

SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES AND SOCIAL CAPITAL: AN APPRAISAL OF NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES' STUDENTS

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Abstract

By using Web 2.0, it obviously means that we are interacting, sharing, collaborating and exchanging ideas especially using the SNSs (Social Networking Sites) like Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, Twitter, Second Life, NigeriaDotCom, Hi5, Okcut, and thousands of others. Social capital refers to the intangible resources embedded within interpersonal relationships or social institutions. This study aimed in investigating and reported the extent of SNSs usage and its influence on social capital among university students in Nigeria. In a qualitative approach using interview employed on 12 subjects from the scope area. The qualitative results indicated the extent of the influence of SNS usage on social capital among the students in Nigeria. And found SNSs as social norms; information and communication channels academically, politically, religiously and economically.

Key words: Social Capital, Lifelong Education Web 2.0 and Social Networking Sites.

Introduction

Social capital (SC) as developed by James Coleman in the 1980s refers to the social relationships between people that enable productive outcomes (Sztreter, 2000). It can be seen as the glue that holds together social collectives such as networks of personal relationships, communities or even whole nations (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Sum et al, 2008). There are two complementary uses of the 'social capital' (Quan-Hass & Wellman 2002) concept:

1. *Social contact*: Interpersonal communication patterns, including visits, encounters, phone calls, and social events. 2. *Civic engagement*: The degree to which people become involved in their community, both actively and passively, including such political and organizational activities as political rallies and sports clubs.

Objectives

The study's objective was to find the extent of SNSs usage among students in Nigerian universities and how this enhances their social capital.

Questions

1. What is the extent of SNSs usage among Nigerian universities' students?
2. What factors of SNSs usage influence social capital among the universities' student in Nigeria?

Literature

A social network service focuses on building online communities of people who share interests and/or activities, or who are interested in exploring the interests and activities of others. From 1997 to 2001, a number of community tools began supporting various combinations of profiles and publicly articulated friends. Boyd and Ellison, (2007) defined social network sites as “web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public profile within a bounded system and articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection.

Social capital (Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2008) involves “social trust, political participation, membership in groups and associations, volunteering, and confidence in political institutions.” Dekker & Uslaner (2006) added that SC is all about the value of social networks, bonding similar people and bridging between diverse people, with norms of reciprocity. It appears there are different ideas about the effect of using the SNSs on social capital. “Some scholars believe that cyberspace decreases SC, in contrast, some others asserted that it transports social capital among people. The more diverse and frequent the interaction among people the more the SC because it all centered on the resources available to people through their social interactions.

Quan-Hass & Wellman (2002); Sum, (2005) believed SC is all about the value of social networks. It is with the aim to bonding similar people and bridging between and across diverse people, with norms of reciprocity. “Among the undergraduates surveyed, shows that intensive use of Facebook was associated with higher levels of SC, especially bridging social capital.” (Ellison, Lampe, & Steinfield, 2009; Steinfield, Ellison, & Lampe 2008) to them also Valenzuela, et al, (2008) postulated that whatever effects social network sites may have on young adults’ SC, they may be contingent upon individuals’ socialization.

In studying SC an exclusive quantitative survey of Facebook (Zywika & Danowski, 2008; Ellison et al. (2007) found that there was greater evidence for the Social compensation pattern, that those with lower life satisfaction and lower self-esteem reported having developed more bridging social capital on Facebook.

Sum, (2008) designed and employed a website entitled "Social Capital Online Survey" which linked to the web server of the University of Sydney. She found that those who use the Internet to meet new people for social purposes or communicate with people for the first time online and use the Internet for entertainment are more likely to have a lower degree of personal wellbeing.

Social capital reflects intangible resources within social institutions or interpersonal relationships. SC exists in these forms: 1. expectations and obligations, 2. channels for information, and 3. Seen as social norms. Education perspective, social capital exists in the forms of parental obligations and control. It is as social networks important for students’ successes that exist within the community, school and family. The concept of SC is a more useful but rather theoretical construct. It explains the differences among students’ educational achievements in various countries. (Michael and Deepa, 2000) The educational expectation, norms, and obligations that exist within a family or a community are important SC that can influence the level of parental involvement and investment, which in turn affect academic success.” The relationship between personal contentment and SNS also could be reciprocal. For instance, universities students with such lower levels of satisfaction in life might participate in the SNSs to increase their personal and psychological well-being (Ellison et al., 2007)

Social connection between the child and the parents is sufficiently strong evidence that cultural capital and financial capital become available to the child for academic capital. That covered for both the short term and the child’s lifelong education. James Coleman (1988) also argued that “as new structures of the

household in modern society become more prevalent, many linkages and activities that provided SC for the next generation are no longer present, and their absence may be detrimental to children's learning.”

The disciplinary effort and the academic ethics established in the school community enhance good relation between home and school. And the mutual trust between school and home are the major forms of SC. Such forms of social capital are found to contribute to student learning outcomes in countries like Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong and Korea of the south east region of the world. It also enhances by improving the quality of the school and reducing learning inequality among social-class groups (Ho, Sui Chu. 2000).

Lifelong learning, which is usually refers to as LLL, is the "lifelong, voluntary, and self-motivated pursuit of knowledge for either personal or professional reasons.” (Wikipedia, 2010) The meaning up till now seems vague because it covers a variety of dimension in contexts and its content. However our concern for now focuses on spontaneous emergence of autonomous learning groups or similar form that enhances social capital and perhaps which may boost human capital as well.

Technological innovation has brought a profound change on learning needs and styles. Learning or acquiring knowledge is no longer confined to the learning place and time (school). It could be virtual and everywhere. It is now an on-going event through daily interactions with the world around us manually or technologically. Internet and SNSs for this matter is one of the social hubs that social and human capital is enhancing by the attributes of lifelong education.

Methodology

Through a qualitative approach the study obtained and analyzed the data in a cross sectional system. Interviews were employed on 12 subjects selected from the three institutions in Nigeria. The institutions were leveled FG1 (University of Abuja), FG2 (Usman Danfodio University Sokoto) and FG3 (Ahmadu Bello University Zaria). Typology style was the qualitative analysis carried out in this research. That means the classification systems of the responses taken from the participants were categorized into themes according to six levels of analysis.

Results

The qualitative findings here indicated getting connected to friends and family as the major reason for using SNSs and that they do interact with other people. It similarly reveals time they normally spend on SNSs sharing, talking and interacting with others. It suggests that the more time spend the more likely the stronger that relationship may be.

Question: What Motivates You To Use Snss?

The entire respondents to this question showed their overwhelming concern, motives and rationale behind using SNSs. Most of them cited using Facebook heavily and they use it for various purposes. All of them reported using SNSs to get connected to friends and families. Others added and stated getting new friends and get in touch with old friends.

Theme One: Communicate and Interact With Different People And Those Lost for A Long Time

In essence using SNSs is to communicate and interact with many people. When asked the majority of the respondents believe to be using SNSs to get connected with old friends and relatives. It is for easy communication and interaction as one of them stated: *“it allows me to connect with different people. I am able to connect with my old friends my relatives and other people I have not seen for a very long time. I use Facebook just to interact and get communication activities easy.”*

SNSs help them connect to their people especially when the face to face interaction is not obtainable. Some opined that it allows them share feelings with others. Other responses indicated discussion on personal issues with other people on various affairs and at various situations.

In a similar view to this theme shows SNSs having related to SC. Some respondents agree that SNSs help them communicate with lost ones. And most importantly when one has a problem or uncertainty about something can discuss it with someone online.

Theme Two: Get In Touch With Old and New Friends

The next theme emerged from the responses was that *to get in touch with old and new friends*. Among the nine that reported this view; one respondent to this question was a male and Muslim of 29 years. He is from the faculty of Arts his ethnic background is Igbo. Around 11:00am when interviewed among the FG 2 why he uses SNSs. He gives out his view by saying that he uses SNSs like Facebook and the reason for that is, he uses Facebook to get in touch with long lost friends. It makes him reach them and interact with them sometimes when face to face was not possible. *“I think Facebook is a very good invention and is very Ok.”* He said. Another respondent who is a Sierra Leonean also said that SNS as a social environment it connects him with his old friends and family. SNSs therefore are tools with a connection factor among the members of a society. It links people with each other from many angles.

Question: In What Areas Do Sns Enhance Your Social Capital?

Theme Three: Knowing Each Other and Getting Information from the Old Friends

They reported using SNS like the Facebook for the purpose of knowing each other as well as communicating with many friends old and new. It also helps to know each other and get information from the old friends. She said:

“SNS helps me by knowing each other, getting information from the old friends may be also from olden secondary school, and primary schoolmates. SNS helps generally in knowing and interacting with people, friends and family. Those got married or are about to or not yet. You will know all. In fact social capital wise it pays”

These views above go in line with Dekker & Uslaner (2006). They postulated that social capital is all about the value of social networks, bonding similar people and bridging between diverse people, with norms of reciprocity.

Theme Four: Connect and Interact At Global Level Network

They use SNSs to connect with people in other part of the world. They believed that SNSs usage is beyond their local scope. It stretches wide to a cover global perspective. One respondent sees it as an avenue to connect and interact with so many people on network across the world. She said *“it makes us meet different people from other parts of the world. And communicate, interact and have personal relationship with them. Is that not the social capital?”*

Theme Five: Share Experiences and Ideas

From the response of ten students another theme that emerged was on sharing experience. A Muslim from FG 3 concurs with this view on this question. He shares his view here that he uses the SNSs to share experiences with others as he stated *“we use SNSs like Facebook in order to share our experiences and*

ideas with our family's members and friends. That is the reason why we use it." The three themes here concur to Quan-Hass & Wellman (2002); Sum, (2006).

Question: Why Do You Think SNS Is Related To Social Capital And Education?

Theme Six: It Helps Solve Academic Problem.

As a form of learning informal tool SNSs has relevance in lifelong education and social capital. To understand this when asked some stated that they used SNSs for seeking academic assistance from others thus it boost their knowledge. Six students reported using SNSs to solve academic problems. A twenty five years Muslim and Yoruba ethnic respondent from FG 3, saw it as an avenue to reach other people and for seeking academic assistance. In his words he stated *"Well, I use SNSs such as Facebook because is an avenue whereby one can reach people such as friends, well wishers, and meet other people who could be of help in the area of academic research and some other things. In fact it's a knowledge seeking tool"* Another respondent a female Christian of 23 years in faculty of science and Igbo by tribe have similar opinion. In her opinion she stated that:

"I use networking sites such as Facebook and Hi5 almost three hours every day. Just to reach my friends especially those I have not seen for a very long time and to get connected with other people from all over the world especially with people that are friends to my friends, and also to get academic assistance from people that are not necessarily my friends. I think it's a new way or mode of learning. Because we learn a lot"

Theme Seven: To Socialize At Any Time

Besides solving academic problems students feel that SNSs is a socializing agent to them. Seven respondents show their vigorous concern of SNS role in the socialization process. One of them said *"I can relate to them at any given time and they can show me their recent pictures and videos. In fact it socializes."* This indicates that to the students the most important rationale for using SNS is to interact with their family, friends, old relations and to some extent to make some new relations. This conformed to Valenzuela, et al, (2008). This took us to the second question.

Question: What Factors Encourage Other People To Use Sns For Social Capital??

Theme Eight: Sns Unite People

In responding to this question two themes were extracted. It indicated that SNSs unite people this continued to encourage more people because it unites them as it allows them to interact with whoever they feel like on the network and share ideology. People can belong to various groups of interest. Many of the SNSs represent interest groups because only people with similar ideology can join while many others are general. It also becomes a phenomenon that now many things can be done with such internet facilities. More so it makes people be aware of what is happening in the society and the world at large as it is now like a global village. SNS is available to everyone in the world and it is a medium for people to chat, talk and deal with others across the globe academically, religiously, politically, socially, and economically or business wise.

The SNSs usage is encouraging because as it helps in uniting people in form of social capital. One of the respondent opined that SNSs unite people and makes them aware of what is happening in their society. She added *"Well, I think it brings people together. Nowadays there is nothing one can do without such internet facilities especially the SNSs many influential people and organizations are on it. It unites people, marking them aware of the happenings in the society and get them informed and connected."*

Another one who responded to this question highlighted that it is encouraging it helps one have a vital information to share with someone like friends, family or group members. He added that *“it can also unite people by connecting one with others that are not around or close to each other who are far from one’s place.”*

Theme Nine: World Is A Global Village

Among other views is that as a result of SNSs usage factor the world is a global village where people are available to everyone within a small scope and range of time. One respondent said *“I think the world is a global village now. I mean the SNS is available to everyone in the world. It gives people who used the medium avenue to invite, chat, talk and deal with others across the global.”* Another also supported and said.

“World is one now. SNS is a modern system of communication through computer. It is one of the shortest and cheapest means of unification through communication and interaction with the love ones and the lost ones.”

Conclusion

The web or Internet has grown to have a place in school, universities and business. It has been praised by educators as a medium of SC which promotes lifelong learning and broadening the numbers and diversity of young people participating in education and socialization. Thereby modifying the teaching and learning methodologies Hence the impact of Internet SNSs in particular on formal young people should be considered substantial at least in terms of the number of the youth involved. This one reason attracted many of the researchers toward the SNSs i.e. Facebook with focus on universities and colleges. (Dwyer et al, 2008) It is pertinent to look back and reflect on the many changes that have taken place on professional development of human, and social capital, and education. “At a time when education systems are going through some of their most dramatic changes, a focus that seems to be universal is to keep teaching, learning and training of human capital as up-to-date and relevant as possible.” (3linc2010)

The present study laid theoretical approach that is likely to achieve the broader range of educational outcomes mainly required from all of the tertiary study. The social aspects of learning as described by Vygotsky and supported by this study have become more useful for those looking to design educational models, projects, and or sites involving a distributed but intercommunicating audience especially the SNSs. Additionally this study did not concur to (Mike, 2006) who postulate that SCOT explains how technologies arise, but ignores the effects of the technology after the fact. And that is a social construction of knowledge in itself, subject to the same limitations as it postulates (“who says what are relevant social groups and social interests?”). The study varied with (Mike, 2006) who holds that constructivist thinks knowledge as relational, multiple and plural as well as being local and particular. Not linear, serial, ordered and step by step. The present study relates to SCT (social cognitive theory) as learning theory which was basically on the believed that people can learn through observation on others deeds and that human thought processes are the central point to understand their personality.

The present study believed that SNSs users learn many (positive and negative) behaviors and get their attitudes influenced by mere interaction with and observation of other people’s profiles. In general the SNSs enhance socialization which is a process by which people, especially children and adolescent, learn acceptable and unacceptable behaviours of a given environment.”

It is therefore inferred in this study that while friendships, ideology and relationships, become the facets of adolescents’ development; it is befitting in the digital age where individual media preferences have also evolved as an important role in the students’ expressions of their status as to who they are in the society. Researchers, that can examine theories of adolescence and emerging adulthood, now have a space

in online SNSs which open gateways to study the evolution of identity development and friendship which may have a profound impact on the behaviour, attitude and social capital.

Higher learning institutions are expected to adapt their own methodologies to reflect to the new reality of a world in this technological and globalization advancements. Thus to make the necessary changes along the best practices available and help to deliver the best possible educational experience and Lifelong Learning training to all human beings. Thus, at long run it is enhancing human and SC.

Now SNSs can be planned and executed according to the users' definition and wishes. Hence a countries' policy can be promulgated and be executed according to the government's decision through the SNSs in respect to academic, social, political, religious, cultural and economic perspective.

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