



SOCIAL MEDIA AND CHANGING COMMUNICATION PATTERNS AMONG STUDENTS: AN ANALYSIS OF TWITTER USE BY UNIVERSITY OF JOS STUDENTS

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Abstract: The developments in Internet technology have seen a rapid rise and change in information flow in contemporary society. One such significant development is the popularity of social network sites, an innovation that is redefining the process of sharing mediated messages. *Twitter*, an online social networking and micro blogging service that enables users to send and read "tweets", has over 500 million users who send over 400 million tweets daily, with nearly 60% of tweets sent from mobile devices. Regarded as "the SMS of the Internet" and one of the ten most visited websites, its users tweet about any topic within the 140-character limit and follow others. The paper set out to study the topological characteristics of *Twitter*, its power as a new medium of information sharing and social convergence, and dimensions of usage by students of the University of Jos. Anchored on the Uses and Gratifications theory, data was collated from the field through questionnaire. Results show that the medium represents both a social forum and a news outlet to the students. Based on this, it was recommended that users should endeavour to verify messages or tweets and sources before sharing with others.

Keywords: *Twitter*, Social Media, Social Networking Sites (SNSs), Tweet, Internet, Students

INTRODUCTION

The invention of the internet brought a new dimension to the media landscape. It marked the beginning of technological transformation and socialization with a higher desire for information about everything. This slowly developed into social media, which essentially is information about people.

The internet has taken the process of information dissemination to a higher platform thereby going beyond being a mere medium of

socialization or information seeking and has become something much more. With this development, users are driving content (Dominick, 2013) in ways never seen before. This has led to the transformation in not just one medium; there is more to come as new trends emerge continually.

Shapiro, cited in Croteau and Hoynes (2003, p. 322) argues that the "emergence of new, digital technologies signals a potentially radical shift of who is in control of information, experience and

resources.” Crosbie (2002), in explaining new media, described three different kinds of communication media. He saw interpersonal media as “one to one”, mass media as “one to many” and new media as “individuation media” or “many to many”. New media is a term meant to encompass the emergence of digital, computerized or networked information and communication technologies in the later part of the 20th century. Most technologies described as “new media” often have characteristics of being manipulated, networkable, dense, compressible, interactive and impartial (Flew, 2008). Neuman, cited in Croteau and Hoynes (2003) adds that new media will alter the meaning of geographic distance thereby allowing for a huge increase in the volume and speed of communication. It will also provide opportunities for interactive communication and allow forms of communication, previously separate, to overlap and interconnect.

Social media, an offspring of new media, typify these features as they have eliminated geographical distance in global communication (Carley, cited in Flew, 2002). Information sharing or interaction moves at the speed of light thereby making it near impossible to quantify volume of communication that occurs at different locations simultaneously. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) sees social media

as media designed to be disseminated through social interaction, created using highly accessible and scalable publishing techniques. It uses internet and web-based technologies to transform broadcast media monologues (one to many) into social media dialogues (many to many).

According to Adelabu (2011), three components typify social media: concept (art, information, or meme); media (physical, electronic, or verbal); and social interface (intimate, direct, social viral, electronic broadcast or syndication or print). One of the things that make social media unique is its interactive capabilities. Like never before, social media are transforming the way in which people receive and share information. Ludtke, as cited in Adelabu (2011, p. 614) notes, “One of the major attributes to social networking is its high level of interactivity” which adds value through its ability to facilitate meaningful conversation with, and between users. Picard also cited in Adelabu (2011, p. 614) asserts that social media and blogs provide an opportunity for users to express themselves and connect with like-minded people:

These digital tools provide an easy (little to no cost) way for members of the public to take part in discussion with larger groups of

people and draw attention to issues and topics that traditional news media might have overlooked....

The high rate of social networking sites, and the impact they have on young people's lives, offers striking testimony to the global impact of today's Internet. Some treat this new medium as a danger, and others treat it as the road to utopia. The truth is somewhere in between.

In view of the seeming students' activeness on *Facebook*, *Blackberry Messenger*, *WhatsApp* etc, it became imperative to understand what *Twitter* was used for and the dynamics of such usage. In addition, the research was borne out of an observation from audience participation in some programmes on the Campus FM (UNI JOS 96.1 ICE FM) that only a fraction of the students use *Twitter* compared to responses generated from using other platforms. This study will therefore engage students of the University of Jos in a focus group-like discussion and responses would contribute to framing the study.

This paper is therefore primed to study the topographical characteristics of *Twitter* and its power as a new medium of information. The study is also expected to determine the dimensions of *Twitter* usage by the students of the University of Jos

and highlight the challenges related to accessing it.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This paper shall be guided by the following questions:

1. Why do students use *Twitter*?
2. How do students access *Twitter*?
3. What is the most engaging activity of students on *Twitter*?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Uses of Social Media:

As a communication platform, many people use the Internet with its various applications such as social media like *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *YouTube*, etc to mobilise people to support a cause. According to Skoler, cited in Adelabu (2011, p. 614):

Today's new culture is about connection and relationship. Social networks are humming because they fit the spirit of the time, not because they created the spirit of sharing. They're not about listening to others and responding. They're about pursuing our interests because we know they will converge with the interests of others. The new culture values sharing information and being surprised by the experiences, knowledge, and voices of others.

The forces propelling this new trend are internet technology and youth who use social media to force changes in all facets of human interactions. Kaplan and Haenlein, cited in Adelabu (2011), describe social media as a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations and allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content. It supports the democratisation of knowledge and information, “transforming people from content consumers into content producers” (Stassen, cited in Adelabu, 2011, p. 614).

With the introduction of the internet as a new media environment and opportunity, the rate at which social ties that go beyond geographical and cultural boundaries are created is quite alarming. One of the current social networks that connect people through the internet is *Twitter* - a free-access website that allows its users to join networks, connect, and interact with other people. With the growing popularity of social networking sites (SNSs), one can only begin to imagine the rapidly increasing population of the internet as a way to communicate with others around the world (Turow, 2010; Udejinta, 2011).

Oyero (2013) contends that presently, a large majority of university students, who a few years back were unlikely to have heard of the internet, cannot easily

be dragged off the internet today. They use the Internet regularly and anywhere (Ibrahim, Odoemelam, and Elechi, 2011). Oyero adds that the availability of mobile and portable devices that allows them to connect to the Internet anywhere, as long as they are connected to data services, has increased social media use. Live feeds and instant streaming, and an increasing number of access through smart phones, modems, wireless, 3G networks, etc have equally pushed up usage of social media by students.

Millions of people go to websites to watch television shows, read newspapers, download music, and do so many things that Turow (2010, p. 132) describes as having “traditionally been associated with separating non-computer media forms”. Social media have revolutionized the nature of communication and dismantled previously existing man made obstacles to information dissemination and sharing. It has proved to be a tremendous platform to reach large number of people across different demographic and economic strata faster and cheaper compared to the use of other media of mass communication (Adelabu, 2011; Oboh and Kasule, 2011).

A lot of information, including text, audio and video, is available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, to connected users of the Internet. The latter is easier,

faster, and more convenient as a source of information. Dominick (2005, p. 310) argues that the social implication of the Internet and of social networking is that “it supplements the function of traditional mass media”. The rape case in Abia State University (ABSU), Nigeria, the 2013 ASUU strike, and the ALUU killings are some of the numerous instances where people racked up posts and articles on blogs describing the ordeal and taking steps to seek palliative measures (Oyero, 2013).

Twitter, like other social networking sites, has become an important place where youths invest their time and search for entertainment, knowledge, meaning, identity, and friendship. Boyd (2007, p. 2) explains that social networks give young people a sense of community and access: “Youths are trying to map out a public youth territory for themselves, removed from the adult culture. They are doing so online because their mobility and control over physical space is heavily curtailed and monitored.”

THE EMERGENCE OF TWITTER

Twitter is an online social networking and micro blogging service that enables users to send and read “tweets”, which are text messages limited to 140 characters. Registered users can read and post tweets but unregistered users can only read them. Created by Jack Dorsey, Evan Williams, and Biz

Stone in 2006, users access *Twitter* through the website interface, SMS, or mobile device apps. It is now one of the ten most visited websites, and has been described as “the SMS of the Internet”. As of September 2013, the company's data showed that 500 million users send over 400 million tweets daily, with nearly 60% of tweets sent from mobile devices (Moore, 2013).

Features of Twitter:

Tweets:

Tweets are messages sent out over the *Twitter* network. They are publicly visible by default, but senders can restrict message delivery to followers only. Users can tweet via the *Twitter* website, compatible external applications (such as for smart phones), or by Short Message Service (SMS) available in certain countries including Nigeria (Drew, 2012). While the service is free, accessing it through SMS may incur phone service provider fees. Users may subscribe to other users' tweets – this is known as *following* and subscribers are known as *followers* (Eric, 2011) or *tweeps*, a portmanteau of *Twitter* and *peeps* (Brandon, 2012). The users can also check the people who are unsubscribing them on *Twitter* (*unfollowing*) via various services (Douglas, 2012). In addition, users have the capability to block those who have followed them. Also, users are allowed to update their profile via their mobile phone

either by text messaging or by apps released for certain smart phones and tablets.

As a social network, *Twitter* revolves around the principle of followers. When you choose to follow another *Twitter* user, his/her tweets appear in reverse chronological order on your main *Twitter* page. If you follow 20 people, you will see a mix of tweets scrolling down the page: breakfast-cereal updates, interesting new links, news alerts, music (audio and video) recommendations, vacancies, scholarships, celebrity shows, educational and business seminars/workshops, eBook links, even musings on the future of education, etc.

Format:

Users can group posts together by topic or type by use of hashtags – words or phrases prefixed with a "#" sign. Similarly, the "@" sign followed by a username is used for mentioning or replying to other users (Fred, 2007). To repost a message from another user and share it with one's own followers, "RT" symbolizes the retweet function in the message.

The tweets were set to a largely constrictive 140-character limit for compatibility with SMS messaging, introducing the shorthand notation and slang commonly used in SMS messages. The 140-character limit has also increased the usage of URL shortening services such as bit.ly, goo.gl, and tr.im, and

content-hosting services, such as Twitpic, memozu.com and NotePub to accommodate multimedia content and text longer than 140 characters.

Trending Topics:

A word, phrase, or topic that is tagged at a greater rate than other tags is said to be a *trending topic*. Trending topics become popular either through a concerted effort by users, or because of an event that prompts people to talk about one specific topic (Balanarayan, 2009). These topics help *Twitter* and their users to understand what is happening in the world.

Trending topics are sometimes the result of concerted efforts and manipulations by preteen and teenaged fans of certain celebrities, breaking events or cultural phenomena, particularly musicians. There have been controversies surrounding *Twitter* trending topics: *Twitter* has censored hashtags that other users found offensive.

Mobile:

The mobile version of *Twitter*, m.*Twitter.com*, has a couple of mobile apps for iPhone, iPad, Android, Windows Phone and BlackBerry. There is also a version of the website for mobile devices, SMS, and MMS services.

Interface:

On April 30, 2009, *Twitter* adjusted its web interface, adding a search bar and a sidebar of "trending

topics" — the most common phrases appearing in messages. Biz Stone, *Twitter* co-founder, explains that all messages are instantly indexed and that "with this newly launched feature, *Twitter* has become something unexpectedly important – a discovery engine for finding out what is happening right now" (Biz, 2009).

Research has shown that there are couple of influencers that affect how people use *Twitter*. These also can be said to have a huge effect on temporal behavioural pattern and user participation. Some of them include singleton, reply, mention, retweet, and homophily. Homophily is a tendency that "a contact between similar people occurs at a higher rate than among dissimilar people" (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook, 2001, p. 415). A user will interact more with another user who shares perceived similarity in the type of people followed and, tweets made. Weng, Lim, Jiang and He (2010) have reported that two users who follow reciprocally share topical interests. Homophily is investigated in two contexts: geographic location and popularity. This explains the similarity in the 'following' list of a group of students.

A tweet can be just a statement made by a user, or could be a reply to another tweet, or a retweet, which refers to a common practice in *Twitter* to copy someone else's tweet as one's own, sometimes

with additional comments. Retweets are marked with either "RT" followed by '@user id' or "via @user id". Retweet is an effective means to relay the information beyond adjacent neighbours. When a user retweets, the user may or may not retweet evenly from those whom he/she follows. This is also an influence of homophily. From the perspective of a user who is retweeted, the retweet may or may not take place evenly among one's followers. The evenness of information diffusion, or favouritism, in retweet is determined by the level of disparity noticeable in retweets.

Retweet is considered the feature that has made *Twitter* a new medium of information dissemination. People often write a tweet addressing a specific user. Such a tweet is called a mention. Both replies and mentions include '@' followed by the addressed user's *Twitter* ID. If a tweet has no reply or a retweet, then it is a singleton (Kwak, Lee, Park, and Moon, 2010). These influencers define a user's level of activeness and the direction to which it tilts.

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF JOS

The University of Jos began as a campus of the University of Ibadan in November 1971 with its first set of students admitted in January 1972 as pre-degree students. The first Bachelor of Arts degree programme began in October 1973

but in 1975 the General Murtala Mohammed led military government established the University of Jos as a separate institution.

The University has undergone enormous development and structural changes, rising to become one of the top second generation Universities in the country. It has grown from an initial single campus and four faculties to having three campuses and nine faculties, and a School of Postgraduate Studies with over 40,000 students (University of Jos School of Postgraduate Studies, 2010-2014). The institution is known for its modest achievements in research findings on Artemisia annua – the plant with the active bio molecules required for combination drug therapy formulation for malaria treatment. Similarly, it made some breakthrough in the area of anti-snake venom research and medical microbiology for detecting the mutation in the gene responsible for fluconazole resistance in Candidiasis. It is also known for the formulation of tablets and discovery of the value of mushroom in the management of sleeping sickness disease (Trypanosomiasis).

The University of Jos emerged as the only University in Nigeria suitable for Instructor Training Centre (ITC) and CISCO Academic Support for West and Central

Africa, English-speaking countries. This earned it a Pearson Vue Testing Centre, which allows it to administer certificate licensure examination for all professionals. The University's pharmacy programme is currently rated the best nationally and its Law Faculty, the third best in the country (Obateru, 2013).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Ohaja (2003, pp. 63-64) argues that, "knowledge does not exist in a vacuum. In every discipline, there is a body of theories that provide the explanation for observable phenomena in that field." This is the reason this discourse is anchored on the Uses and Gratifications theory.

Uses and Gratification Theory

According to Katz, Blumer and Gurevitch (1974), Uses and Gratifications theory establishes a phase in mass media research challenging the traditional focus of what the media do to the audience to what the audience do with the media. It further focuses on why the audience use the media and the purposes for which it is used (Baran and Davis, 2009). The theory holds that people have preconceived needs, which they bring to the communication process. Expatriating on the theory, McQuail (2010, p. 423) states that "the central question posed is: why do people use the media, and what do they use them for?" The theory has been identified as a "model of

communication research which seeks to explain issues on the basis of the audience's subjective account of the media experiences and the functions a particular kind of content serves in particular circumstances" (Orewere, 2006, p. 17).

The theory is approached from the view that, for the audience, the mass media are a resource that is drawn upon to satisfy needs. The theory has an image of the audience 'in control' rationally using the media to achieve its own ends. The theory recognizes and maintains that the audience has various needs that prompt them to expose themselves to any media or media content. Therefore, the theory establishes that there are distinct benefits a consumer expects to get from any medium and failure to deliver these expectations will lead to the audience deserting such medium. *Twitter* has become a supplement to audience access to information, entertainment, and enlightenment. With tweets from subscribed websites, blogs, individuals, celebrities, etc, information savvy people satisfy their needs with the support of what the mainstream media provide. Gratification is even better achieved with the mobile notification activation on *Twitter*, a function that allows a user get all tweets on his/her *Twitter* account direct on his mobile phone as text message at no cost through a free short code 40404.

The theory is applicable to studies where the audience is free to choose what to use based on an anticipated benefit from the content of a medium. Its suitability to this discourse springs from the fact that the students at the University of Jos use *Twitter* largely because of the specific satisfaction they derive (news content, academic research and social interaction). Similarly, Zafar (2010, p. 515) contends that "Uses and Gratifications theory suggests that media users play an active role in choosing and using the media." In an effort to further elaborate on what the theory entails, Folarin (2002, p. 72) argues that, "...instead of asking; "what kinds of effects occur under what conditions?" The question became "who uses ...which media under which conditions and for what reasons?" The theory is relevant to this study as the research looks into why and how students of University of Jos use *Twitter*.

METHOD

The study used the descriptive survey, which according to Wimmer and Dominick (2006, p. 179), attempts to describe or document current conditions or attitudes, that is, to explain what exists now. The results allow researchers to examine the interrelationships among variables and to develop explanatory inferences.

Survey research was adopted because it enables realistic

RESULT AND ANALYSIS

Table 1 – Respondents’ Age

Response	Frequency	Percentage
18 – 20	4	2.6%
21 – 23	48	32%
24 – 26	74	49.33%
26 and above	24	16%
Total	150	100

Table 1 shows the percentage distribution of respondents’ age. The data indicate that majority of the respondents were within the 24 and 26 age bracket hence, 49.33%. This age range, representing almost one-half of the population, is more active on *Twitter* as it is with other social networking sites. Thus, they are capable of making reasonable use and judgment on use of *Twitter* by students. Please, note that all tables are from the author’s fieldwork.

Table 2 – Sex of Respondents

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Male	82	54.67%
Female	68	45.33%
Total	150	100

Table 2 shows the sex percentage distribution of respondents’. The data indicate that majority of the respondents are males.

Table 3 – Respondents’ Student Status

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Undergraduate	116	77.37%
Postgraduate	34	22.67%
Total	150	100

Table 3 shows the percentage distribution of respondents’ student status. Undergraduate students were 77.37% of the population while 22.67% of the respondents were Postgraduate students. This shows that undergraduate students have embraced the internet and *Twitter* and are using it more consistently.

Table 4 – Faculty of Respondents’

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Arts	82	54.67%
Education	2	1.33%
Environmental Sciences	0	0%
Law	8	5.33%
Medical Sciences	12	8%
Management Sciences	10	6.67%
Natural Sciences	14	9.33%
Pharmaceutical Sciences	2	1.33%
Social Sciences	20	13.33%
Total	150	100

The information on the Table 4 indicated that the bulk of the respondents were from the Arts and Social Science fields which explained why *Twitter* is used for informational and social communication needs.

Table 5 - Why do students use *Twitter*?

S/N	ITEM	SA	A	N	D	SD	X	DECISION
1.	Registration on <i>Twitter</i> is easier and less cumbersome than other social networking sites.	17	62	39	27	5	3.4	Accepted
2.	Accessing user account is not faster.	10	23	51	45	21	2.7	Rejected
3.	Social relationships are easily formed and maintained.	27	56	37	25	5	3.5	Accepted
4.	Interaction with research institutes, celebrities, religious leaders, politicians and friends is not enhanced on the <i>Twitter</i> platform.	13	23	19	54	41	2.4	Rejected
5.	It is an alternative channel for academic research.	17	44	39	37	13	3.1	Accepted
6.	Private information, activities and experiences are shared in picture and text.	59	51	27	13	0	4.0	Accepted
7.	Users do not get quicker access to news content and share frequently than on other sites.	7	21	23	60	39	2.3	Rejected

Table 5 shows the mean score of why the students of University of Jos use *Twitter*. To get the mean score, the five digits: 5,4,3,2 and 1 are summed up

to get 15. This sum (15) is divided by 5 (the total number of variables: SA, A, UD, D and SD). That is $15/5 = 3$. Therefore, 3 becomes the *criteria mean*.

Each variable contains the number of responses, which is further multiplied by its coded figure. For example,

5	4	3	2	1
SA	A	UD	D	SD
40	20	5	30	5

$$= 40 \times 5 = 200$$

$$20 \times 4 = 80$$

$$5 \times 3 = 15$$

$$30 \times 2 = 60$$

$$5 \times 1 = 5$$

$$= 200+80+15+60+5 = \frac{360}{100} = 3.6$$

100 (no. of respondents)

From this simple calculation, we see that 3.6 is the *table mean*, which is symbolized by \bar{x} in the table. If the table mean is higher than the criteria mean then the decision is accepted. If the table mean is below the criteria mean, then the decision is *rejected*. The criteria mean, therefore, is the benchmark for taking decision.

Seven items sought responses on reasons for using the platform with 3 items rejected and 4 accepted. Items 8, 10, 12 and 13 with a table mean of 3.4, 3.5, 3.1 and 4.0 respectively were accepted indicating that the ease of registration and, sustenance of

established social relationships facilitated by self expression avenues (picture & text) and the fact that the site provides another option for academic research were reasons for patronizing *Twitter*. Items 9, 11 and 14 with a table mean of 2.7, 2.4 and 2.3 respectively were rejected implying that users easily accessed their accounts, interacted with research institutes, social, political and religious associates and, read and shared news content quicker than other sites. This showed some sort of balance in use as the platform gratifies their urge for academic materials, news content (reception

and sharing) and socialization, in terms of building mutually beneficial relationships with people far and near. The simplistic nature

of the site (on personal computer and handheld devices) makes the aforementioned easily possible.

Table 6 - How do students access *Twitter*?

S/N	ITEM	SA	A	N	D	SD	X	DECISION
1.	Students access <i>Twitter</i> through mobile phones.	102	38	2	4	4	4.5	Accepted
2.	Students access <i>Twitter</i> through other hand-held devices.	28	74	26	12	10	3.6	Accepted
3.	<i>Twitter</i> is accessed through computers.	24	72	32	18	4	3.6	Accepted

Table 6 shows the mean score on how students access *Twitter*. Data collected showed that there are other means that provide access just as mobile phones do. The students access *Twitter* through computers (desktop and laptop) and hand-held devices such as iPads and other tablets. Three items sought responses on the research question above. Item 5, which translated into 4.5 table mean shows that mobile phones offer the highest access to respondents as items 6 and 7 each translated into 3.6. This information proved that majority of the students use their mobile devices than personal computers to access *Twitter*. This is also supported by the fact that the age group that uses the site the most favours those between 21 and 26 years.

Table 7 - Research Question 3: What is the most engaging activity on *Twitter*?

S/N	ITEM	SA	A	N	D	SD	X	DECISION
1.	Posting of tweets	70	50	18	12	0	4.1	Accepted
2.	Reading of tweets (news updates)	66	58	12	12	2	4.1	Accepted
3.	Reading tweets (from and on celebrities)	56	50	30	12	2	3.9	Accepted
4.	Observing tweeps	28	58	46	16	2	3.6	Accepted
5.	Retweeting	54	56	26	12	2	3.9	Accepted
6.	Participating in trending topics and 'hashtags'	36	64	34	16	0	3.8	Accepted

Table 7 shows the mean score of the activity the respondent viewed as most popular on *Twitter*. All six items that sought the respondents' view on the most engaging activity on *Twitter* were accepted. This

implied that variables such as tweeting, reading of tweets, retweeting and connecting with trending topics were all popular among the respondents. However, items 15 and 16, translated into 4.1

each indicating that posting of tweets and reading of tweets on news are more active than the rest having recorded the highest table mean score. Despite the popularity of these functions, messages are often times distorted in meaning and quality because of the restricted number of words usable. This results in a communication gap and the possibility of a sender's intended meaning not conveyed to the receiver. In the case of new updates, a news story could be misinterpreted when shortened and social communication could also be misleading because of word limitation. Celebrity gossips and retweeting of same or similar information is also affected as tweeps try to share an interesting issue within the available character space.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Social media have changed the face of human relations and the conventional human interaction in its variegated forms drastically. This new media have also redefined our value systems more narrowly and dangerously.

Twitter is rising in popularity and is projected to be one of the leading rallying points on social media. Findings from the research shows that the students of the University of Jos use *Twitter* for informational, academic and social purposes. Responses show that the students used *Twitter* as an alternate research medium for

academic works, forming and maintaining social relationships with friends and admired personalities. This supports Oyero's (2013) and Otunla's (2013) positions that majority of tertiary students use social networks as their primary sources of news information in this decade.

Results also show that more than half of the sampled population accessed the platform through mobile phones than computers and other hand-held devices. This is in agreement with the world statistics, which favours mobile phone users as posited by Moore (2013). It can also be adduced to the simplistic nature of the mobile version of the platform, which is much easier to access to a younger, and internet savvy community, as the result showed. The acceptance of items 15 – 20 supported this as the activities listed are such that can be carried out on-the-go, no different from the normal Short Message Service (SMS).

With respect to research question one, i.e. why do they use *Twitter*? It was revealed that one of the purposes the students of University of Jos use *Twitter* is to form and maintain social relationships with fellow students (within and outside their school) as reflected in their ability to share private information and experiences. This agrees with the findings of Ezeah, Asogwa and Obiorah (2013) and Haridakis and Hanson (2009) that Nigerian

students use social media for social interaction and other leisure entertainment. These findings confirm the rationale for the application of Uses and Gratifications theory of the media as the theoretical anchor for this study.

Similarly, the study revealed that the students use *Twitter* because it serves as an alternative channel for academic research and news content. This further justifies the application of Uses and Gratification theory to this study, as the finding also support that of Ezeah, Asogwa and Obiorah (2013) that social media platforms like *Twitter* give the students room for getting essential information and education.

The study further revealed that students between 21 and 26 years are more active on *Twitter* and access to the platform is greatly enhanced by the availability of mobile phones and other handheld devices. This is relative to the conclusions of Onyeka, Sajoh & Bulus (2013) that adolescents and young adults are the heaviest computer and Internet users, primarily using it for completing school assignments, e-mail and/or instant messaging. It was also argued that social networking sites are the latest online communication tool that allows users to create a public or private profile to interact with people in their networks (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Kadala

(2011) added that an average Nigerian youth spend about 6-7 hours daily on the Internet, and some spend all night, surfing (tweeting and updating profiles on different social networks), and this is made easier and more convenient with the mobile phones and other handheld devices.

Generally, results showed a balance in usage pattern as the platform is well deployed to gratify news, academic and social needs. This is an indication that as more features are developed, *Twitter* will get more relevant in years to come among students and will provide stiff rivalry to other social networking sites like *Facebook*, *Instagram*, *WhatsApp* and *2go*.

CONCLUSION

The various social networking sites are perhaps the most visible face to social media today. This partly accounts for their growing popularity as a youth media. What distinguishes social networking sites from other types of social media is that in some manner they allow users to show the connections they have, or they allow others to see their social networks. The ability to share the map of one's social network, and allow others to tap into that map by contacting other people in the network, has become an incredibly powerful tool (Pavlik and McIntosh, 2011).

Twitter, like other social networking sites developed within

the past few years, provides a variety of communication and sharing tools, and encourages users to develop applications that make the site even more useful to users. By this, you can subscribe, share, friend, or follow as many feeds as you would like, students post tweets, retweet favourite tweets by followers, those followed, and monitor activities of tweeps. Understanding the driving forces of this micro blogging site helps in gaining a better picture of why social media are transforming not just media habits but today's world.

This study showed an average of 2 years of participation by respondents which is a proof that the site is gaining acceptance. On the whole, a few of the respondents attributed their inactiveness on *Twitter* to poor internet connections which affects all access means, character limitation especially where a favourite tweet is to be 'quoted' or retweeted. Thus, the paper concludes that *Twitter* has taken the process of information gathering and sharing, socialization and learning by the students to a higher platform thereby making the site more than a mere interactive social networking site.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the paper recommends that the word limit should be increased by the developers of the site to a minimum of 150 words as this

would guarantee better participation and use.

Second, there should be a regulatory mechanism by Nigerian Communications Commission to checkmate the activities of celebrities and users who share unverified information. The site owners should find a way to block tweets and other activities that do not conform to consented user agreement during registration. In addition, users should endeavour to verify messages or tweets and sources before sharing with others.

Third, more students should be encouraged to register on *Twitter* as the number is low compared to *Facebook* and *MySpace*. The University of Jos should also create a *Twitter* account for the institution, follow other research institutions (local and international), and advise all students to follow. By this, students will be exposed to scholarships opportunities and talent development.

Fourth, Telecommunication network providers in Nigeria must improve their services, especially within the University community as poor internet connections discourage students from being active on *Twitter*.

In addition to the fourth point above, the management of the University of Jos should expand the bandwidth of her wireless internet connection so the students can cut down on private internet charges

and maximize the social and academic benefits of social networking. In the alternative, more functional Internet enabled

computer laboratories should be opened, if possible, in each Department or College of the University.

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