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P U B L I S H I N G

Discourse on Social Media Use and Reading Culture of Nigerian Youths

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Abstract

There is a growing public concern over the perceived decline in the reading culture of youths in Nigeria. A wider section of analysts strongly insinuate that the increasing use of social media and other new media technologies is the most significant cause of this social ill; hence, emphasis has been placed on how to control the use of online platforms principally for social interaction in Nigeria. This study examines the nature of relationship between social media use and the reading culture of Nigerian youths. Using a survey of 1,000 youths selected from Nigeria's South-south geopolitical zone through a multistage sampling technique, the study found that 94.3% of the respondents use the social media and there is a generally poor culture of reading among young Nigerians. Contrary to popular opinion however, the study found a weak and insignificant relationship between social media use and reading culture (rho = 0.241, p> 0.05). Nevertheless, reading culture tended to be positively and significantly associated with certain demographic variables such as sex (.787**), education (.731**) and employment status (.654**). The study recommends the urgent reinvigoration of societal campaigns aimed at improving the reading culture of youths through the provision of a favourable socio-economic environment that encourages people to read.

Keywords: reading habit, internet, new media, media technology, Nigerian youths

1. Introduction

The social media have become widespread platforms for creating, sharing and accessing diverse information across the globe. Among many Nigerians, using the web 2.0 based platforms is not merely a fad but an integral aspect of daily lives that pervades all age groups and social classes (Onuoha & Saheed, 2011; Ezeah, Asogwa & Edogo, 2013). Certain benefits tend to make social media platforms attractive to users. These benefits transcend entertainment values to include information and education purposes (Akpoghiran & Erubami, 2019). Beyond their social networking function, the social media serve as platforms for teaching and learning; hence, scholars believe these technologies now constitute a vital part of students' success equation (Seaman & Tinti-Kane, 2013).

Regrettably, as the use of the social media technology increases among Nigerians, the culture of reading also seems to be declining at an alarming rate (Ifedili, 2009; Ayanbimpe, 2012). Reading is indispensable to personal and national development, and it is crucial to the attainment of literacy, liberation from the shackle of ignorance and maintenance of efficient living and learning (Fabunmi &

Folorunso, 2010; Sagitova, 2014). Through reading, people learn about the past and amass adequate information to predict the future. Thus, a good reading culture is essential for the development of the individual and the general society (Kamalova & Koletvinova, 2016). As a concept, reading culture refers to the continuous habit of seeking knowledge, information or entertainment through written languages (Igwe, 2011; Kojo, Agyekum & Arthur, 2018).

Studies indicate that there is a progressive decline in the reading culture of young Nigerians (Ifedili, 2009; Ogugua, Emrole, Egwim, Anyanwu & Haco-Obasi, 2015; Sotiloye & Bodunde, 2018). These studies claim that many youths in Nigeria seldom read, and when they do, they read mainly for academic purposes. For example, in his study of students of tertiary institutions in Nigeria, Ifedili (2009) found that 60% of students had prescribed textbooks only for examination purposes, while a paltry 21% of them bought novels principally for pleasure and knowledge acquisition. Another study found that the average Nigerian reads less than one book in a year for pleasure, and about 40% of post-high school adults in the country never read a non-fiction book from the beginning to the end (Aina, Ogungbeni, Adigun, & Ogundipe, 2011). Similarly, Sotiloye and Bodunde (2018) assert that the culture of reading in Nigeria is associated only with schooling and preparation for examination, and that the advent of affordable and easy access to home video, comic materials and other entertainment contents made possible by new media technologies may be responsible for students' low reading interest in non-school books. In his conclusion, Ayanbimpe (2012) opines that the reading culture in Nigeria has totally collapsed, arguing that most young Nigerians neither study their books nor read other information materials; hence, their poor command of the English language, vocabulary and diction.

Despite the seeming consensus among stakeholders that the culture of reading is declining among young Nigerians, there are contrasting opinions on the possible influence of social media use on the reading culture of Nigerians. The ensuing debates have given rise to two broad schools of thought: the pessimists and normalisers. Generally, the normalisers argue that social media use may not be significantly associated with the reading culture of Nigerians. Proponents of this view assert that it is the delivery mechanisms of reading materials that may have changed, but reading per se is not exactly on the wane among Nigerians. For example, Aina et al. (2011) assert that though the vast majority of global information is yet to be fully digitized, communication through words and printed materials is still thriving albeit in a new format of reading online. In his assessment of the factors militating against the culture of reading in Nigeria, Igwe (2011) identifies such militating factors as poor library conditions, lack of suitable reading materials, socio-economic hardship and the quest for materialism that tend to erode the cultural values of reading.

On the other hand, the pessimists contend that the growing use of the social media by youths in Nigeria is principally responsible for the progressively waning reading culture among them (Anyokwu, 2015; Kaduralere, 2016; Nkordeh, Oni, Olowononi & Bob-Manuel, 2017). For example, Nkordeh et al. (2017) argue that the social media have negatively affected the reading culture of Nigerians and their advent and popularity has led to a decline in the reading interest of youths in the country. In a study to determine if students preferred using the social media for either academic or non-academic purposes, the researchers found that about 66% of the respondents were more interested in using the social media for social interaction than for leisure reading. Accordingly, Kaduralere (2016) asserts that many Nigerian youths are wasting useful hours to check the profiles of thousands of actual and potential friends on the social media, assessing and admiring photographs of people they may never meet and reading countless updates on trivial issues, rumours and celebrity gossip; consequently, many of them have become knowledgeable in issues of trivial impact but ignorant in issues that actually hold great importance. Kojo et al. (2018) recommend that authorities in tertiary institutions must limit students' use of online platforms, such as social networking sites, due to the perceived tendency of the social media to negatively impact students' reading culture and their academic achievements. Similarly, Anyokwu (2015) contends that the increasing use of the social media have negatively affected the reading culture of young Nigerians, especially students, who now prefer going online to glance through the snippets, summaries or spark notes to reading a book from cover to cover. A possible implication of this trend is that the social media have turned many Nigerians to passive learners who only consume

the junks of written information while neglecting the important part that could engage them in critical reasoning (Anyokwu, 2015).

It will suffice to note that many conclusions on the supposed relationship between social media use and reading culture in Nigeria tend to be based on stakeholders' opinion, and empirical exploration of this presumed relationship seems limited. The present study seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the interplay between social media use and the culture of reading among young Nigerians. Specifically, the study seeks to (1) determine the extent to which Nigerian youths use the social media; (2) find out the purposes for which Nigerian youths use the social media; and (3) evaluate the relationship between social media use and the reading culture of Nigerian youths. Based on previous theoretical and empirical findings, we proposed a non-directional hypothesis as follows:

H_1: The extent of social media use will be significantly associated with the reading culture of Nigerian Youths.

H_o: The extent of social media use will not be significantly associated with the reading culture of Nigerian Youths.

2. Method

2.1 Design and Participants

The study adopted the analytical survey research approach which allows researchers to examine many variables, including the opinion, attitude, motive and intention of people towards issues (Wimmer and Dominick, 2011). The population of study was the South-south geopolitical zone of Nigeria which comprises six states- Akwa-Ibom, Balyesa, Cross Rivers, Delta, Edo and Rivers. The zone occupies a total land mass of approximately 85,303 square kilometers with an estimated population of 28,829,288 residents, many of whom are youths between the ages of 15 to 35 years (Agbor & Ashabua, 2018; National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2018).

A sample size of 1,000 respondents was drawn for the study in line with Comrey and Lee's 1992 recommendations that a sample of 50 is very poor, 100 is poor, 200 is fair, 300 is good, 500 is very good and 1,000 is excellent for a multivariate analysis (Lessiter, Freeman, Keogh & Davidoff, 2001; Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). A multi-stage sampling technique was adopted in the study. In the first stage, a cluster sampling technique was used to divide each state into urban and rural areas using data from the NBS (2018). In the second stage, we selected an urban area and a rural community to represent each state using a simple random technique. The following areas were selected: Akwa Ibom (Etinam and Itak Abasi), Bayelsa (Yenagoa and Aleibiri), Cross River (Biase and Imikuo), Delta (Agbor and Okerenkoko), Edo (Benin-City and Ifade) and Rivers (Port Harcourt and Egbeda). The third stage involved the selection of individual respondents from the selected urban and rural areas using the systematic sampling technique in which one eligible respondent was selected from every 10th household in the urban and rural areas included in the study. Only young Nigerians within the age bracket of 18-35 years were considered as youths and included in the sample (National Youth Policy, 2009). Copies of questionnaire used for data collection were proportionally distributed to the studied areas using an upward grading format of 60:40 in line with the United Nations' estimation that more than 50% of the Nigerian population will live in Urban areas by 2020 (Reed & Mberu, 2014; Bloch, Fox, Monroy & Ojo, 2015). The self administered questionnaire was distributed with the aid of six research assistants who were trained for about two weeks prior to the data collection exercise. The data were collected between September 16, 2019 and November 29, 2019.

2.2 Measurement

2.2.1 Extent of social media use

This variable was measured with one item on a 5-point scale using the question, "How often do you

use the social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, Youbube, Blog, etc?" Responses ranged from 1= never to 5= Hourly. Higher scores represented greater extent of social media use.

2.2.2 Social media use purposes

Relying on previous studies (Ashiekpe & Mojaye, 2017; Nkordeh et al., 2017; Akpoghiran & Erubami, 2019), we constructed a scale of social media use purposes using six items on a 5-point scale (see table 2). Possible responses ranged from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

2.2.3 Reading Culture

We measured reading culture using the Self-Report Habit Index (SRHI) developed by Verplanken and Orbell in 2003. The SRHI has been shown to have a good psychometric property as well as internal and external validity (Schmidt & Retelsdorf, 2016). The adapted version of the SRHI (shown in table 3) contained 10 items on a 5-point likert scale with possible responses ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). To introduce the scale, the respondents were asked to rate their leisure time reading experiences based on the 10-items on the scale. We also assessed the number of books respondents had read for leisure purposes in the past 12 months using the question, "In the past 12 months, how many books have you read that are not directly related to your academics or career advancement?", with responses ranging from 1 (none) to 5 (14 and above).

2.2.4 Demographic variables

Based on previous studies suggesting a relationship between certain demographic characteristics and reading culture (Igwe, 2011), we also included the following variables: Sex (1=Male; 2=Female); Education (1=Primary; 2=Secondary; 3=Tertiary); Employment status (1=Unemployed; 2= Employed).

2.3 Data Analysis

The descriptive statistics of percentage (%), mean ($\bar{X}$) and Standard Deviation (SD) were used to analyse the data. The mean and SD cutoff points were determined at 3.00 and 1.41 respectively. Any item with a mean score of less than 3.00 was considered negative (rejected), while items with mean scores greater than 3.00 were considered positive (Nworgu, 2006; Nkordeh et al., 2017). SPSS Version 23 was used to conduct a bivariate analysis for exploration of the formulated hypothesis.

3. Results

Out of the 1,000 copies of the distributed questionnaire, 973 were appropriately filled, returned and found usable, representing a 97.3% response rate. 52.4% of the respondents were male; the least possible age of the respondents was 18 and the highest was 35; the modal age rang was 20-25 years. A total of 10.7% of the respondents have had primary education, 48% have had secondary education, while the remaining 41.3% have received various levels of tertiary education. 52.2% of the respondents had various forms of active employment, while 47.8% were unemployed.

3.1 Extent of social media use

Our result showed that most of the respondents are heavy users of the social media. Data in Table 1 showed that 94.2% of the respondents use the social media, with 19.7% (n = 192) of them claiming that they use the platforms on the go or nearly every hour, while 47.4% (n = 461) of them use the web 2.0 based platforms daily. A total of 18.9% (n = 184) of the respondents use the social media on a weekly basis, 8.2% (n = 80) explore them occasionally, while the remaining 5.8% (n = 56) reported not using

any of the social media platforms.

Table 1: Extent of social media use

Regularity of usage	Frequency	Percentage
Hourly/on the go	192	19.7
Daily	461	47.4
Weekly	184	18.9
Occasionally	80	8.2
Never	56	5.8
Total	**973**	**100**

Source: Field survey

3.2 Social media use Purposes

Data in table 2 showed that most of the respondents use the social media mainly for chatting and social interaction ($\overline{X}$ = 3.8, SD = 1.6), relationship building ($\overline{X}$ = 3.7, SD = 1.4), news update and information sharing ($\overline{X}$ = 3.5, SD = 1.6) and sharing of multimedia files ($\overline{X}$ = 3.3, SD = 1.8). However, majority of the respondents recorded a low average score on the use of social media for both reading academic books ($\overline{X}$ = 2.1, SD = 1.5) and general interest books ($\overline{X}$ = 2.0, SD = 1.5).

Table 2: Main purpose for using social media

S/N	Item	$\overline{X}$	SD
1	I deploy the social media mainly for reading academic books	2.1	1.5
2	I use the social media primarily for reading general interest books	2.0	1.5
3	Chatting and social interaction are the main reasons I use the social media	3.8	1.6
4	I use the social media essentially to get news update and share information	3.5	1.6
5	I use the social media principally for relationship building/dating	3.7	1.4
6	Social media platforms are just for downloading and sharing of music/video/photo	3.3	1.8

Source: Field survey

3.3 Youths reading culture

Our result indicated a poor reading culture among the respondents. Based on the mean benchmark for the study, the SRHI presented in Table 3 showed that the respondents only scored relatively high on three out of the ten items on the scale- items 1, 3 and 7. Overall, the scale showed a poor self reported reading habit ($\overline{X}$ = 2.7; SD = 1.3). Furthermore, table 4 showed that 18.3% (n = 178) of the respondents have not read any book in the past 12 months that was unrelated to their academic/career advancement, 50.8% (n = 494) have read between 1-3 books, 23.7% (n = 231) have read 4-8 books, 5.3% (n = 52) have read 9-13 books and 1.9% (n = 18) have read at least 14 books in the past 12 months.

Table 3: Reading culture scale

S/N	Item	$\overline{X}$	SD
1	I frequently engage in reading for leisure	3.3	1.3
2	Leisure reading is something I do automatically	2.1	1.2
3	I easily engage in leisure reading without conscious effort to do so	3.2	1.3
4	Not reading in my spare time makes me feel weird	2.2	1.4
5	I read for leisure without having to think too much about doing it	2.9	1.4

S/N	Item	X̄	SD
6	Leisure reading is something that requires no effort to do	2.6	1.3
7	Leisure reading is part of my daily routine.	3.1	1.2
8	Leisure reading is something I do not need to think about doing.	2.9	1.4
9	Reading in my spare time is typically part of who I am	2.8	1.3
10	Leisure reading is something I have been doing for a long time.	2.8	1.4
	Grand Mean	**2.7**	**1.3**

Source: Field survey

Table 4: Non-academic/career related books read in the past 12 months

Response	Frequency	Percentage
None	178	18.3
1-3	494	50.8
4-8	231	23.7
9-13	52	5.3
14 and above	18	1.9
Total	**973**	**100**

Source: Field survey

3.4 *Hypothesis testing*

A Spearman rho correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between social media use and reading culture of Nigerian youths. The results of the correlation matrix shown in Table 5 indicate a weak correlation that was not significant (rho = .241, n = 973, p>0.05). Since the P-Value was greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis, which states that there is no significant relationship between the extent of social media use and the reading culture of Nigerian youths, was accepted. Thus, an increase or decline in the reading culture of Nigerian youths may not be sufficiently explained by their extent of using the social media. However, reading culture was positively and significantly associated with sex (.787[**]), education (.731[**]) and employment status (.654[**]). Deductively, female respondents with higher education and good employment status tend to have a better reading culture than male respondents with poor education and no employment.

Table 5: Correlation matrix between variables

		1	2	3	4
1	Sex				
2	Education	.314			
3	Employment status	.613[**]	.706[**]		
4	Social media use	.348[**]	.522[**]	.347[**]	
5	Reading culture	.787[**]	.731[**]	.654[**]	.241

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

4. Discussion

Analysing data collected from youths in Nigeria's South-south geopolitical zone, this study attempts to advance knowledge of how social media use influences reading culture. The findings indicate that exploring the social media constitutes a significant part of the daily activities of many Nigerian youths. The largest chunk of the respondents (47.4%) admitted to navigating the various online platforms day in, day out, just as yet another proportion of them (19.7%) claimed to use social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Blogs, Youtube, etc on an hourly basis. This is consistent with previous studies

(Ezeah et al., 2013; Kojo et al., 2018; Akpoghiran & Erubami, 2019) which affirmed that most Nigerian youths have embraced the social media as a veritable means of communication and networking, and that they devote much of their time exploring the essential features of various social media platforms. Indeed, modern social media platforms have friendly and easy-to-navigate interface with peculiar features that easily attract young people. This partly explains why they have become integral parts of the daily lives of many Nigerian youths.

Among the many purposes identified for using the social media, young people in Nigeria seem to be most interested in social interaction, relationship building and download or sharing of multimedia contents. Online discussions and information sharing also ranked top among the purposes for which youths deploy the social media. Conversely, our result suggests that many youths are less likely to use the social media to access reading materials either for leisure or academic/career advancement purposes. Previous studies (Nkordeh et al., 2017) have also shown that most Nigerian youths use the social media chiefly for non-academic purposes as they tend to be more interested in chatting and surfing the internet for social networking purposes than reading online for pleasure. Understandably, the unique nature of these computer mediated tools make them essentially for online community building, social values creation, promotion of independent expressions and facilitation of discussions and social interaction among people, regardless of physical barriers (Ashikpe & Mojaye, 2017; Akpoghiran & Erubami, 2019).

Furthermore, the study found a deficient culture of reading among the respondents as evident in their low self reported reading habit and the total number of books read in the last 12 months. Consistent with previous theoretical and empirical findings (Ifedili, 2009; Ayanbimpe, 2012; Ogugua et al, 2015), we found that reading either for pleasure or as a habit is less popular among young people in Nigeria. Specifically, 18.3% of the respondents clearly indicated that they have not read any book that was not related to their academic or career pursuit, while more than half of the total respondents (50.8%) only admitted to have read between 1-3 books in the past one year. Only a paltry 1.9% of youths claimed to have read at least 14 books within the same 12 months period. This appears to be a far cry when compared to what obtains in other countries like the USA where adults reported to have read an average of 12 books for leisure purposes in a year (Pew Research Center, 2019).

Many studies have been quick to identify the social media as the principal cause of the waning culture of reading among Nigerian youths, but we found no statistically significant evidence to support the presumed association between social media use and the level of reading culture among Nigerian youths. Consequent upon a correlation output of .241, P>0.05, we accepted the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant relationship between the extent of social media use by Nigerian youths and their reading culture. This refutes earlier assumptions (Anyokwu, 2015; Kaduralere, 2016; Nkordeh et al., 2017; Sotiloye & Bodunde, 2018) that leaned towards a causal relationship between the two variables. While many of such conclusions were premised on individual or group opinion (Anyokwu, 2015; Kaduralere, 2016), methodological and population differences may have influenced earlier conclusion supporting a significant association between social media use and reading culture (Nkordeh et al., 2017).

Incontrovertibly, there are myriad social, economic and political factors that tend to adversely affect an individual's ability to develop a healthy culture of regular reading in Nigeria. Such limiting conditions as widespread poverty, political corruption, dearth of good public libraries and limited access to high-quality reading materials may weigh down the zest of even an avid reader (Aina et al., 2011; Igwe, 2011). Besides, dealing with the avalanche of distractions that come with living as an adult in Nigeria may as well be a much more significant factor influencing the reading culture of Nigerians than the mere use of the social media for interaction and networking. For example, a large chunk of youths in Nigeria are unemployed and some have received little or no formal education. These factors may pose greater limiting conditions to a reader than the mere use of the social media.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

The use of the social media has become an integral part of the daily routine of most Nigerian youths; thus, making them the most technology-savvy group in the country. Essentially, the need for social interaction, relationship building and sharing of multimedia/digital contents are the principal purposes for which the Nigerian youths deploy the social media, while other reasons, such as leisure reading, may only come as second fiddle. Based on our findings, it could also be concluded that most Nigerian youths have a poor reading culture as evident in their self reported overtime reading habit and the average number of books they read in a year. Although this unsavory decline has been widely reported in many Nigerian literatures, there is no statistically significant evidence to infer a correlation or association between the poor culture of reading among Nigerian youths and their use of the social media for whichever purpose they deem fit. Nevertheless, the combined effects of other debilitating factors like the state of the economy, general standard of education and dearth of good quality reading materials in public libraries may as well be a more contributing cause of the waning culture of reading than the single factor of social media use.

Hence, we recommend that governments and other public spirited organisations should mobilise the needed resources and coordinate adequate efforts to improve the quality of reading materials available in public schools and libraries. There is also the urgent need to reinvigorate the general standard of education in Nigeria to encourage more youths to embrace the fine skill of acquiring knowledge through reading. Similarly, governments should make more honest efforts at improving the socio-economic lots of citizens. All concerned bodies, such as Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Community-Based Organisations (CBOS) and Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs) should intensify efforts on national values reorientation that places a higher premium on knowledge and hard work as against undue quest for materialism.

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