ABSTRACT

This study investigates the uses and gratification of the Internet among students in the Department of Mass Communication, Delta State University (DELSU) Abraka. The study became necessary following the influx of and increase in the use of the Internet in education, which portends functional as well as dysfunctional roles on students if not properly handled. Hence, the need to empirically evaluate uses and gratification of the Internet by students. Findings show that students in the Department of Mass Communication, DELSU Abraka, are heavy users of the Internet despite their low level of technological knowledge in the use of the Internet. Also, it was found that the students use the Internet to send e-mails, gather information for educational purposes and to chat despite being occasionally hampered by network failure. Therefore, the study concludes that students are not affected by dysfunctional roles of the Internet. Hence, the programme curriculum of the Department of Mass Communication, DELSU, Abraka, be reviewed to incorporate a broader study of the Internet in order to boost the technical knowledge of the students. Nevertheless, the study recommends that Nigerian government should work out a workable framework that would ensure that Internet Service Providers in Nigeria tackle the incessant network failure so that users of the Internet get value for the subscription of Internet services.

Keywords: Communication, Education, Gratification, Internet, Nigeria, Technology

INTRODUCTION

The 20th century witnessed a lot of revolutionary developments in communication and science and technology. These contemporary advances and innovations in the fields of communication, science and technology have led to the emergence of new technologies. New technologies here denote significant technological developments that have changed entirely the world of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). ICTs cover any product that
store, retrieve, manipulate, transmit or receive information electronically in digital form. In fact, ICTs are computer enabled communication technologies with special features such as connectivity, interactivity and multimedia necessary for the production, communication and transmission of information. One overwhelming and magnificent Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in this 21st century is the Internet.

The Internet is a network of computer networks covering the entire world as long as there is a connection and requisite infrastructure in place. Pearson, Nelson, Tibsworth and Haster (2003) note that the Internet is a network of interconnected computers and computer networks. Adegoke (2009) adds that the Internet is a virtual library which is seen as virtual space containing a vast amount of information and documents including books, pictures, video, graphics and musical sounds that can be consulted. The Internet, Udende and Azeez (2010) write, is a collection of computers and computer networks located all over the world.

Furthermore, the Internet is a global network offering range of services governed by different protocols such as the World Wide Web (WWW) etc. It has been around for over 20 years as a network for Defense Department and Scientific communication. But today it has become an unlimited and powerful channel of communication and information retrieval and dissemination. The Internet has also revolutionized the way in which societies interact, conduct business, communicate and how students conduct research even though Ebersole (2000) study showed that many of the students sampled also used the Internet for other purposes other than research.

Nevertheless, the Internet enables people to produce, access, adapt and apply information in greater amounts more rapidly and at reduced costs and also it offers enormous opportunities for enhancing business and education. The Internet is considered increasingly important in virtually all aspects of human endeavour (Severin & Tankard, 2001). This is true because the Internet provides different types of information through networking globally to affirm its name as information superhighway. It allows greater flexibility and working hours irrespective the user’s location, especially with the spread of high speed connections. This is because the Internet can be accessed from anywhere by numerous means/devices, mobile phones and computers among others as long as there is a connection.

The use of the Internet has been extended and embraced by many institutions in Nigeria. This is because there is a general belief that the Internet would lead institutions to the promise land. This notwithstanding, the Internet is a two-edged sword. It has several dysfunctional roles that may affect its users especially the young/youths like students. With the Internet for instance, students in a classroom may dedicate most of their focus on sex sites, pornography, violence and other social vices sites. In view of this, Sparks (2002) states that at no time in human history has sexually explicit media been as readily available as it is today. We owe that fact-good or bad to the Internet.

This raises some interesting questions regarding the use of the Internet in an educational context. Even students who seek out educational content on the Internet may be thwarted by the very attributes heralded by the Internet proponents. Would this attribute of the Internet not daunt its functional uses among students? Or would what they hope to achieve (gratification) in using the Internet propel them positively? More so, studies like Ebersole (2000) have shown that most students, who visited Internet sites frequently, visited sites that are not educational. It is against this background that this study seeks to ascertain the uses and gratification of the Internet among students in the Department of Mass Communication, Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Internet is eagerly and easily adopted by all in the educational sector administrators, teachers, lecturers, scholars, researchers and
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