

Social Networking: Harnessing the Potentials for Information Dissemination in Nigeria

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Abstract

Social networking is a new form of information dissemination platform, using WWW, COM as its driver. It uses the social media site as an interface for sharing information and content like photos, video, messages and academic resources. This paper focuses on social networking and its potentials for information dissemination in Nigeria. It examines the various social networking sites and their relevance to individuals and university Libraries in sharing of personal information and library content. It explored the implication of social networking for libraries and the role of the librarian. The paper conclude that Social networking is a useful platform for information dissemination, but faced with challenges, such as lack of awareness, copyright issues, lack of training program on the use of social media site, bandwidth problem, technophobia and unreliable power supply, and recommended periodic training and awareness campaign to enable librarians and users take full advantage of the media for information dissemination.

Keywords: Social networking, social media, media education

INTRODUCTION

Information and communication technologies that are used for information generation, processing, storage and dissemination has evolved over the years. According to Soola (1989) cited in Adaja and Ayodele (2013), the technology of information generation, processing and transmission dates back to the ancient times. Accordingly, man has continually continued to improve on the technology for efficient dissemination of information, natural development and educational growth. Soola (1989) posits that in the ancient times, the earliest form of writing and communication of information was cuneiform which was invented in 35B.C. Evans (1989) reported that Tiro Invented short-hand in 63 B.C. Henry Mill presented the type writer in 1944 while what is now known as Facsimile (Fax) transmission was presented by Brain in 1843.

However, the new media did not just appear suddenly, technology evolved and developed gradually. Between 1950 – early 90's was the "Phreaking Era" this involved the basic manipulations of the basic telecommunication systems which involved the calling of mobile phones via Skype, which is now perfectly mainstream, acceptable pursuit. Phreaking was a term coined to describe a culture of people who studied, explored and experimented with telecommunication system in their spare time. This was followed by the Bulletin Board Systems, 1979 – 1995, Commercial Online Services, 1979 – 2001, the World Wide Web (WWW) -1991, Internet Relay Chat and instant Messenger, 1983 – 1996, Social Media Sharing, 1999, Social Networking Sites, 1997 – 2008, Social Bookmarking, 1996 – 2003 and Blogs 1994 - 1999 (Taprial & Kanwar, 2012). What is therefore regarded as new is the impressive array and sophistication of ICT, its increasing efficiency, reliability, speed, accuracy, portability and ubiquity made possible by microprocessor (Soola, 1989). Today, current information platform is changing as a result of the emergence of social networking in the 21st century. The potentials are obvious in terms of e-business, interactions, interrelationship, politics and education. Throughout this research, both social networking and social media have been mentioned. Although both terms are similar but distinct, according to McHaney (2012), social networking is the "what" and social media is the "How". What it means is that social media are tools that facilitate social networking. Consequently, Ajewole and Fasola (2012), believed that the world wide web (www) is altering human social interaction and the way the brain processes information. Therefore the use of social networking is widely acclaimed. Adaja and Ayodele (2013), noted that the transformation in the technology of information and communication generation, processing, storage and dissemination has opened up a new platform for information dissemination, storage and handling.

Accordingly Sakoya, Onifade and Alabi (2012), noted that before the advent of information and communication technology, a study by Dudu and Anyanwa (2009) reported that some medium of dissemination of information existed, these include folk songs, town criers, associations, hand bills, posters, face-to-face meetings, letters and print. Today as a result of the emergence of the www.com new means of disseminating information began to emerge. Prominent among this is the social networking (social media) which has altered the strategy for communication in our contemporary society. The paper therefore examines social networking and its potentials in the dissemination of information in the 21st century.

Objective of the study

The objective of the paper is as follows:

- i) To examine the nature of social networking
- ii) To examine their potentials in information dissemination
- iii) To find out the advantages and disadvantages networking sites in the course of information dissemination and
- iv) Provide recommendations that will help to control negative impact of social networking

LITERATURE REVIEW

The evolution of the www.com has made it possible for people to connect to each other irrespective of status and distance in our present society. One of the main drivers for this interconnectivity is the emergence of social networking and social media. This is so because social media is a catalyst to the process that enables social networking workable. In other world social media are tools that facilitate social networking (Stelzner, 2009). According to McHaney (2012) for instance, LinkedIn is a social media. Social networking takes place in LinkedIn each time people form connections, exchange information, share or discuss. Twitter is a social media and each tweet represents the act of social networking. What this means that social media makes social networking easier.

Accordingly, social networking is a platform where users are both consumers and producers of online content. This platform is used for collaboration, sharing and dissemination of information (Ezeani and Igwesi, 2012). Social networking became very popular in the last few years and these networks are harmless and user friendly, that allow for social interaction and personal expression (Ajewole and Fasola, 2012). However the social network encompasses a lot of social media. Social media is widely used in our society, the first time it appeared was in 2004 after LinkedIn created a social networking application. The purpose of the application was to allow people disseminate information easily, using the internet to share and discuss information (B &C, 2010).

Similarly, the role of the social media is rapidly expanding and radically changing the way we communicate with one another, even the way we do business online, sometimes the social media is referred to as participative internet (NIDA CTN social media resource aside, 2012). According to Taprial and Kanwar (2012) social media has become inevitable part of our daily life because nearly all human activities are influenced by social media and defined social media as electronic form of communication through which users create on line communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content. Social networking is a medium for social interaction, using highly accessible and scalable publishing techniques. Social media use web based technologies to transmit and broadcast media monologues into social media dialogues. Taprial and Kanwar (2012) posits that social media is not restricted to social networking websites like facebook and twitter, the social media encompasses all the services that facilitates creation, sharing and exchange of user generated content. This include but not restricted to internet forum, YouTube, blogs, Microblogs, wiks, my space, flicker, ning, library thing, Google+ and podcast (Paxson, 2010, Gordon, 2010, Ezean, 2012 and Adaja & Ayodele, 2013).

In Nigeria, the use of social networking or media is growing geometrically among researchers, students, peers, professionals, youths, business men and women. People source for information directly from their peers in an environment of thrust, the availability and accessibility of direct connection through mobile phones makes social networking friendly (Sakoya Onifade & Alabi, 2012). In this research, the focus is the social media that is commonly used in social networking. In a survey by Charnigo and Barnett-Ellis (2007) cited in Olisana (2012) reported that over 100 academic libraries visited to sought their opinion about Facebook found that while some librarians are enthusiastic about Facebook, many considered it outside the realm of their profession. The use of Web 2.0 is gaining ground in libraries and the library environment is becoming social, user attitude is also changing. There are at least a million social media users in Nigeria putting social media penetration at 5.4 (Torraron, 2013). For example, Torraron reports in the table below on gender use of Facebook.

Facebook Users in Nigeria

Number of users	5,357,500	
Largest age group	18 – 24 1,930,460	
Gender Distribution	Male 69%	Female 31%

Source: Terragon-Insight, 2013

Potential of Social Networking

Social networking is relevant to information dissemination by providing speed and wider coverage to people through the Web. Social networking sites like Facebook, MySpace, Blogs, Twitters, Google+, YouTube, Wikis etc., are used to disseminate information. Some of them are discussed below:

Facebook: Is the largest and most ubiquitous social networking websites on the www.com today. Developed in 2003, and lunched in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg and a few of his colleagues. Facebook has since expanded

significantly. The websites membership was initially limited to only students of Harvard University but was later expanded to include other colleges in Boston area, the Ivy League and Stanford University. Much later in 2006, it was finally open to the general public for people of all age group above 13 years (Taprial & Kanwar, 2012).

The Company opened its international headquarters in 2008 with an active user's base of 100 million and now boasts a user base of 845 million as of December 2011. More than 75 percent of these users are located outside the U.S. Facebook users can create personal, group and event pages, post photography, videos, broadcast, news line, text entries to others pages as well as chat in real time, exchange private messages and share information with other users (Dewey, Kadin, Marks, Matsushima & Zhu 2012). According to Ezeani and Igwesi, (2012), Facebook is very popular among librarians, because it is library friendly with many applications like JSTOR search, world Cat and other forum through which information are disseminated. Library can relate with Facebook users to know their information need and libraries can also link some of these specialized library applications to Facebook.

Twitter: Twitter was launched in 2006, is also a popular social networking and micro-blogging service by which users can send and receive text based post of up 140 characters, known informally as "tweets". Twitter has expanded most rapidly in recent years and months, as of August 2011 Twitter generated over 2000 million tweets a day as against 65 million the previous year's. Ironically, the president Obama campaign success has been credited in part to the use of social media, text messages and online videos. Even today, president Obama is the most followed person on Twitter, with over 9 million followers (NIDA CTN social Media Resources Guide, 2012). Ezeani and Igwesi (2012) note, that Twitter helps to keep staff and patrons updated on daily activities, like frequently updating library collections. Users can use this platform to type in a short messages or status update. Librarians in Nigeria and other parts of the world can use this platform to give users firsthand information on the status of library collection, National issues like elections, indexes and abstract. Users can send instant messages (IM) on complaints or ask questions on issues of mutual interest and get a feedback on the spot using Twitter.

Google Plus (Google+): Google + is a new social networking, created by Google, it includes Google wave, Buzz and Talk. Google+ (plus) is similar to Facebook, with features like "circles" of friends, acquaintances or followers. In Google +, you can invite/ add friends or even follow strangers who share common interests or hobbies among the other networking features like sharing content and photos, sending messages, collaborating, events. You can have access to this social media on your computers, but the quickest way is to install Google+ is through Google chrome, it will enable you have access. To store, Google docs, Gmail, Google search, Google drive and YouTube on the same platform. This networking is also very useful to librarians because you can publish library collections, titles and new arrival on this media and your patron can have access to them. Google + got 20 million visitors in three weeks since its release in 2011. Between 2011 and January 2013, Google + had approximately 359 million active users and by May the usage statistics grew to 500 million users. Google + has become a serious competitor for Facebook and is the second largest it has surpassed Twitter (Wikipedia free encyclopedia, 2013 and Taprial & Kanwar, 2012).

Blogs: Blogs were among the first applications to become associated with the transition from static Web pages to social media. In the early form, blogs were most commonly used as online journals and had evolved from UseNet, bulletin board systems and moderated news groups. In the mid 1990s more online journals began to appear. These journals were known as Weblogs. This word was eventually shortened to "blog" by Jorn Barger (Wortham, cited in McHaney, 2012). According to Gordon (2010) blogs represent online diaries created by individuals or a group of people. Blogs consist of blog post in chronological order and allow users to comment on the posts. Librarians can periodically post messages share information on a particular subject or issues both in the institutions and government and allow users to comment or contribute to the content., articles on thought provoking issues can be posted and expect instant reaction (Ezeani and Igwesi, 2012).

YouTube: Is a video sharing website created by Chad Hurley, Steve Chen and Jawed Karim, who were early employee of Paypal. Hurley Studied design at Indiana University of Pennsylvania while Chen and Karim computer Science at the University of Illinois at Urbana – Champaign (Wikipedia, Free encyclopedia, 2013). YouTube is currently the highest one content community, allowing it users to watch and share originally created videos. Since its launch in November, 2005, YouTube had reached over 700 billion playbacks by 2010, with 70 percent of its traffic coming from outside the United States. Every day, more than 3billion videos are viewed and 8 years' worth of video content uploaded (Dewey & Kadan, 2012). However, the content is available to only registered users of at least 18 years and above. In higher institutions across the world and Nigeria, events such as important highlights of inaugural lecturers, conferences and workshops are disseminated via the YouTube.

Wikis: Wikis is an online free encyclopedia that gives a background knowledge and definition of concepts. It offers a platform for users to access, edit and contribute to content. This is a collaborative web page for developing content. According to Gordon (2010), Wiki applications facilitate collaborative editing of items and storing of knowledge in one place. Wiki is often connected with the principles of "Wisdom of the Crowd", reflecting the idea of people, collecting and aggregating enough data until there is a consistently reliable answer.

Wikis are also used in organizations as collaboration tools.

LinkedIn: LinkedIn was founded in December, 2002 and publicly launched in May, 2003 by Mid 2012 LinkedIn had more than 175 million registered users from 200 countries. While Facebook focuses on connections between friends, relatives and other casual acquaintances, LinkedIn has specifically courted the business world and attempted to create an online venue where job histories, resumes, recommendations and career related networking can takes place. Many employers of labour and business recruit new employees using LinkedIn and for many individuals LinkedIn has become the primary locations where all business contacts, skills inventors, training records and experience histories are maintained. LinkedIn is also useful in maintaining communication and business contacts and associated. For example if a remember charges job, locations or promotion he or she can easily send the new contact or update information through LinkedIn to her associates. Librarians can also get patrons connected with specialists in their particular field of interest, via LinkedIn. They can use this platform to render specialize services such as strategic dissemination of information (SDI).

My space: MySpace (<http://www.myspace.com>) is a popular and social networking sites which have a social function of allowing people to make friends and talk online and share resources.

Ning: Librarians can use this tool to get connected with students, library associations and share information with people. Other social media that are useful for, librarians, institutions and individuals that can be used to disseminate information are:

- Flickr
- Library thing
- Tagged
- 2go
- Eskimi
- Skype
- Ngiraland
- Naij etc

The use of social media for information dissemination is growing geometrically. In Africa, there are about 17 million users only on face-book. And the figure is expected to increase by 28 million (Ledgard, 2011). Daily active users on face-book is 665 million, 1.1 billion, mobile users monthly, of this number, 751 million of these number are youth while 18 million of the youth are active. Twitter has 288 million users monthly. This means that 21% of internet users are on twitter. YouTube has 6 billion hours of video monthly, Google + 359 million monthly and LinkedIn 200 million users. In Nigeria, 83% of social media users are active putting social media penetration at 5.4% (Terragon, 2013, Wikipedia, free encyclopedia, 2013). The above usage statistics corroborates Hitwise (2011) study and ranking of social media usage for 2011.

Table 1: Social media Usage Statistics (2011)

Ranking	Social Media	Visit share (%)
1.	Face Book	64.69
2.	YouTube	19.64
3.	Yahoo answers	1.15
4.	Twitter	1.11
5.	MySpace	0.79
6.	Tagged	0.43
7.	My yearbook	0.40
8.	LinkedIn	0.32
9.	MyLife	0.32
	Meebe	0.26
11.	Others	10.89
	Total	100%

The table revealed that (64.69%) of those visitor visits Facebook. It means that for the year 2011, Facebook was the highest social media site used.

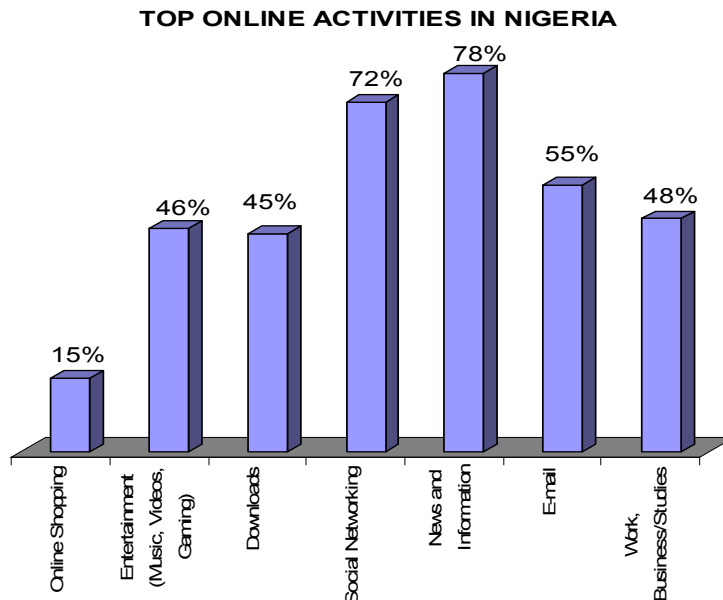
However, Tourism Review.com (2012) also projects the growth of social network users worldwide between 2011 and 2017 in the table below:

Table II: Growth of social network users worldwide between 2011 – 2017

Year	Users (billion)	Percentage (%) increase per year
2011	1.22b	+23.7
2012	1.47b	+20.4
2013	1.73b	+18.0
2014	1.77b	+13.4
2015	2.18b	+10.8
2016	2.37b	+8.9
2017	2.55b	+7.5

Source: Tourism-Reivew.com (2012)

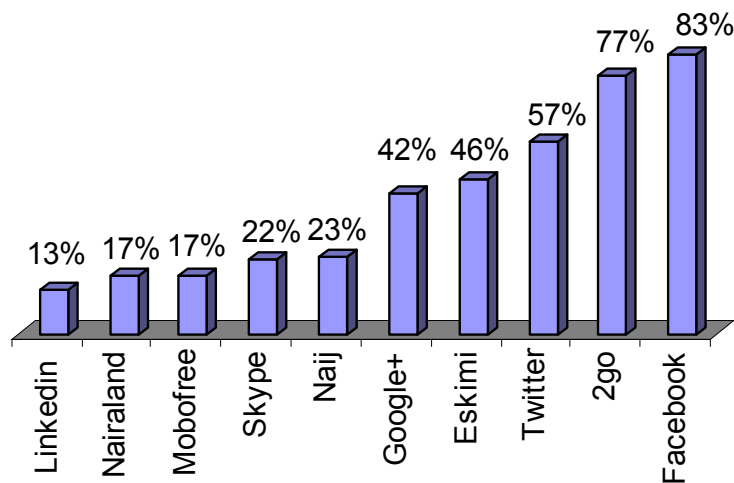
The Potentials of social networking cannot be under estimated. Social networking is a major driver of social change, national development and education. According to Ikpe and Olise, (2010), these possess the capability to increase work efficiency and speed as well as reduce cost. About 91% of students utilized Facebook. This ranges from simple ownership of Facebook account to daily active visitor or user (Pempek, Yemolageva & Chwert, 2009). Nigeria has a total population of 167,000,000 with (51.6%) rural and (48.4%) urban (national Population Commission, 2012) with internet users of 48.366,179, putting internet penetration at (28.4%) (World statistics, 2012) while the mobile subscribers is 113, 195,591 with a mobile percentage penetration of (69,01%) (National Communication Commission, 2012). The mobile internet users in Nigeria out number desktop internet hits, while (60.69%) are mobile based internet hits (30.31%) are desktop based internet hits (gs.starcounter.com 2013). According to Terragon-Insights (2013) top online activities in Nigeria are in the graph below:



Source: Terragon-Insight, 2013

However, there are at least 9 million social media users in Nigeria. Putting the social media penetration at 5.4%, below is a graph of Nigeria most frequently used social networking sites, and social media usage purpose.

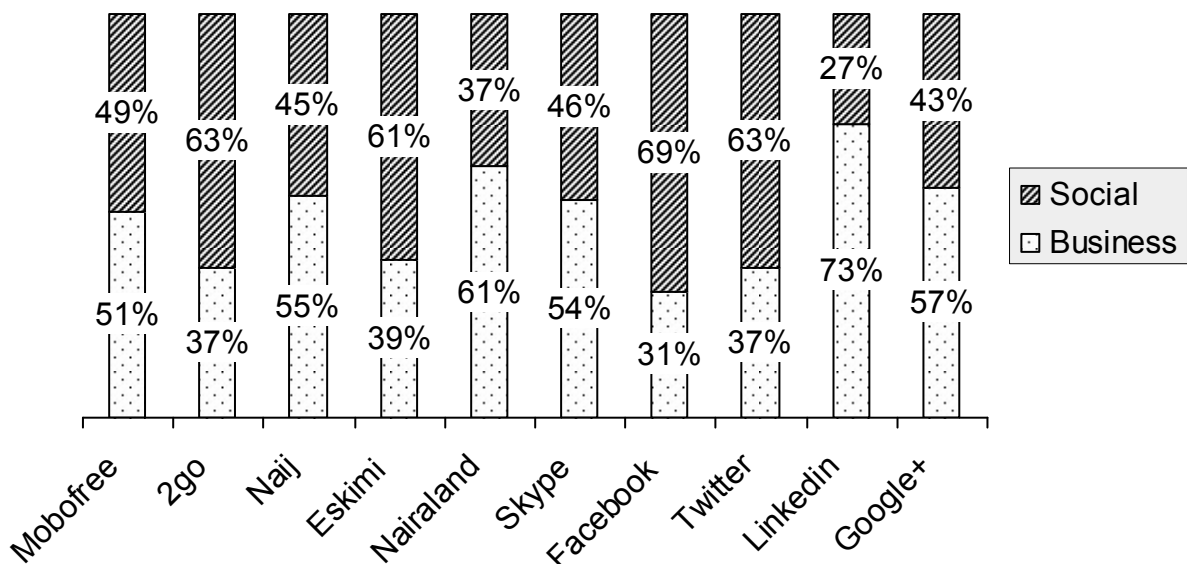
NIGERIA'S MOST FREQUENTLY USED SNS



Source: Terragon-Insight, 2013

From the above statistics it is obvious that Nigerians are not left behind in the social networking environment. Social networking is an example of a new form of information exchange in this era, it is an information distribution and sharing mechanism on the web. Most of the social networking sites are designed to share information or content. According to Mislora (2009). Flickr, YouTube, and Live journal are used for publishing organizing, locating and distributing photos, videos and blogs, respectively. The use of social networking for business transaction is of growing importance globally, in Nigeria for example Terragon (2012) explain the usage in various capacity in the graph below:

SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE: SOCIAL VS BUSINESS



Source: Terragon-Insight, 2013

Advantages and Disadvantages

Social networking is not just a platform for easy and simple advanced online means of communication, although it has become a revolution of our time, many people are using different social networking sites. Some have tried to capture its importance without considering the negative effects of social networking. Below is a list of positives and negative effect of social networking.

Social Networking Implication for Library Services

The use of social network for information in libraries is gradually gaining ground, however there is little research that focuses on some aspect social network in libraries, especially in Nigeria university libraries. Although a study conducted by Manes (2006) reported that librarians are only beginning to acknowledge Web 2.0 primarily in the form of weblogs. Thus, Social Networking has implication for moving library forward in terms of services rendering. For example, blogs and wikis are relatively quick and faster ways for moving library collection collections and services into Web 2.0. This will make library content and services more interactive and user-centered. Specifically, as discussed above librarians can use these tools to render services.

Web 2.0: Web 2.0 is a term used during the O'Reilly and MediaLive International, in 2004. Since then it has been used to describe applications that allow people to participate in information creation, digital resource sharing, webpage design and collaboration on the World Wide Web (Laningham, 2006 & McHaney, 2012). Web 2.0 is the method by which data and services previously locked into individual web page for reading can be liberated and reused.

Web 2.0 in Library: In September 2005, Michale Carey used the term Library 2.0 in a blog LibraryCrunch, created personally. According to Majumdar and Shukla (2008) Library 2.0 is equal to Web 2.0 concepts and applications in Library and Information Services. From their views, Web 2.0 combined with library services, transformed into library 2.0 as the application of interactive, collaborative and multimedia based technology for library services and collection. The important components of Web 2.0 are:

1. User centered
2. Multimedia character
3. Social networking and
4. Communally innovative.

User centered: User perspective in the creation of the content and services, they view within library's web OPAC. Thus the consumption and creation of content is dynamic and sometimes the role of libraries and user are not always clear.

Multimedia character: It provides multimedia experiences, where both the collection and services of Web 2.0 should be used by user to record experiences in the library.

Social networking: This enables both the librarian and user to have their presence in the web, and communicate with one another and the library.

Communally innovative: This is an important aspect of "Lib 2.0" the library must be innovative in her services, and understand that as communities change libraries must also change with them. They must allow the user to change the library, and seek to continuously change its services to find a new of rendering services and allow communities to seek, and utilize information (Majumdar and Shukla, 2008).

Role of Librarian

In this era of information explosion, according to Majumdar and Shukla (2008) Librarians should call themselves Librarian 2.0. This is because Librarian 2.0 understands his or her users at a deep level, not just as pointers and clickers. Librarian 2.0 understands end users deeply in terms of their goals and aspirations, workflows, social and content needs. In view of the above, Librarian should actively involve in the utilization of information and communication technology for information dissemination. Librarian 2.0 is the master of the information age.

It is important to for Libraries and Librarians to reach out in this ICT driven information platform. According to Rogers (2012), patrons are getting their information from a diversity of sources and libraries need to reach them where they are, this is because the traditional way of rendering library services is becoming obsolete. Therefore, Librarians should try to:

- Understand the power of Web 2.0 opportunities,
- Learn the major tools of Web 2.0 Lib2.0,
- Connect people and technology and information in context,
- Encourage user driven metadata and user developed content and commentary,
- Use and develops advanced social networks to library advantage,
- Connect with everyone using their communication facilities, to do Skype, IM, SMS, email, etc.

Advantages

i) Bring people together or breaking the isolation of many individuals: social networking facilitates open communication and enhancing information discovering and delivery. Everyone can find new people and meet their friends and communicate with love one all over the world.

ii) Breath of knowledge: Social networking enables people to experience the broadness of knowledge and connectedness through social media use. It is easier to know or find out different information through a connected media. For students who are also engaged in this activities, it can give them the benefit of being

exposed to technology and can be connected to a broader base of opinion and world views through global connections. Social networking provide platform for people to work together, to create their own meanings in work environment social contexts and especially academic subject.

- iii) Allows establishment of ties and relationships with people who share the same interests, concerns and needs as well as continues updating of contacts.
- iv) Attracts attentions: Apart from building loyalty and long term relations to your audience, social network can attract attention to your sites, products and services.

Disadvantages

Besides the advantages listed above, social network has the following disadvantages

- i) The invasion of privacy is a problem that occurs in social network some of the problem related to privacy issues stem from the fact that social network do not always make clear whether the user own their own personal data.
- ii) Children are vulnerable to high risk as there is no control over the social networking sites
- iii) Lack of anonymity, social networking usually require you to input your name, location, age, gender and many other types of personal information, which in most cases you have no control over the usage.
- iv) Scams and harassment, being online you are at risk to face cases of harassment, cyber stalking online scams and identify theft.
- v) Time consuming, if you are new to social networking, learning the process can be very time consuming.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Social media is not just a platform for easy and simple advance online means of communication, it has become a revolution of our time. Irrespective of its usefulness and potentials in information dissemination, it also poses a major risk in communication process. Therefore, in order to harness the potentials of social networking the following recommendations need to be considered:

- i) There is need to introduce usage policy, because most social network users are under age and so they do not know the importance of information ethics. Most of the contents posted on most social networks are sometimes offensive and not ripe for some age groups.
- ii) Training of users periodically is necessary as most social network users are not aware of the uses of many social networking sites.
- iii) Copyright issue is still a matter of concern among users, therefore users should be educated on copyright laws & vacation.
- iv) Lack of regular power supply affects usages of social networking sites. Therefore government should ensure the provision of power to enable users mostly in developing, countries to take advantage of this social network for information dissemination.
- v) There is danger on placing too much information online, therefore users of social network should try as much as possible o control contents.

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