


Perception of Social Media Use by Distance Learners in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Perceived ease of use (PEOU) and perceived usefulness (PU) of social media by distance learners may affect its acceptance for learning. These constructs were investigated among 341 distance learners in two universities, the University of Ibadan- UI and the National Open University- NOUN in Nigeria using a questionnaire and was analyzed using frequency and percentages. The main purpose and use of social media in UI and NOUN was to share information (100% and 100%) and for group discussion (96.3% and 100%) respectively. WhatsApp was used daily in NOUN (100%) and UI (91.3%). The PEOU by the respondents in NOUN and UI were both high: requiring a lot of mental effort (100%) and promoting distance interactions between learners and lecturers outside the lecture room (96.9%), while PU in NOUN and UI was also high: it decreased travel expenses (100%) and improved academic performance (100%). Therefore, the high perception of social media use (PEOU and PU) by distance learners should be sustained by facilitators through the adoption of social media for all their courses.

KEYWORDS

Distance Learners, Nigeria, Perceived Ease of Use, Perceived Usefulness, Social Media Use

INTRODUCTION

A distance learning program broadens access to education, which gives opportunity for continuous and life-long learning for individuals. Jimoh (2013) averred that distance learning affords learners the privilege of being free from the time constraints, limited place and offers flexible opportunities of learning for anybody who has the inclination for higher education. Through a distance learning program, students have access to higher education which otherwise would have been hindered due to their employment status, marital status, family responsibilities, distance, and expenses incurred with traditional education (Hannay & Newvine, 2006).

The physical distance between the learners and instructors makes it necessary to use information and communication technologies (ICT) for delivery of learning resources such as the Internet. Universities have been able to cater for the educational needs of distance learners through social media platforms which may ensure learners learn and become equipped at their own pace. Selwyn (2012) suggested that in recent years, the wide-scale uptake of these ICT tools has transformed the ways in which the Internet is experienced and used by most students due to the presence of social media tools. Social media is becoming a major form of communication, interaction and provides information access and generation for people globally. The use of social media by undergraduates

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is now a global trend (Wickramanayake & Jika, 2018; Leyrer-Jackson & Wilson, 2018; Al-rahmi, Zeki, Alias, & Saged (2017).

Social media is described as an “application that allows users to converse and interact with each other; create, edit and share new forms of textual, visual and audio content, and categorise, label and recommend existing forms of content” (Boateng & Amankwaa, 2016, p. 3). Social media enables individuals to meet new people and friends, have discussions with one another through the use of text and exchange information carrying content they both understand. Social media is characterized by active participation on the part of distance learners as it provides a forum for learners to share knowledge, provide clarification to questions, disseminate information, and engage in group discussion. These social media environments can be very useful for e-learning purposes, being a potential communication channel where distance learners can collaborate with lecturers for educational purposes.

Some social media sites include Facebook, Wikipedia, Twitter, Blogs, LinkedIn, YouTube, MySpace, Yahoo, Answers, Google+, Pinterest. Social media site allows distance learners to engage in wall posting, video sharing, tagging, photo uploading, making comments, podcasting, blogging for the purpose of learning. The use of social media sites allows “students and faculty members interact, express their views, and share resources by constantly maintaining their profiles and creating groups on social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Blogs, Google docs, YouTube and others” (Beltran-Cruz & Cruz, 2013, p. 69).

Beltran-Cruz and Cruz (2013) affirmed that “social media sites are now being used by universities as alternative spaces wherein students can adapt to the university lifestyle through interacting online with peers and faculty” (p. 69). Presently universities around the world are harnessing the advantages that social media offers to improve the delivery of teaching and learning practices to distance learners. Gulbahar (2014) reported that students in Turkey were using social media for collaboration and knowledge sharing. According to Adamson (2012), social media enable students to collaborate and share information with their lecturers and the entire world at large at any time convenient to them and from any place in the world. This also encourages peer sharing, which offers students the opportunity to learn from each other in the content they produce. Al-rahmi, Othman, and Musa (2014) reported that “one of the most commonly cited benefits of social media by scholars is its ability to facilitate collaborative learning and communication among peers and with people outside academia” (p. 179).

Social media could be used by distance learners for personal and educational purposes as it contributes significantly to the development of their learning related activities and also provides a flexible opportunity for teaching and learning. The frequency of social media use by distance learners could vary as a result of their different commitments to other day to day activities. Distance learning students may use social media daily, weekly, monthly or as often as they have the opportunity to (Olowu & Seri, 2012). Social media like Facebook, WhatApps, Line and others have been frequently used to communicate, upload articles and update profile.

Social media has been recognized as an important facilitator for teaching and learning among distance learners, however some factors may hinder its maximum use for learning based on a learner’s intention in either to accept or reject such use in their higher educational pursuits. These factors may include: perceived ease of use (PEOU) and perceived usefulness (PU). There are two key components that have made the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Figure 1) one of the most influential research models related to understanding information technology usage and acceptance (Perceived Ease of Use and Perceived Usefulness).

Perceived Ease of Use

Davies (1989) as cited in Sago (2013) stated that perceived ease of use (PEOU) and perceived usefulness (PU) determine attitude towards a technology, which in turn impacts the adoption and use of a new information technology (p. 3). Perceived ease of use and usefulness may affect attitude towards the use of social media and shapes learners’ intentions to use it for learning activities.

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