

Internet Using Habit Among Junior High School Students of Nima, Accra - Ghana

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ABSTRACT: *Ghana is currently considered as one of the growing countries in terms of Internet usage in West Africa. Since the introduction of the Internet, its use has grown tremendously among students at all levels, right from the primary schools to the universities. Studies have shown that in developed countries, adolescents and the youth for that matter go online to find information about health and to conduct academic researches; however, little is known about the online practices of youth from developing countries. It is no secret that students use the Internet for social, entertainment, and educational purposes. This study's purpose is to explore and provide current information, drawn from Junior High School students in Ghana's capital city of Accra, on the reasons for the use of the Internet and their ability to readily access it. The study uses a quantitative survey design to collect data from 255 respondents on the purpose of Internet use and the level of access. Findings from the study indicate that most of the respondents use the Internet for assignments while a significant number say they have no difficulty in accessing the Internet.*

KEYWORDS: *Internet, Junior High School Students, Academic Use, Nima, Accra*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the last few years, the use of the Internet in Ghana and the world in general has seen a dramatic increase. The Internet is used for various purposes, from surfing for pleasure, to finding information. Its use varies from user to user but all geared towards one aim, to fulfill a personal 'uses and gratification'. The availability of the Internet, its ease of use, and the numerous needs it can answer immediately, have turned it into a key player in the cultural and social life of the 21st century man.

An understanding of Internet usage assumes considerable importance as society encounters problematic forms of online behavior. These include both instances of excessive use, in the form of what scholars term Internet [10] and underutilization by disadvantaged groups also generally termed the Digital Divide. The Internet is a global linking of

computers that allows information transfer. Ani defines it as a network of linked computers stationed at different places all over the world to provide easy communication between persons and organizations no matter where they are located [5].

In this era, now referred to as Information and Communication Technology (ICT) age, the Internet and its usage has become the order of the day. Countries, including both the developed and the developing (like Ghana) are not exempted from this era.

Internet access and usage in the world has been multiplying year by year, with approximately 1.11 billion users in 2007, 1.67 billion in 2009, and 1.97 billion in 2010 [12], indicating an upward trend in the number of people moving along with this digital age. Such a rapid growth has been interacted with people's needs and motivation.

Ghana is not left out in this Internet revolution. Indeed, Ghana can be said to be rapidly developing as an information technology hub in West Africa. According to a 2005 statistics from the United Nations Statistics Division, Ghana had approximately 170,000 Internet users compared with its neighbors Burkina Faso and Cote D'Ivoire, which had 25,000 and 90,000 users, respectively [23].

The Internet in Ghana went commercial in terms of access by January 1995, and it is estimated that in Accra there are over 150 cybercafés [2], where usage now costs less than GH ₵1: 00 per hour. Many Ghanaians, including the youth now make the cybercafé their places of getting all types of information and for socialization. This has made the cybercafé business very lucrative (the numbers of these cybercafés keep rising by the day). In Nima (a suburb of Accra) for example, hardly would one pass through any street without seeing a cybercafé. Individuals, who have their personal computers and would not want to visit such cybercafés, buy Internet

modems being powered by telecommunications networks.

In view of the increasing use of the Internet in Ghana, it will be significant to study the extent to which it is being used by the Ghanaian youth, using Nima as the point of reference.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM AND OBJECTIVES

The arrival of the Internet has changed the reach of the world making it what is now called the global village. Apart from the Internet being a fast medium of accessing information and even getting entertained and socialized, it is also useful in conducting businesses of different kinds. Its usefulness seems to manifest greatly in the academic circles too, where students and tutors use the Internet for research and relaxation.

Indeed, Brain and Leon & Rotunda conclude that the results of frequent Internet use, particularly among students, have become a highly controversial issue [9] [15]. This, he explains to mean that there is no consensus on what exactly the Internet is used for among a targeted group of people. This, he says, is probably due to the limited amount of research on the subject. He, therefore, recommends that many more studies be done to include the reasons for the use of the Internet and other consequences of its use.

This study, therefore, is an academic response to Brain to find out what the youth of Nima, a suburb of Accra, use the Internet for [9]. The specific objectives of this study include the following:

- Discover the purpose of Internet use among the youth of Nima and;
- Investigate the level of access the youth of Nima have to the Internet;

III. THEORY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The main theory in which this study is situated is the Uses and Gratification. Uses and Gratifications Theory assume that audiences actively seek out media in a goal-directed way that provides them with the means of gratifying a wide variety of needs. Gratifications sought, however, do not in themselves predict media behavior; they have far greater explanatory power when compared with the gratifications obtained.

Uses and gratifications are perhaps the dominant paradigm for explaining media exposure in the field of communication studies. It has been applied to a wide range of conventional mass media as well as to interpersonal communication and now to the Internet.

Scholars such as Roy argue that the Uses and Gratifications Theory can be a starting point for studying students' Internet usage in real surfing behavior [9]. Based on Roy's assertion, the present study adopted the Uses and Gratification theory to investigate how the youth in Nima, a suburb of Accra, use the Internet [9].

Schneider *et al* argue that the Internet is used, among others, for communication, research, entertainment, education and business transactions [19]. Ucak studied the Internet using habit of the Department of Information Management of Hacettepe University, Ankara and found that the students preferred electronic media to print media in seeking information and they mainly used the Internet to do homework and prepare for their lessons. He also claims that the students found the Internet's easy access to information more important than its other features [21].

Consistent with the assertions of the above scholars, Suryani explored new media usage among Indonesian students in Australian universities and found that the Internet has become an important source of information which students use to support their learning processes [20]. Suryani also confirms that learning processes are influenced by new communication technologies but that the impacts are complicated depending on the users and their usage patterns [20].

On their part, Griffiths and Donald report that based on 186 million Internet users in the US, the most common category of information sought through the Internet is related to personal or family information needs (89%), followed by work-related needs (47%), and education needs (18.1%). They claim that the users' need for information could fall into several categories such as personal, medical and work-related information needs [13]. Griffiths and Donald further assert that in 2006, the Internet was accessed about 7.5 billion times to seek education related information and that the Internet was used more for educational purposes by teachers (25%) than by students (15%) [13].

The Internet offers significant advantages for its users in sharing and collecting information, searching for jobs, communication, and entertainment. According

to Rice the Internet provides its users with the latest news of the world and most of the newspapers are available on the Internet, which are periodically or immediately updated with the latest news [18]. Thus, Internet users can almost instantaneously learn about news events, read news articles or opinions about world events, and share this information and their own thoughts with others. Again, aside the range of search engines that are used to search for jobs on the Internet, Metzger claimed that most organizations/departments advertise their vacancies on the Internet which can inure to the benefit of Internet users [16].

Also, people around the world can now quickly communicate with each other through the Internet using a range of applications: chatting, video conferencing, email, and Internet. The Internet also provides different types of entertainment [24]. Internet users can play games with other people in any part of the world, watch movies and listen to music. Internet users can form new relationships on the Internet [11].

Gross also found that adolescents use the Internet to facilitate social interactions (e-mailing, chatting, and instant messaging) [14]. In line with this assertion, Borzekowski and Asante reported that in-school Internet users in Ghana use the Internet mostly to e-mail other people [8]. They also added that the less popular but still prevalent uses of the Internet for the youth they studied are visiting chat rooms and checking online boards (29.2%) and instant messaging with friends (22.8%).

The revelations above motivated the researcher to find out if the youth in Nima mostly uses the Internet to send emails, do assignments, and chat with friends or for other purposes. The study also goes further to establish, in the light of the assertions that Internet users in Ghana are increasing, to find out how easy it is for respondents to access it (the Internet).

IV. METHODOLOGY

A. RESEARCH DESIGN

This study uses a quantitative survey design. Researchers, such as Wimmer & Domick, claim that the use of numbers in quantitative research allows greater precision in reporting results, hence the choice of this method [25].

Wimmer & Domick again posit that surveys allow a large amount of data to be collected with relative ease from a variety of people [25]. It enables researchers

to examine many variables (demographic and lifestyle information, attitudes, motives, intentions and so on) and to use a variety of statistics to analyze the data. The survey method relies on a questionnaire instrument and is the most common method used in social science research library and information science research [7] and for studies of Uses and Gratification [17].

B. SAMPLING

Cluster sampling was employed to recruit the population of students within the catchment area of the study. Cluster sampling usually applies to large populations or geographical areas (Kolb, 2008). For example, if a sample needs to be drawn from a large city, the city can be divided into smaller areas (clusters), like residential blocks. Specific residential blocks are then randomly selected – from which the sample is selected. This process was adopted for the current study to select two schools out of the total number of schools located within the Nima community.

In order to ensure that the sample selected for the study is representative enough, a systematic random sampling technique was used to select 255 students from the selected schools. Wimmer & Domick posited that systematic random sampling is advantageous because its selection procedure can be accurate, generally easy and less expensive [25]. Systematic random samples were used by choosing all even numbers from the schools' register, starting from 2 and adding a sampling interval of 2 in that sequence. The survey instrument, the questionnaire, was also pre-tested to ensure reliability. The data, as collected, was coded and analyzed using SPSS statistical software to develop descriptive and inferential statistics.

V. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. PURPOSE OF INTERNET USE BY THE YOUTH OF NIMA

Al-Harbi noted that students are becoming dependent on the Internet for academic needs due to such perceived advantages as immediate gratification in obtaining information, convenience, ease of use, independence, and privacy [3]. This assertion, coupled with that of other scholars such as Asemi that students' main purpose for using the Internet is for research, motivated the researcher to find out what the youth, mostly students, of Nima use the Internet for [6]. Table 1 summarizes the finding.

Table 1: Internet Use

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Assignment	127	49.8
Chatting	91	35.7
Search Friends	8	3.1
Read News Stories	15	5.9
File Sharing and Downloading	9	3.5
Others	5	2.0
Total	255	100.0

Table 1 above shows that of the 255 youth sampled for the study, close to half (49.8%) used the Internet to do their assignments, 35.7% use it to chat with family and friends and 5.9% read news stories on the Internet. The statistics from the data as presented in Table 1 revealed that most of the youth use the Internet for academic purposes.

This finding is in line with the assertion of Ucak that students preferred electronic media to print media in seeking information and they mainly used the Internet to do homework and prepare for their lessons [21]. It is also consistent with that of Suryani that the Internet has become an important source of information which Indonesian students use to support their learning processes [20].

Udende claimed that the majority (80.9%) of Nigerian students he studied used the Internet for academic purposes [22]. Similarly, the current study also found that almost half (49.8%) of the youth in Nima uses the Internet to do their assignments. Perhaps, the finding of this study and those conducted earlier by other scholars point to the fact as indicated by Adegoke that, the Internet is a virtual library containing a vast amount of information and documents including books, pictures, video, graphs and musical sounds that can be consulted [1].

The fact that respondents differ in terms of purpose of Internet usage is also in line with the Uses and Gratification theory which states, among others, that people use the media to achieve various gratification purposes.

B. INTERNET ACCESS

With Internet access, the analysis of the data collected suggests that most of the youth in Nima does not have much problem in getting access to the Internet. Table 2 presents the analysis.

Table 2 Internet Access

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	94	36.9
Agree	89	34.9
Neither Agree nor Disagree	42	16.5
Strongly Disagree	6	2.4
Disagree	23	9.0
Total	254	99.6
Missing System	1	.4
Total	255	100.0

Out of the 255 youth sampled for the study, 71.8% claimed they don't find it difficult accessing the Internet at their various designated places. Of this number, close to 40 percent (36.9%) strongly agree that they find it very easy to access the Internet anytime they wish to be online and the rest 34% just agreed on the assertion. Significantly, only 11.4% of the respondents complained of having problem in having access to the Internet.

The finding of the study is not surprising as, as far back as 2004, Ahiabenu estimated that Accra had over 150 cybercafés. This number has increased and all corners of Nima today have at least one cyber café [2]. The result of this study and the statistics cited above contrast with the situation reported by Suryani's that in Indonesia, most internet users had difficulties securing Internet access and where access was possible, they had problems with connections [20].

VI. CONCLUSION

This study used a quantitative survey to investigate Internet usage among the Junior High School students of Nima, a suburb of Accra. The findings have been presented and discussed above. One of the research objectives was to find out what the respondents mostly use the Internet for. The results of the study show that the majority of them (49.8%) used the Internet for academic purposes while a sizeable number (35.7%) of them used it to chat with families and friends.

Again, this study established that a significant number of respondents (71.8%) claimed they don't find it difficult accessing the Internet at their various designated places. This finding is a plus to the growth of Internet in Ghana as more and more people continually get access to the Internet. It is however significant to state that most of the respondents access the Internet from Cybercafés.

Ghana as a country must make a conscious effort to get schools in the country connected to the Internet so that no student will be left behind in this digital age.

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