print and electronic sources, are subjected to satisfying the information curiosity of postgraduates as it is one of the basic functions of its existence, which is one of the determinants of the information seeking behavior of any user. It therefore seems that the proliferation of new and different, Internet, sources and the possibilities and obstacles for accessing information, gives way to a situation where there is still much research to be done (Chowdhury, Gibb, & Landoni, 2011).

Ahmed, Wan Mokhtar and Baharuddin (2024) investigate the influence of undergraduate students' information-seeking behaviour and the use of electronic information resources (EIRs) on academic performance in Federal Universities in Northeastern of Nigeria. Results showed significantly impact of students' information-seeking behaviour on their academic performance by utilizing electronic information resources. Hence, prioritizing undergraduate students in maintaining their individuality by enhancing, maintaining, and nurturing their mindset in utilizing EIRs for academic purposes can be advantageous for academic institutions, faculty, and students. These resources and services are primarily intended to help them complete their academic tasks. The study concludes by revealing mixed and conflicting findings, among the limited information-seeking behavior and under-utilization of electronic information resources. Again, Akanbi (2025) examine the perceive influence of the use of social media on information seeking behaviour of undergraduates in Nigeria universities and findings revealed that undergraduates make use of social media for information search often and it has been a reliable source of information for them. The study recommended that undergraduates should sharpen and improve their information literacy skills so as to overcome the challenges of unregulated nature of social media content. Social media has greatly impacted the information seeking behaviour of undergraduates in Nigeria universities.

In the modern era of innovations, individuals need information for personal use, professional development and social survivals. However, the information needs of these individuals are different (Chandrawamsa, 2016). Research students have different information needs regarding their topic of research, writing of articles, theses and dissertations, searching techniques and literature review (Manjunath & Babu, 2018). According to Majid *et al*. (2010) and Chinnasamy (2016), information seeking behavior includes techniques expressing characteristics which include needs, seeking, evaluation, selection, and usage of information. Although searching and processing of literature in the context of information seeking behavior is documented, the process of dealing with access problems has been simply noted as a point where the researcher can or cannot access the literature in question.

Methodology

Descriptive research design was used to give an assessment of the information seeking behavior of postgraduate students relating to SMN. The populations considered in this study are 300 postgraduate students of selected universities in Sokoto State, Nigeria which include Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto and Sokoto State University. A stratified random sample of 300 was identified for the gathering of information for the study. This was done to select individuals from each stratum and the selected respondents were representative of all the postgraduate students in the universities. Descriptive statistics used included frequency counts, percentages and means. Questionnaire was used to collect data and data collected were analysed with the use of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 16.0.

Data Analysis and Results

This section of the research addressed the presentation and discussion of the research findings in line with the research questions that were raised in the study. This presented as follows:

Table 1: Demographics Characteristics of the Respondents

	Frequency	**Percent**
Institutions		
Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto	220	73.7%
Sokoto State University	80	26.3%
Total	**300**	**100**
Gender		
Male	180	60
Female	120	40
Total	**300**	**100**
Age		
Below 30yrs	30	10
30-35yrs	78	26
40yrs and above	192	64
Total	**300**	**100**

Table 1 displays the distribution of sampled respondent across the three (3) universities. It shows that large number of postgraduate students were selected from Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto 220(73.7%), followed by 80(26.3%) State University, Sokoto. Also, Table 1 shows that the population of the postgraduate students is dominated by male students which stand at 180; represent 60% of the entire population while 120 were female representing 40% of the whole population. Finally on Table 1, it can be seen that the respondent age group that

form the highest number of the population is 40yrs and above with 192(64.0%), 78(26.0%) of the respondent were between age bracket 30-35yrs while the least 30(10.0%) were below 30yrs of age.

Table 2: Types of Social Media Networks Used by the Respondents

Social Media Types	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Facebook	55	18.3
WhatsApp	140	46.7
Twitter	35	11.7
Instagram	30	10.0
LinkedIn	10	3.3
Google plus	-	-
Telegram	10	3.3
Others	20	6.7
Total	300	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 2 shows the distribution of respondent based on social media platform which indicate that 55(18.3%) of the respondents use face book most often, 140(46.7%) made use of WhatsApp, 35(11.7%) uses twitter, 30(10.0%) use Instagram, 10(3.3%) made use of LinkedIn, none of the respondent uses Google plus while 10(3.3%) made use of Telegram and the remaining 20(6.7%) uses other social media platforms.

Table 3: Effects of Social Media Networks on Information Seeking Behavior of the Respondents

S/N	Statements	SA(%)	A (%)	UN(%)	D(%)	SD(%)
1.	Social media networks ease the search and retrieval of information needed at any time.	196(65.3)	60(20.0)	10(3.3)	24(8.0)	10(3.3)
2.	It distracts one from the main search for information because of the wide-range of contents available on social media	115(38.3)	100(33.3)	25(8.3)	30(10.0)	30(10.0)
3.	Too much time spent on social media networks will not allow for engagement in other activities.	200(66.7)	65(21.7)	20(6.7)	-	15(5.0)
4.	Social media networks may provide strings of irrelevant information not related to main search history	186(62.0)	85(28.3)	-	16(5.3)	13(4.3)
5.	There are rules and policies that guides the search for information on different social media networks which may hinder the obtainability of information needed by postgraduate students.	206(68.7)	60(20.0)	10(3.3)	12(4.0)	12(4.0)

The data in Table 3 on the effect of social media networks as influence of information seeking behavior of postgraduate students as shown indicates that majority 196(65.3%) strongly agree that SMN ease the search and retrieval of information needed at any time, 60(20%) agree, while 10(3.3%) were undecided, 24(8.0%) disagree and 10(3.3%) strongly disagree respectively. Also, 115(38.3%) of the respondents were strongly in agreement that it distracts one from the main search for information because of the wide-range of contents available on social media, 100(33.3%) agree, 25(8.3%) undecided while 30(10.0%) and 30(10.0%) were disagree and strongly disagree. 200(66.7%) were strongly agree and 65(21.7%) agree that too much time spent on social media networks will not allow for engagement in other activities, 20(6.7%) were undecided, none disagree while 15(5.0%) were strongly disagree.

Again, 186(62.0%) were strongly agree and 85(28.3%) agree that social media networks may provide strings of irrelevant information not related to main search history, none of the respondent were undecided, 16(5.3%) were disagree while 13(4.3%) were strongly disagree respectively. 206(68.7%) were strongly agree and 60(20.0%) agree that there are rules and policies that guides the search for information on different social media networks which may hinder the obtainability of information needed by postgraduate students, 60(20.0%) were undecided, 12(4.0%) were disagree while the remaining 12(4.0%) were strongly disagree respectively. This shows that majority agreed with latter.

Table 4: Challenges facing the Respondents in Using Social Media Networks

S/N	Statements	SA(%)	A(%)	UN(%)	D(%)	SD(%)
1.	Lack of Internet connection hinders the use of social media networks	180(60.0)	60(20.0)	-	40(13.3)	20(6.7)
2.	Power failure may discourage the use of social media networks.	120(40.0)	80(26.7)	10(3.3)	54(18.0)	36(12.0)
3.	Lack of interest towards social media networks may prevent the use of it.	140(46.7)	80(26.7)	20(6.7)	40(13.3)	20(6.7)
4.	Preference of physical communications to social media networks may hinder the use of these applications.	200(66.7)	60(20.0)	-	20(6.7)	20(6.7)
5.	Inadequate experience to navigate through social media networks may discourage the use by postgraduate students.	220(73.3)	60(20.0)	-	-	20(6.7)

The analysis of responses on the challenges facing the respondents on the use of social media as depicted in Table 4 shows that 180(60.0%) of respondents strongly agree that lack of Internet connection hinders the use of social media networks, 60(20.0) none were undecided and 40(13.3%) and 20(6.7%) disagree and strongly disagree with the statement, respectively. 120(40.0) of the respondents which state that power failure may discourage the use of social media networks. 80(26.7) agree, and 10(3.3%) were undecided, 54(18.0%) and 36(12.0) were disagree and strongly disagree with the statement, respectively.

Also, 140(46.7%) of respondents strongly agree that lack of Internet connection hinders the use of social media networks, 80(26.7) agree, 20(6.7%) undecided and 40(13.3%) and 20(6.7%) disagree and strongly disagree with the statement respectively. Again, 200(66.7%) of respondents strongly agree that preference of physical communications to social media networks may hinder the use of these applications, 60(20.0) agree, none of the respondent were undecided and 20(6.7%) and 20(6.7%) disagree and strongly disagree with the statement respectively. Finally, 220(73.3%) of respondents strongly agree that inadequate experience to navigate through social media networks may discourage the use by postgraduate students, 60(20.0) agree, none of the respondent were undecided and disagree with the statement and 20(6.7%) were strongly disagree respectively.

Discussion of the Findings

Emanating from the findings, the social media platforms mostly used by postgraduate students are *WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram* and *YouTube*. This corroborates the findings of Wiley and Sisson (2016) who stated that more than 90% of tertiary school postgraduate students use social media platforms. The findings from the study also support Weber and Taber (2016), who disclosed that *Facebook* and *WhatsApp* were mostly used by postgraduate students. Majid *et al* (2010) also noted that the social media types used by postgraduate students include Snapchat, *Facebook, Instagram, Twitter* and *YouTube*. As such, the study results are validated. Also, findings from the study indicate that postgraduate students spend time on social media platforms.

Furthermore, findings from the study reveal that Internet addiction and distraction are the major influences of social media on postgraduate studies. The result is not far from the claims of some of the participants' habit of spending hours daily on social media with the resultant effect of postponing their academic tasks to spend time on the social media platforms, usually to while away time. Support for this finding can be seen in the study by Ndaku (2019) which showed that postgraduate students spend much of their study time on social media which has diverted their attention from attaining educational objectives. In contrast, according to a survey conducted by Francis in the Pew Research in 2018, *Facebook* and *YouTube* dominate the social media landscape, as notable majorities of U.S. adults use each of these sites for academic purposes. At the same time, younger Americans (especially those ages 18-24) stand out for embracing a variety of platforms and using them frequently.

Lastly, lack of Internet connectivity, power failure and inadequate experience to navigate social media are among the challenges encountered by postgraduate students. Rideout (2017) has shown that postgraduate students experience some bottleneck while using social media platforms more than amount of time spent reading books and information resources. This view is however rejected by Onyeka, Sajoh and Bulus (2018) who acknowledged that social media sites not only re-engage learners with their studies but also enhance their academic performance. Relatedly, Pew Research Center found that Americans are wary about the ways that SMN share news and certain content. According to Allcott, Gentzkow and Yu (2019), the more worrisome aspect of the social media is its potency to be used to spread fake news with its significant negative effects on the society and on people's decisions and behaviors. This wariness of accuracy is on the rise as social media sites are increasingly exploited by aggregated new sources which stitch together multiple feeds to develop plausible correlations. Hemsley, Jacobson, Gruzd and Mai (2018) refer to this phenomenon as "pseudo knowledge" which develops false narratives and fake news that are supported through general analysis and ideology rather than facts and academic achievements.

Conclusion

Finding from the study has shown that postgraduate students across the universities in Sokoto State partake in numerous SMN activities; as their social media networks usage enhances information seeking behavior of postgraduate students. The study established that there is positive correlation through social media and information seeking behavior of postgraduate students. Thus, from the findings, the study arrived at the conclusion that the most used social media platforms are *WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram* and *Twitter*; these platforms are used mainly for socialisation, information, and academic purposes. Also, findings from the study indicated that the postgraduate students spend an average of 2 to 3 hours daily on social media platforms; which may have an impact of distraction and addiction to social media platforms.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Postgraduates students should set their priority right by taking advantage of social media more for learning, online discussion, seeking academic help from academic faculty, downloading materials for reading and research purpose, and for solving academic related problems.
2. Postgraduate students should invest their time wisely and concentrate more on their studies rather than spend their precious time on social media platforms for non-beneficial engagement.
3. Lecturers should restrict postgraduate students from using their phones when lectures are on-going. This will help to curb the extent to which postgraduate students are distracted during lecture periods.
4. Lecturers can adopt the strategy of online learning by channeling assignments or discussions on social media platforms to help inculcate the habit of using these media platforms for academic work by postgraduate students.
5. Awareness programmes related to social media usage should be arranged at the institutions, faculties and departmental levels, to enlighten postgraduate students on the impact of Internet addiction as a means of lessening their chances of falling prey to the harmful impacts of social media.

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