

Short Communication

The Impact of Internet Usage: A case study of Delta State (Nigeria) tertiary institutions

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The Internet is one of the greatest recent advancement in the world of information technology and has become a useful instrument that has fostered the process of making the world a global village. However, despite the added benefits of the Internet to learning, teaching and research, there is no provision of effective Internet services in most of the tertiary institutions in Delta State. The objective of this study was to evaluate the impact of the Internet for learning, teaching and research in institutions of higher learning in Delta State. Questionnaires were administered to students and staff in four tertiary institutions within the State. The results from the analysis of the responses showed that students and staff use Internet mainly for on-line chatting (24.89%) and e-mail (24.16%). The use of Internet as a source of research materials ranked third (23.21%). This study concludes that research would significantly improve through proper enlightenment, formal training on the use of Internet and provision of effective Internet services in tertiary institutions in Delta State.

Key word: Internet, institutions, research, e-mail.

INTRODUCTION

The Internet provides several opportunities for the academia. It is a mechanism for information dissemination and a medium for collaborative interaction between individuals and their computers without regard for geographic limitation of space (Leiner et al., 2000; Singh, 2002). The word Internet is derived from two words: "international" and "network". The Internet therefore can be defined as an international computer network of information available to the public through modem links (Basssey, 2003). According to Lagos (2003), the Internet is a worldwide system of linked computers networks.

The Internet is the world's largest and most widely used network. It is an international network of networks that is a collection of hundreds of thousands of private and public networks all over the world. There are rich and varied learning experiences available on the Internet that would have been inconceivable just a short while ago. The Internet has a range of capabilities that organizations

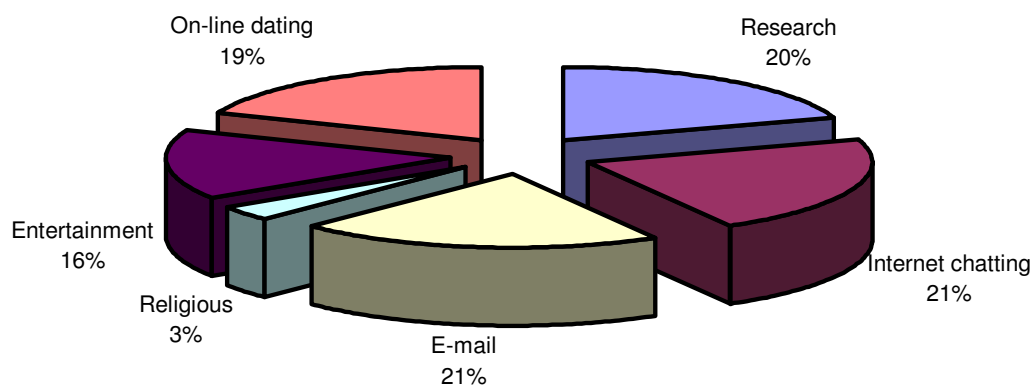
are using to exchange information internally or to communicate externally with other organizations. The primary infrastructure for e-commerce, e-banking, e-business, e-learning and virtual library is provided by the Internet technology. The Internet provides several opportunities for all academia, business organizations, the employed and the unemployed, the young and the old. The Internet is a 'live' constantly 'moving', theoretically borderless, potentially infinite space for the production and circulation of information. The Internet might thus be described as a 'sea of information', containing texts which are not housed between library or bookshop walls and subject areas span across all fields of knowledge.

The Internet can be used for other things besides e-mail. One can listen to international radio station on research and education on the Internet, read national dailies of other countries, speak to friends around the globe, read books and other materials on the Internet. The list of things that can be done on the Internet is a very long one. The Internet contains more information than the world's largest libraries (Emeagwali, 2000). With access to the Internet one can retrieve information from the world's largest information database.

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Table 1. Ranking the services sought for on the Internet.

| Service sought for | Frequency | Sum | Mean score of respondents | Percentage value of mean score |
|--------------------|-----------|-----|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Research | 98/111 | 650 | 5.86 | 19.87% |
| Internet chatting | 102/111 | 710 | 6.40 | 21.70% |
| E-mail | 105/111 | 685 | 6.17 | 20.92% |
| Religious | 18/111 | 106 | 0.95 | 3.22% |
| Entertainment | 60/111 | 508 | 4.58 | 15.53% |
| On-line dating | 51/111 | 614 | 5.53 | 18.75% |

**Figure 1.** Ranking of the services sought for on the Internet.

The Internet has brought tremendous changes to the society and the world at large. The information retrieval in the Internet is relatively fast and accessible 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Despite these advantages, it should be noted that the information found on the Internet has both the useful and the useless co-existing (New Mexico State University Library, 2002). This study was aimed at investigating and evaluating the impact of Internet usage in Institutions of Higher learning in Delta State of Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

This study made use of questionnaire to solicit for information from staff and students of four higher institutions in Delta State of Nigeria namely: Delta State University, Abraka, Delta State Polytechnic, Otefe-Oghara, Petroleum Training Institute, Effurun and College of Education, Warri. One hundred and twenty questionnaires consisting of 13 questions were equally distributed to these 4 institutions and were randomly administered to the staff and students, male and female. A total of 111 questionnaires were returned at the end of the exercise, representing a 92.5% response rate. The data collected was analyzed using SPSS 10.0 and Microsoft Excel 2000.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Services sought for

The respondents were asked to rank in order of importance between the values of 1 and 10 the major

services they sought for on the Internet. Table 1 shows that Internet chatting ranked first as the service sought for on the Internet among staff and students of high institutions in Delta State (21.70%). This was closely followed by e-mail services (20.92%). Using the Internet as a source of research materials ranked third (19.87%). On-line dating ranked fourth (18.75%), followed by entertainment (15.53%) and lastly religious information ranked lowest (3.22%). Ranking of the services sought for on the Internet is depicted in Figure 1.

Table 2 shows that most Internet users are in the age group of 21–23 years, contributing 33 respondents (29.7%). Respondents were also grouped by genders to measure if gender had an influence on Internet usage. Out of the 111 respondents covered in the study, 54% were male and 46% were female. We assume that females are not usually adventurous as males (Table 3).

Therefore, we conclude that more males visit the Internet than the females. 106 (95.5%) of the 111 respondents agreed that Internet technology has significant benefits on the educational systems of Delta State while 5 (4.5%) did not agree to this. This may be due to low level of awareness among these set of students and/or staff. Also 108 (97.3%) respondents agreed that the dividend of Internet technology would be more if there is provision of Internet facilities within the campus. This will bring Internet to the doorstep of every member within the campus community.

Table 2. Number of respondents by age.

| Age groups | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------|-----------|------------|
| 15 – 17 | 7 | 6.3 |
| 18 – 20 | 28 | 25.2 |
| 21 – 23 | 33 | 29.7 |
| 24 – 26 | 19 | 17.1 |
| 27 – 29 | 16 | 14.4 |
| 30 – 32 | 4 | 3.6 |
| 33 – 35 | 1 | 0.9 |
| 36 – 39 | 1 | 0.9 |
| 40 and above | 2 | 1.8 |
| Total | 111 | 100.0 |

Table 3. Number of respondents by gender.

| Gender | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------|-----------|------------|
| Male | 60 | 54.0 |
| Female | 51 | 45.0 |
| Total | 111 | 100.0 |

Conclusion and recommendation

The potential of the Internet as a major tool for globalization and source of materials for academic research and learning is still high. The study has revealed that the present State and level of utilization of the Internet is still very low in tertiary institutions in Delta State. There should be a review of the current school curriculum cutting across primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. The purpose of this review should be to integrate information technology into the mainstream of education and training. The Delta State government should stimulate the private sector most especially the oil/gas companies to invest in research and development (R&D) of IT in our tertiary institutions. This can be achieved by creating special incentive programs to induce investment in IT sector. The State Government should ensure that there is uninterrupted power supply so that IT infrastructure can be properly utilized. Also, the State Government should restructure the educational system at all levels to respond effectively to the challenges and imagined impact of the information age and in particular, the allocation of a special IT development fund to education at all levels. Internet training courses need to be organized at all levels to create awareness of the importance of Internet and to equip staff and students in the institution of higher learning with the necessary skills so that maximum usage can be derived out of this evolving technology. Finally, provision of Internet facilities within our campuses should be a matter of urgency to all stakeholders.

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