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## Benefits of Accessing Health Information on Social Media among Female Students: A Study in a Nigerian Public University

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# Benefits of Accessing Health Information on Social Media among Female Students: A Study in a Nigerian Public University

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**Abstract-** The importance of social networking sites can never be over emphasized as it has been put to diverse use by different people and groups for different purposes. It is as a result that the researchers investigate the use of social networking among the female students of Taraba state University and how best it has been used to access and diffuse information on health related matters. A quantitative approach was employed with the help of questionnaires administered to the female students in Faculty of Arts And Social Sciences of the Taraba State University, which has the largest population of all other Faculties. The questionnaire was designed and divided into three sections, encompassing section 'A' Demography, section 'B' research questions and section 'C' Likert scale questions. Results revealed that Facebook is the most commonest of all the social networking sites used by Taraba State University female students in accessing information on health related issues. The study further revealed that social networking site is an effective means of communicating health-related matters. The study recommends among other things that, students should employ the use of social networking site to avert the spread of sicknesses and diseases so as to control, manage and avoid becoming a victim.

**Keywords:** social media, health, women, diffusion, empowerment.

## 1. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

A lot of criticism has been leveled at social media and the effect it has on the way students process and retain information, as well as how distracting it can be. However, social media offers plenty of opportunities for learning and interactivity, and if you take a moment to think about it, it's not too hard to see how students benefit from using social media. As younger generations use such technology, they remake the educational landscape. Students are experiencing the world through more than just books and assignments; they are learning and adapting to the world using a relatively new form of communication (Baker, 2013; [www.edudemic.com](http://www.edudemic.com)).

It is clear that the role social media play in the lives of people at all facets of life cannot be overemphasized. Social media has become so

important that some people feel not comfortable when they don't put it to use. It's companionship and the interactivity nature makes it so important that people think they cannot do without it. This goes with the word 'knowledge is power' because all and sundry employ the use of social media in the market school, communication and even in transportation.

Social media today is seen as the latest form of communication that allows individual and group to witness another level of communication among themselves which enables collaborative and co-operative work. Although the term social media seems to be complex, Fuchs(2014), puts it as a tool for collaborative work which involve three level of sociality, which are cognition, communication and community, which covers the process of mental knowledge, and the use of diverse forms of sociality on the internet in the context of the society as an integrated platform which permits the flow of the media and its information in another way.

Cacioppo (2009), points out that craving for social network may be as a result of loneliness and also the feelings of insensitivity to disconnection, therefore, adding that there is need for adding the right social network which will profit the person and by so doing avoiding any form of danger it may present to the person. This implies that social networking for a specific purpose can be profitable than when used for general purpose.

Social networking has been of great assistance to students, schools and university programs and the social networking differs based on states and educational levels. While some nations restrict its use by banning social networks sites, the emphasis is made on it that it can as well enhance opportunities for formal learning across geographical context. Hence it can be referred to as the collective online communication channels which are dedicated to community-based input, which help in interaction, content sharing and collaboration which has earlier been mention.

It is a new communication form that offers opportunities for health promotion which could increase the quality of life and decrease healthcare cost. 3.5 billion pieces of content were estimated to be shared on

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Face book every week in 2010 when the site had 600 million registered users (searchenginge journal, 2010)

"Social media provide health care professionals the tools to share information, to debate health care policy and practice issues, to promote health behaviors, to engage with the public, and to educate and interact with patients, caregivers, students, and colleagues. They can also use social media to potentially improve health outcomes, develop a professional network, increase personal awareness of news and discoveries, motivate patients, and provide health information to the community" (Ventola, 2014).

This implies that through social media people get educated as well as acquainted to certain health related issues. It is, therefore, a means of educating the educated and the uneducated. Rishante and Gambo (2012), stress that social networking has overtaken other means of communication, such as radio, television, and print. This implies that attention has been shifted from the mainstream to this latest means of communication.

It is on this premise that the researchers examine the benefits of employing social media in accessing health related matters by female students of Taraba State University. Burrowing into how a group of persons, individual can have access to information not necessary consulting their physician or meeting face to face before handling health-related issues.

## II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Over the years people only go to the hospital for consultation but with the advent of modern technology, consultation is now readily available online. People now have access to health information which has served as an alternative to face to face consultation with a Physician or a Doctor. The level, method and platform of social media to be used for accessing health-related matters by female students of tertiary institutions still remain a pertinent problem. Although social media has come to stay, the way and manner in which it can be used for accessing health issues still remain an issue of concern among female youths today.

## III. AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The work is aimed at considering the benefits of using social media as a tool for effective accessing of health information. The study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To find out the platforms the female students of Taraba State University employ in accessing social media
2. To ascertain how credible female students regard the health-related information received through the social media
3. To examine the benefits of using social media for health information

## IV. SCOPE AND LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The study is restricted to only female students of Taraba State University, students population is 5000. In the Faculty of Arts and Social Science, we have 1500 students and out of which 752 are female, which is the population, being the largest of all the Faculties in the University.

## V. REVIEW OF RELATED STUDIES

The social media which earlier was mentioned on how it worked has presented a lot of reasons why some people depend on it for their day to day information and reliability, the Health affairs Organisation (2016) posits that "Social media tools bring the advantages of 'flatter', more democratic, and presumably more effective communication networks to healthcare". In Africa we believe that health is wealth, this implies that when you are healthy, you will be able to accomplish a lot of things which include the chatting and even holding the gadgets use for communication. And so our health needs to be taken into consideration of managing it or controlling of sicknesses and diseases before they go out of hand and some related information for healthy living which may include our dieting and the exercise which we may engage in for healthy physical fitness.

Health when discussed, is the level of metabolic efficiency of a living organism, this presents itself as one of the important aspects of life. That is, when you are healthy you function mentally and otherwise can surf the net.

Social networking as earlier mentioned came with its dynamics which enable the different aspects of life to be touched. The integration of social network can be seen in the world and in developing countries of the world. It encompasses academic, transportation, business, and even restaurant employ its use to meet up with the trend of the 21st century way of life.

Women are considered as focus in this study because the institute for women and research reveals that women have died of some certain ailment which they don't have enough information on, between 2001 to 2013, so the need to proffer solution to these problems like cancer, heart disease and the need to look into that which concerns women and girls in their communities is paramount. Marzuki, (2015) noticed that since 1990, other developing countries of the world have also realized the role Information and Communication Technology plays in Health information, adding that it strengthens communication.

Marzuki pointed that the following health related Ministries were introduced in Malaysia Ministries of health to cater for their people's online health need, referred to as (TELEHEALTH), which was introduced as Multimedia Super-corridor (MSC), Lifetime Health Plan

(LHP), Teleconsultation(TC), Mass Customised Personalised Health Information and Education . (MCPH IE) and Continuing Medical Education (CME)part oftheir Federal Government's project all geared towards encouraging the people to participate with health care professionals in managing people's health and sickness.

It is to this point that Nigerian Government also wants to improve on their use of social networking on health related matters. No wonder the[ Health Affairs 28, no.2 (2009):361-363;10.1377/hltaff.28.2.361]recorded in Brooklyn New York, has a special online services which they can attend to people online via website which they can stay in touch with their patient through the instant messaging platform, these are as a result of advancement in technology.

The Nigerian Government have realized the need to forge ahead with the present technological erato enable it to manage its Health sector well. No wonder on the 15th of September, 2016 the Health Minister Isaac Adewoleinaugurates a committee to strategize on e-Health,supporting the advancement of technology in the aspect of health, Heemphasize on the need to move along with technology. He asserts that:

We see technology playing a critical role in achieving government's target of making 10,000 primary Healthcare centers functional across the country in the next 2 years.The world is changing, and we cannot afford to lag behind; let's take a giant step forward to transform our health sector; and let's use ICT to advance telemedicine (Enejeta , 2016)

In a related development, Phan et .al (2016), adds that the internet is seen as an important means through source of Health Information are gotten. It is also seen to be an appropriate channel stressing that the prevalence of health activity online is credible which can easily cover large number of persons that are not willing to participate in public exercise, pointing that the advancement in mobile technology, has given another opportunity to which it can support healthy behaviour through lifestyle of monitoring and online communities.

## VI. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### a) Health Belief Model

This was propounded by Rosen Stock (1977). This theory postulates that individuals are motivated to take positive action and promote their health due to a desire to avoid negative health outcomes (Jerome, 2013). Relating this theory to this work, students who use social media for health related information/matters take positive action to promote their health. If they see the benefits derive from taking precautionary measures as stipulated on social media they will be moved to carry out certain actions to promote their health. For example during the Ebola virus, different social media platforms sensitize the masses on how to safeguard themselves and many of them abided by such precautionary

measures because it is beneficial to them. As the theory postulates, individuals are moved to carry or abide by certain information on media (Social media) if it will help them health wise.

## VII. METHODOLOGY

Quantitative survey research was used for the work. According to Nwodu (2006:67) "survey is are search method, which focuses on a representative sample derived from the entire population of study. A researcher who employs this method, therefore, goes into the field and selects samples out of the entire population. It has to do with administering questionnaires personally to gather data and collect them back from the various respondents in order to analyze the data for a better result".

The area of the study is Taraba State University located at Jalingo metropolis of Nigeria which has four faculties namely, Arts and social sciences, Education, Sciences and Agric which has 5000 population.

Data were entered on SPSS " Statistical Package for the Social Sciences"version 21 . The missing value is minimal as only two out of the 100 questionnaires were not duly filled .The analysis of survey respondents are presented based on descriptive statistics with tools such as simple percentages and frequency counts and was presented in tables.

## VIII. RESULTS ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

From the 100 copies of the questionnaires that were distributed,only 98 copies were properly filled and returned.This shows that the response rate is highat 98%. The results revealed that there are more undergraduate female students than the graduate students which represents 94.9% .

The target sample for the study is female users of social networking sites in Taraba State University Jalingo. The students for the sample were drawn from the Faculty of Arts and Social Science which were randomly selected from the Eight Departments; Mass communication, Geography, Languages and Linguistics, Christian Religious Studies, others are Islamic Religious studies, Political Science, History and Sociology and Anthropology. The researchers used this faculty because it houses the highest number of students in the institution.

From the conducted survey, out of 98 Respondents, (n=93)making 94.9% are singles and (n=5) 5.1% are married. Virtually half of the respondents (n=58) with about 59.2% are between the age limit of 16-24 , while 25-33 of age, respondents (n= 35) with 35.7% ,while 34-42years, (n=4) 4.1% and 43 and above with (n= 1) 1%. On Academic Status, (n=93) 94.9% are undergraduate students , (n=5) 5.1% of the respondents are post graduate students.

Table 1: Demographic information of respondents

Categories	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Marital status				
Married	5	5.1	5.1	94.9
Single	93	94.9	94.9	100.00
Age Difference				
16-24	58	59.2	59.2	59.2
25-33	35	35.7	35.7	94.9
34-42	4	4.1	4.1	99.0
43 above	1	1.0	1.0	
Academic Status				
Undergraduate	93	94.9	94.9	94.9
Post graduate	5	5.1	5.1	100.00

Source: Field Survey 2016.

Demography encompasses marital status, age, and the academic status because the research is on female students so the researchers did not ask for gender.

Table 1 shows that 5 respondents, representing 5.1% were married, while 94.9 were single representing 94.9%. This implies that singles respondents responded more or the singles are more in school than the married. Hence may be as result of some factors that may militate their going to school as married women saddled with some responsibilities at home.

And on the age, from the table above, 58 respondents representing 59.2% are between the age

range of 16-24, 35 respondents, representing 35.7% are between the age range of 25-33, while 4 of the respondents representing 4.1% are in the age range of 34-42, and just one person is represented to be above 43 years with 1 representing 1.0%.

Based on the table, 93 of the respondents representing 94.9 % are undergraduate while 5 of the respondents are post graduate represented by 5.1% as seen above, meaning the undergraduate outnumbered the post graduate as this rightly agrees with the age difference.

Table 2: Networking platforms used by the respondents

Platforms	Frequencies	percentage
Facebook	53	54.1
WhatsApp	14	14.3
Snapchat	5	5.1
All of the above	28	26.5
Total	98	100

Source: Field Survey 2016.

Table 2 shows the different networking platforms the respondent make use of, 53 respondents representing 54.1% uses facebook, as 14 of the respondents uses WhatsApp representing 14.3%, 5 of

the respondent uses snapchat representing 5.1% and 28 of the respondents representing 26.5 % make use of the 3 platforms.

Table 3: Years of using the Internet

Duration	Frequencies	Percentage
Less than 1 year	3	3.1
1 year	3	3.1
2-5 years	58	59.2
6-9 years	28	28.6
10 years above	6	1.1%
Total	98	6.1%

Source: Field Survey 2016.



Table 3 shows the duration at which the respondents have exposed themselves to internet/social media. 3 respondents have used social media for less than 1 year representing 3.1%, 3 respondents responded that they have used the social network for 1 year representing 3.1%. While 58 of the respondents

which represent 59.2% says they have been using it for about 2-5 years, while 28 of the respondents representing 28.6% have been using the internet for 6-9 years and 6 of the respondents representing 6.1% have been using it for 10 years

*Table 4:* Hours spent on social networks

Hours	Frequencies	Percentage
Less than 1 hour	32	32.7
1 hour to 4 hours	52	53.1
5 hours to 8 hours	6	6.1
9 hours and above	8	8.2
Total	98	100

*Source: Field Survey 2016.*

Table 4 above shows the number of hours the respondents expose themselves to the social network. 32 of the respondents representing 32.7% uses social network for less than 1 hour a day, 52 of the respondents representing 53.1% use social networks for

1 to 4 hours daily, it was also revealed that just 6 of the respondent use the social network representing 6.1%, and 8 of the respondent use the social network for 9 hours representing 8.2 %.

*Table 5:* Social network is a credible source of health information

Variables	Frequencies	Percentage
Strongly agreed	34	34.7
Agree	37	37.8
Undecided	6	6.1
Disagree	10	10.2
Strongly disagree	11	11.2
Total	98	100

*Source: Field Survey 2016.*

Table 5 above ascertain the credibility of social media on providing health information. 34 of the respondents representing 34.7% strongly agree that social media is credible, while 37 of the respondents which represent 37.8 % agree, 6 respondents representing 6.1% remained undecided. Source: Field

Survey 2016. 10 respondents, representing 10.2 % disagree while 11 respondents making 11.2 strongly disagree. This implies that information on health diffused through the social networking sites are credible. This means Health related information online are credible.

*Table 6:* There is a high benefit of using social media to diffuse Health-related Information.

Variables	Frequencies	Percentage
Strongly agree	35	35.7
Agree	38	38.8
Undecided	4	4.1
Disagree	14	14.3
Strongly disagree	7	7.1
Total	98	100

*Source: Field Survey 2016.*

Table 6 shows that there is a high benefit of using social media to diffuse health related information. 35 of the respondents representing 35.7% strongly agree that they benefit from the health matters on the social network, while 38 respondent representing 38.8% agree that they derive benefits on health matters

on social media, 4 respondents remained undecided representing 4.1%. 14 respondents representing 14.3% disagree as to whether there is any benefit derived from social media on health matters, 7 respondents representing 7.1 % strongly disagree that there is a benefit derived on social media on health

matters. This implies that there is health information that female users have benefited from on social media. This means that social media provides health-related information and the respondents have benefitted from it.

*What are the gains derived in using social media for accessing health issues ?*

The study enquired from the respondents to narrate the benefits they derive from social media in terms of information on health. Majority of the respondents 65% opine that social media platform such as Face book and Twitter has increased their awareness on the certain outbreak of diseases in their society. They postulated that when Ebola came into the country at some point in time, social media was so much utilized by health care professionals as well as students on campuses; displaying preventive and precautionary measures on walls and blogs. This sensitizes them on the need to be very hygienic and careful in order to prevent and control diseases.

Other sets of the respondents were with the view that social media has increased their knowledge on certain diseases and viruses such as HIV, Diabetes, Hypertension etc. Through social media platforms, they get updates on recent drugs that could be used to combat different ailment in the society.

The respondents also pointed out that through social media they get health tips; this enables them to leave a healthy life, thereby, stopping intakes of certain diets that could be harmful to the body. As far as these crops of respondents are, social media provides them with balance diet information that would improve their health.

Other section of the respondents submit that through social media they have been able to share and tailor information on health matters for others to benefit from, some agree to have different blogs on Face book through which millions have been enlightened and sensitized on the need to take precautionary measures in order to develop mentally and physically and to improve the hygiene of one's environment.

This comment shows that social media is a tool in the hands of not only the female gender but all who are willing to harness its relative advantages.

## IX. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS/CONCLUSION

Deducing from the data gathered, presented and analyzed in this study is it glaring that social media networks have an impact on the lives of female users of Taraba State University on health related issues. This shows that the female users benefit from using social media when it comes to health related matters. This can be seen in *Table 1*, which reveals that the undergraduate students benefit more than the graduate students as the age shows that female students at the age of 16 to 24 are more active users of the networking sites than students above that age group. And the true reflection of

what is obtainable in schools, female students at the age of 16-24 represented by 94.9% are more active against the married ones which usually are fewer.

As revealed by the study, facebook is the commonest of the entire platform used by the respondents as seen in *Table 2*, 54.1% of the respondents' uses that platform which is half of the population. Nowadays there is no one even in a house that does not make use of the social networking site either for family communication, business or even hospital consultation.

Going by the outcome of the results, it was gathered on the level of exposure, 58 respondents agreed that they have been exposing themselves to social media messages on health issues for about 2-5 years as it is seen in *Table 3*.

On grounds of credibility, results reveal that female users are dependent on social media because it is credible, 34.7% agreed that it is credible and can be used to empower the female students to manage, control sicknesses and diseases. This is seen on *Table 5* above, the strongly agree and the agree have a little difference which is believed that it is credible. This is in agreement with the word of Phan et.al that (2016), that the internet is seen as an important means through which it provides source of Health Information as it is also seen to be an appropriate channel stressing that the prevalence of health activity online is credible which can easily cover large number of persons that are not willing to participate in public exercise, pointing that the advancement in mobile technology, has given another opportunity through which people can access information to help solve problems.

The study also reveals that there is a high benefit of using social media to diffuse Health-related Information. As a related study revealed social media "is a new communication form that offers opportunities for health promotion which could increase the quality of life and decrease healthcare cost. 3.5 billion pieces of content were estimated to be shared on Facebook every week in 2010 when the site had 600 million registered users" (searchengingejournal, 2010).

The study reveals that social media platform such as Facebook and Twitter has increased female students of Taraba state University's awareness on the certain outbreak of diseases. For instance, the outbreak of Ebola and Lassa fever was matched by different social media blogs that show precautionary and preventive measures. As the study reveals, health care professionals as well as students on campuses utilized this medium, thereby, displaying preventive and precautionary measures on walls and blogs.

Social media as revealed has broadened the knowledge of students on certain diseases and viruses such as HIV, Diabetes, and Hypertension etc. Through social media platforms, they get updates on recent

drugs that could be used to combat different ailment in the society. This is related to Bailey et-al (2010) who submits that “numerous Internet-based health interventions have been developed, with several reviews concluding that such interventions generally have positive effects for a range of behaviors”

It is a new communication form that offers opportunities for health promotion which could increase the quality of life and decrease healthcare cost. 3.5 billion pieces of content were estimated to be shared on Facebook every week in 2010 when the site had 600 million registered users (searchengingejournal, 2010). “Social media provide health care professionals the tools to share information, to debate health care policy and practice issues, to promote health behaviors, to engage with the public, and to educate and interact with patients, caregivers, students, and colleagues. They can also use social media to potentially improve health outcomes, develop a professional network, increase personal awareness of news and discoveries, motivate patients, and provide health information to the community.” (Ventola, 2014).

The study further reveals that through social media, female students get health tips; this enables them to leave a healthy life, thereby, stopping the intake of certain diets that could be harmful to the body.

## X. RECOMMENDATIONS

Having explicated the benefits of using social media in accessing health related matters, this study recommends among others things that:

- 1) Women and girls can do themselves good if they have access to social media, try as much to get information through it that are of benefit to them in managing their health and controlling their body system before seeing a consultant.
- 2) Women and girls are encouraged based on the report of Status For Women Data to exercise the more, eat more of fruits and vegetables to ensure prevention of these diseases, since they hardly have access o information, this way they can prevent sicknesses that they areeasily prone to like cancer, and heart attack.
- 3) Students should employ the use of social networking site to avert the spread of sicknesses and diseases so as to control, manage and avoid becoming a victim.

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