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# The Effects of Social Networking on Nigerian Universities Research Works (A Case Study of University of Abuja)

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### ABSTRACT

Social Networking is a structure made up of individuals or organizations referred to as nodes and is connected by one or more specific types of interdependencies. Such interdependencies may include: friendships, kinships, sexual relationships, belief relationships, knowledge, etc. Knowledge is a discovery or invention made by an individual or group. When this knowledge is propagated so that others may learn it, then that may lead to scientific knowledge which is the subject of this study. It is strongly believed that social networking sites are made possible due to the existence of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). The study intends to investigate the effects of social networking on scientific knowledge from research works in Nigerian Universities with University of Abuja as the case study. The choice of the case study is because only University of Abuja has fairly equal representations of students from every nook and cranny of the Nigeria nation. The study deployed the administration of questionnaires to collect data from students and staff who are involved in social networking as well as research works. These data are analyzed to arrive at a conclusion.

**Keywords:** Social Networking, Nigerian Universities, Social Networking Sites, Research, University of Abuja.

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### INTRODUCTION

Social Networking is a means of bringing together people of like minds. This concept is not new in our world, but the Internet has actually popularized its existence. Before the advent of the Internet, Social Networking has been limited by physical boundaries, but the Internet has opened the doors to every citizen of the world irrespective of geographical locations. There is no doubt that some countries of the world are still lacking in their Internet connectivity due to poverty, especially

those in the continent of Africa. However, anyone who has access to the Internet can participate in Social Networking. In Social Networking through the Internet, there are no racial, lingual, educational, cultural, colour and religious discriminations. In any case, it has been observed that people network with others with common interest.

Internet Social Networking is made possible by Social Networking Sites (SNSs). In such sites, applicants are expected to fill forms in

order to be admitted to a given network of interest. In the course of filling the form, the applicant is expected to supply one's bio-data. Today, there are thousands of SNSs. Some of them are more popular than others.. One of the SNS is Academia.edu. Leeder see Academia.edu as a SNS developed by Dr. Richard Price of Oxford University which does two things: Firstly, it shows academics around the world structured in a 'tree' format, displayed according to their departmental and institutional affiliations and secondly, it enables academics to see news on the latest research in their area – the latest people, papers and talks<sup>1</sup>.

This work is meant to find out the effects of Social Networking on Nigerian Universities research work with emphasis on University of Abuja students and staff who are involved in research.

### Research

Research can be defined as the search for knowledge, or as any systematic investigation, with an open mind, to establish novel facts, solve new or existing problems, prove new ideas, or develop new theories, usually using a scientific method. The primary purpose for basic research (as opposed to applied research) is discovering, interpreting, and the development of methods and systems for the advancement of human knowledge on a wide variety of scientific matters of our world and the universe.

Scientific research relies on the application of the scientific method, a harnessing of curiosity. This research provides scientific information and theories for the explanation of the nature and the properties of the world around us<sup>2</sup>.

### Social Networking

According to Roos, the term "social network" has been around since the 1950s, but the meteoric rise of social-networking Web sites like MySpace, Facebook and LinkedIn has turned a dusty sociological phrase into the hottest buzzword of the Internet age<sup>3</sup>.

Social network analysis views social relationships in terms of network theory consisting of nodes and ties (also called edges, links, or connections). Nodes are the individual actors

within the networks, and ties are the relationships between the actors. The resulting graph-based structures are often very complex. There can be many kinds of ties between the nodes. Research in a number of academic fields has shown that social networks operate on many levels, from families up to the level of nations, and play a critical role in determining the way problems are solved, organizations are run, and the degree to which individuals succeed in achieving their goals<sup>4</sup>.

Online social networks facilitate connections between people based on shared interests, values, membership in particular groups (i.e., friends, professional colleagues), etc. They make it easier for people to find and communicate with individuals who are in their networks using the Web as the interface<sup>5</sup>.

Some popular SNSs include Facebook, Twitter, Myspace and LinkedIn. These SNSs and their areas of coverage are discussed below:

### Facebook

Facebook was created in 2004 by Harvard student Mark Zuckerberg. The website was intended to be an online version of the University's printed Facebook, a directory of new students. At that time, membership to the website was limited to Harvard students only. In a month's time, Facebook grew to include other Ivy League students as well, and within a year had over 1 million users. Facebook is a Social Networking Site. it's an online community—a place where people can meet and interact; swap photos, videos, and other information; and generally connect with friends, family, co-workers, fellow students, fellow hobbyists and enthusiasts, and numerous others in their social network. Facebook connects people within cities or regions, work or school<sup>6</sup>.

### Twitter

Kevin defined Twitter as a simple social network made up of hybrid of email, instant messaging and sms messaging all rolled into one neat and simple package. According to him, the idea behind twitter is that members broadcast to anyone who chooses to follow them. It could show what a given member is doing at any point in time. With Twitter, it is possible to ask a question to one's

followers. Likewise one may choose to follow people and receive their messages<sup>7</sup>.

### **Myspace**

Cancel describe Myspace as one of the biggest social interacting websites out there today with over 150 million members and at least 230,000 new registrations a day. According to him, in Myspace, there is potential money to be made 24 hours a day, 7 days a week<sup>8</sup>.

There are some MySpace pages of musicians who have their music on their sites. To access any music involves going to the music search to search for a member's favorite song and this could be added to a member's site.

### **LinkedIn**

LinkedIn is a social networking site that focuses more on the professional lives of its members. Instead of sharing wacky photos of your Saturday night's escapades and countless updates about how much you need coffee, LinkedIn connects members to trusted contacts and helps them to exchange knowledge, ideas, and opportunities with a broader network of professionals. Through LinkedIn, one can establish a professional presence online, stay in touch with colleagues and friends, find experts and answers, and explore opportunities. LinkedIn is a great site for getting questions answered by other professionals in one's field<sup>9</sup>.

LinkedIn has become a popular social media site for conducting business. With its popularity, users have brought business to the social bookmarking arena. Like many of the social network sites, LinkedIn is free for basic users.

### **Social Networking and Research Works**

Today, Social Networking has been found to be penetrating even the academic community. These SNSs are research tools for those who are involved in research works. Although, not many researchers are aware of their existence, the few ones who are aware deploy them in search of knowledge. Some of the SNSs that may be used for research include Academia.edu and ResearchGate.

### **Academia.edu**

This is a free social networking website and collaboration tool aimed at academics and researchers from all disciplines. Launched in September 2008, it became one of the largest social networking sites for academics in 2010<sup>10</sup>.

Kassel described Social Networking as one of the hottest new Web technologies in sight with millions of users registering and participating around the globe. According to her, topic-specific Usenet newsgroup available on the Internet and electronic discussion forums are populated by professionals of a like mind have been around in various online formats since the 1980s. In principle, these earlier technologies and social networking serve the same purpose - to communicate and collaborate. Participants worldwide contribute to and collaborate in readily available online discussions, creating new knowledge bases that are not yet fully recognized as information sources. Some SNSs are general in nature whereas others are usually specific in their areas of coverage<sup>11</sup>.

### **ResearchGate**

ResearchGate is a free social networking site and collaboration tool aimed at scientific researchers from all disciplines of science. It provides web applications including semantic searching (whole abstract searching), file-sharing, publication database sharing, forums, methodology discussions, groups etc. Members can create their personal blog within the network. Since May 2008, ResearchGate has gathered a user base of more than 900,000 researchers from 196 countries<sup>12</sup>.

Connecting scientists across time and space is no longer a problem these days thanks to the internet and a niche social network called ResearchGATE described as a "Facebook for scientists" by founder Ijad Madisch<sup>13</sup>.

### **Methodology**

In a bid to find the Social Networking effects on research in Nigerian Universities, a total of 260 questionnaires were randomly distributed to both students and staff of University of Abuja who are involved in one research or the other. Out of the questionnaires sent out, 227 of them were

**Table 1: Summary of the Data collected from section A part of the 209 returned Questionnaires**

	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Sex		
Male	148	71
Female	61	29
Programe Type		
Full Time	140	67
Part Time	44	21
Staff	25	12
Age		
Below 16	0	0
16-20	32	15
21-25	127	61
26-30	31	15
Above 30	19	9
Faculty		
Art	38	18
Management Science	24	11
Social Science	32	15
Sciecne	98	47
Other (Specify)	17	8
Level of Research		
Undergraduate	102	49
Postgraduate	41	20
Research Fellow	17	78
Scientific	20	10
Others	29	14
Favourite Search Engine		
Google	125	60
Yahoo	21	10
Ask.com	21	10
Msn	37	18
Others	5	2
Preferred Social Network		
Twitter	47	22
Researchgate	9	4

Academia.edu	6	3
Facebook	140	67
Others	7	3

Purpose of Joining Social Network		
Share Knowledge	53	25
Research	48	23
Leisure	25	512
Make Friends	72	34
Others	11	5

How Long Have You Joined Social Network		
Below 11	28	13
2-3	126	60
4-5	37	18
6-7	18	9
Above 8	0	0

How often do uou link up with Colleagues		
Daily	92	44
Monthly	31	15
Weekly	67	32
Annualy	2	1
Others	17	8

returned by the respondents. This gives about 87% return rate of the administered questionnaires. However, the number of valid questionnaires is 209, leaving 18 of the returned questionnaires invalid for some reasons. This means that about 80% of the questionnaires sent out were analyzed and used to draw conclusion. See the survey instrument in the appendix.

### Research Statements

In this research, the effects of Social Networking on Nigerian Universities' research are sought. Each statement in the research is presented with five options. A respondent is expected to choose one of the options based on his(her) view about a particular statement. The options are: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Neutral (N), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD).

For the purpose of analysis, the administered questionnaire concentrated on two key areas of the effects of Social Networking on Nigerian universities research work. The areas are:

- My research knowledge has not improved

- despite joining social networking.
- ii. Research work becomes easier if views of colleagues in a social network are sought.

### Data Presentation

Table 1 shows summary of data collected from section A part of the questionnaires returned and used for the analysis in order to see the effects of Social Networking on Nigerian Universities research.

From table 1 above, it can be seen that the number of males that responded is 71% when compared to the number of females which have a response rate of 29%. Looking at the demographic distribution shows that 61% of respondents within the age bracket of 21-25 years, have so much interest in the use of Social Networking to carry out research works in the universities in Nigeria. This percentage is higher than all other age brackets combined together. Table 2 below is a summary of data collected from section B of the 209 valid questionnaires

**Table 2: Summary of data collected from section B of the 209 valid questionnaires**

S. No.	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	I have often asked for research materials from other students in a social network	35	97	13	43	21
2	My colleague in another university has never assisted me with research materials through social networks.	21	39	18	71	60
3	Joining and maintaining social networking is usually expensive	29	67	27	53	33
4	My research knowledge has not improved despite joining social networking	19	35	13	68	74
5	I may need to link up with any person in a social network to carry out a good research	57	71	9	34	38
6	Joining social networking has no effect whatsoever in my research work	29	36	18	76	50
7	I have come to realize that since I joined a social network, I spent less time to conclude a research	69	55	8	37	40
8	Social networking is not good for collaborative research work	24	31	21	56	77
9	Research work becomes easier if views of colleagues in a social network are sought	71	63	11	36	28
10	Asking for research materials from other social network researchers has never been beneficial to me	66	91	9	16	27

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From table 1 above, looking at "Level of Research" it was observed that all the respondents are involved in one form of research or another. But, rather than use the sites specifically designed

for research (Academic.edu and ResearchGate), about 67% of the respondents preferred Facebook, whereas, only about 4% preferred ResearchGate and less than 3% preferred Academic.edu, which are research sites. This could be attributed to the fact that not many people are aware that

ResearchGate and Academic.edu are specifically designed for the purpose of research.

Similarly, the same table has shown that 35% of the respondents joined Social Network to connect to friends as against 23% who joined due to their research interest.

By extracting statement numbers 4 and 9 from table 2 above and examining them in details would produce tables 3 and 4 respectively. Table 3 shows that 35% of the respondents strongly disagreed that their research knowledge has not improved since they joined Social Networking, while only 9% strongly agreed to the statement.

**Table 3: My research knowledge has not improved despite joining Social Networking**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Respondents	19	35	13	68	74
Percentage	9	17	6	33	35

**Table 4: Research work becomes easier if views of colleagues in a Social Network are sought**

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Respondents	71	63	11	36	28
Percentage	34	30	5	17	13

This implies that respondents research knowledge have improved after joining a Social Network.

Table 4 shows that 71 (34%) of the respondents strongly agreed that the views of colleagues in a social network make it easier to carry out a research work and only 28 (13%) of the respondents strongly disagreed to that statement. What this means is that by seeking the views of colleagues in a Social Network, research becomes easier to carry out.

#### Recommendations

The author would like to recommend that owners of Social Networking sites specifically

designed to assist researchers in their works should create awareness about the existence of such sites. Also, those already aware of these sites should spread the gospel to others yet to know that they can collaborate with researchers with similar interest from any part of the world.

#### CONCLUSION

The research has shown that views of colleagues in Social Networking make it easier to carry out a research work and that a Social Networking can improve research knowledge thereby making it possible to carry out qualitative research works.

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## Appendix

Dear Respondent,

This questionnaire is meant for a research work in the Department of Computer Science, University of Abuja, Nigeria. Fill in the correct information. All the information will be treated with utmost confidence and will only be used for the purpose of this research work.

Thanks.

Please fill or tick ☒ accordingly.

### Section A

1. Sex: A Male ☐ B Female ☐
2. Programme Type: A Full-Time ☐ B Part-Time ☐ C Staff ☐
3. Age: A Below 16 ☐ B 16-20 ☐ C 21-25 ☐ D 26-30 ☐ E Above 30 ☐
4. Faculty: A Arts ☐ B Management Sc. ☐ C Social Sc. ☐ D Science ☐  
E Others Specify \_\_\_\_\_
5. Level of Research: A Undergraduate ☐ B Postgraduate ☐ C Research Fellow ☐  
D Scientific ☐ E Others Specify \_\_\_\_\_
6. Favorite Search Engine: A Google ☐ B Yahoo ☐ C Ask.com ☐ D MSN ☐  
E Others Specify \_\_\_\_\_
7. Preferred Social Network: A Twitter ☐ B ResearchGate ☐ C Academia.edu ☐  
D Facebook ☐ E Others Specify \_\_\_\_\_
8. Purpose of joining social Network: A Share knowledge ☐ B Research ☐  
C Leisure ☐ D Make friends ☐ E Others: Specify \_\_\_\_\_
9. How long have you joined Social Network? A Below 1 ☐ B 2-3 ☐ C 4-5 ☐ D 6-7 ☐ E Above 8 ☐
10. How often do you link up with colleagues: A Daily ☐ B Monthly ☐  
C Weekly ☐ D Annually ☐ E Others Specify \_\_\_\_\_

### Section B

Please, tick the appropriate option

S. No.	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	I have often asked for research materials from other students in a social network					
2	My colleague in another university has never assisted me with research materials through social networks.					
3	Joining and maintaining social networking is usually expensive					
4	My research knowledge has not improved despite joining social networking					
5	I may need to link up with any person in a social network to carry out a good research					
6	Joining social networking has no effect whatsoever in my research work					
7	I have come to realize that since I joined a social network, I spent less time to conclude a research					
8	Social networking is not good for collaborative research work					
9	Research work becomes easier if views of colleagues in a social network are sought					
10	Asking for research materials from other social network researchers has never been beneficial to me					