

## *Full Length Research*

# **Dynamics of internet usage: A case of students of the Federal University of Technology Owerri (FUTO) Nigeria**

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**The survey was conducted in the Federal University of Technology Owerri (FUTO), Nigeria with a view to identifying the rate and purpose of Internet use by students in order to be well positioned to provide effective Internet services to them. Questionnaire was randomly distributed to 1200 students in their hostels out of which 67.66% was returned. The results were collated and analyzed using tables, frequency and percentages. The work revealed that majority of the students in the University use the Internet for academic purposes in spite of the location of the facility. Students in the management and agricultural sciences use the Internet more than those of engineering and sciences. The distance of the Internet center to the students' residence determines the time spent and the frequency of the visit to the center. Recommendations are made based on the findings.**

**Key Word:** Internet use, students.

## **Introduction**

University education is geared towards the production of a complete intellectual capable of independent learning and research. Prior to the use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) for acquisition, processing and dissemination of information, university teaching, learning and research were restricted to information materials available to students dominical institutions library or by extension, those materials made available through inter-lending. However with globalization through the Internet, Carbo (2003) informed that the world is shrinking resulting to immediacy of information. Thus, multimedia resources can be created, and information can be communicated instantaneously. The mode of acquiring and disseminating information for university education changed from physically available prints to e-materials with virtual reality. As a result of that Akintunde, (2002) asserts that any attempt to have meaningful academic communication can be successful only by the use of ICT which presents information in real time and space.

No wonder youngsters especially students and researchers spent most of their time in cyber café. Where the later is not available in the university community, they risk traveling a further distance to transact one business or another in the Internet. These

members of the university community use the Internet for the facilities it provides which according to Ikoro (2002) include e-mailing, world wide web browsing, telephoning, and telex/video conference. Available also in the Internet are audio broadcasting, news and discussion/chart group facilities. She also included electronic books storing and purchasing, electronic libraries and archiving as part of the facilities. Using these facilities available in the Internet Cisse (2004) noted that students and researchers are disposed to access maximum information and communicate at world level. Thus they can debate democratically and freely while being exposed to happenings in their field of activity as well as other subjects. Chifewepa (2003) and Jagdoro (2004) specified the benefits of Internet to academic community as;

- (a) Quick, global and convenient access and exchange of information with experienced and expert in any field;
- (b) Easy dissemination of research findings;
- (c) Enhanced collaborative research and other activities; and
- (d) Ability to use some software and expand the capability of one's competences.

As an important technology for modern teaching, learning and research, many research works have been carried out to determine, the purpose, rate, proficiency

and impediments to internet use by members of academic community. It is used by students and other members of the various university communities for:

- (1) Entertainments and sports ;
- (2) Academic purposes;
- (3) Correspondences; and
- (4) Social and business purposes.

Such purposes are achieved through accessing and downloading academic material, access and downloading software, visiting other university sites and sending or receiving e-mails. (Ayoku, 2001; Akintunde, 2002; Chifwepa, 2003; and Ibegwam, 2004).

Chiwepe (2003) discovered a high use of Internet by the staff of the University of Zambia where 35 out of 37 staff made use of Internet. Their major motivation for such use is convenience (82.91%); usefulness (80.05%); free access to information and software (71.4%); and ease of use (68.6%). Bao (1998) found out that only 10% of his respondents at the Seton Hall University do not use the Internet, 40.2% of students and researchers use it on daily basis, 38.3% on weekly basis and 10.7% on monthly basis.

Jagdor (2004) in his own research ascertain that 45.2% of postgraduate students access the Internet at the cyber café in the university where only 8.2% use the library Internet facilities. A greater percentage (38.24%) does that only on monthly basis where 39.7% spend one hour on each visit.

Though many university communities have been exposed to Internet an facility which engenders the study on the dynamics of use, the University community of F.U.T.O experienced the presence of Internet in October 2004. The university which is situated 34km away from Owerri the Capital city of Imo State was cut off from the Global community without telecommunication facilities since its movement to the permanent site in 1996. However, members moved to the city regularly to enjoy the facilities available in the Internet. Furthermore, the University library is at the final stage of providing Internet facility in the Library.

As a result, the suggestion by Stowe and Lindahl (2003) for in-depth knowledge of library patrons and Reid (1996) for analyses of level of Internet usage for effective services becomes imperative.

Based on that, the work sources to survey the Internet usage of students of FUTO with a view to:

- (a) Identify the rate of Internet use by students of FUTO; and
- (b) Elucidate the purpose of Internet use.

### Method of Study

All the students of the university except those in hundred (100) level constitute the population of the study. A questionnaire comprising of two sections were developed and randomly distributed to the students in their hostels. A total of 1200 questionnaire was distributed and 812 were returned. This represents 67.66% of the number distributed.

The Five schools in the University were represented in the following order: School of Engineering and Engineering Technology (SEET 65%); School of Agriculture and Agricultural Technology (SAAT 15.38%); School of Science (SOSC 20.32%); School of Management Technology (SMAT 8.79%); and School of Health Technology (SOHT 0.54%). The 30 but 3 departments in the five schools were also represented. The unrepresented departments are the Departments of: Dental Technology, Orthopedic Technology and Public Health. These three departments are parts of the newly established School of Health Technology whose students are in the second year and few in number. All the academic levels were represented except the hundred level students which were not part of the sample. The students sampled are resident in seven states in Nigeria. The results of the survey were collated and analyzed using tables, frequency, and percentages.

### Analyses and interpretation of results

#### Rate of Internet Use

The results show that 72.16% and 27.91% of male and female students responded to the questionnaire. A 95.56% of the male students have used the Internet before while 4.43% have not representing the 68.42% of the entire students who have not used the Internet before. On the other hand 90.42% of the female students have used the Internet while 9.57% have not used the Internet before representing 31.57% of the entire respondents who have not used the Internet before. Thus more male than female students have not used the Internet before.

More students at the 300 hundred levels (36.84%) have not used the Internet than those of 200, 400 and 500 levels (21.05%) respectively. Furthermore, majority of the students who have not used the Internet are found in SEET (31.57%); SOSC (31.57%) and SAAT (26.31%) than in SMAT (10.52%).

#### Location of Internet Center Used

On the location of the Internet center used by the students, 69.76% of students used Internet center located at Owerri, 25.47% use the only one in the University, 3.09%, 0.95% and 0.71% use the Internet centers located in Ihiagwa, Obinze and Nekede respectively which are villages surrounding to the University. This shows that majority of the students spends so much time and money and even risk their lives traveling about 30km to Owerri to use the Internet.

Table 1 shows that most of the students (50.27%) visited the Internet only once in a week. This is followed by (30.21%) who use it once in a month. There are (15.93%) respondents who use it between 2 and 3 times in a week and a very low (3.57%) that use it once daily. More of the students (44.62%) spend 3hours and more while using the Internet than (20.81%) and (14.40%) that spend 2hours and 1hour respectively. Among those who spend 3hours and more, (26.92%) use the Internet once in a week while the remaining (15.10%, 1.78%and 0.82%) visit the Internet monthly, daily and 2hourly in a week respectively. This shows that the less often they visit, the more time they spend. This is also evidence in the group who visit 2 to 3 times a week, only 0.82% of the 15.93% spend 3hours and more contrary to 9.61% that spends an hour.

#### Purpose of Internet Use

The respondents were required to indicate the purpose for which they visit the Internet centers. The results shows that (81.08%) visit the cyber café for academic purposes, (15.02%) do so for recreational purpose while (3.88%) visit Internet centers for

**Table 1:** Cross Tabulation of Frequency of Internet Use by Students of FUTO.

TIME	% RESPONDENTS			Total
	1hr	2hrs	3hrs and above	
Daily/Hourly				
Once in a Day	0.68	1.09	1.78	3.57
2-3 Times a Week	9.61	5.49	0.82	15.93
Once in a week	2.74	20.60	26.92	50.27
Once in a Month	1,37	13.73	15.10	30.21
Total	14.40	20.81	44.62	49.98

correspondence purposes. The indication is that majority of the students spend their time, energy and money accessing the Internet for one academic reason or another. Only few do so for correspondence or leisure.

The areas of academic activities these students focus on in the Internet include according to their responses: knowledge improvement (52.77%), collection of materials for assignment (39.68%) and collection of materials for research and projects (7.53%).

Thus many students use information materials available on the Internet to improve on their knowledge.

## Discussion

From the results, it is apparent that more male students (68.41%) than female students (31.57%) have not used the Internet in FUTO. The finding may be relative to a particular group of students being studied. In the case of FUTO, the number of male students (17,379) outweighed those of female (5,550). The female students, therefore, make extra efforts to challenge their male counterparts. The use of Internet could be considered as one of such efforts.

The high rate use of Internet by 200, 400 and 500 levels students could be ascribed to exposure and the desire to get quick information for writing term paper by the 200 level students; the effort to use the state-of-the-art information to write industrial training report and projects by the 400 and 500 level students respectively. The desire to acquire information would have reduced as the 200 level students graduate to 300 level.

Again most engineering and science students are more concerned with experiments and laboratory experiments than those of management sciences. Spending time in the laboratory may not allow them the opportunity and time to use the Internet. Hence less number of the former may be represented in Internet search than the later. Thus, confirming the views of Adimorah (1993) and the findings of Anunobi (2002) that scientist and engineering students do less citation than management and agricultural students.

The use of Internet centers located in Owerri by the majority of the students suggests that these students spend more energy, time and money in an effort to access the Internet than their counterparts who may have

such facilities around their universities. Such effort may be a source of distraction to the use of Internet, thereby alienating FUTO students from the global information community.

The weekly use of Internet center by 50.27% of the students could also be the consequence of distance location of the facility and its discouraging tendencies. Thus the students make fewer visits and spend longer time as indicated in Table 1. In other words, students who visit the center more regularly spend less time than the others. Furthermore, majority of the students prefer to spend 2 hours (20.81%) or 3 hours and above (44.62%) in the Internet centers. The explanation to that could be that many of them use the Internet for information/literature search using one search engine or another. In such situation, they require ample time to download and save information.

The reason for long stay in the Internet center is revealed when (81.08%) of students indicated that they visit the centers for academic purposes. Thus, confirming the findings of Ibegwam, (2004) that students and lecturers use Internet for academic purposes. Such a quest by no means deserves adequate time investment. The provision of Internet in academic libraries to compliment print materials is further justified. The use of Internet for knowledge improvement is an indication that the Internet not only provides the type of knowledge needed by students but also provides new findings in real time. Consequently, confirming the opinion of Onwubiko (2004) that Internet provides variety of Information needed by users. It also sounds a note of warning on the displacement effect of Internet to the library.

## Conclusion and recommendation

From the findings of this work, it is deduced that large numbers of students in the University use the Internet irrespective of the location of such facility. Students from the School (Faculty) of Management and Agriculture use the Internet more than their counterpart at the Schools of Engineering and Sciences. Furthermore, students at the second, fourth and fifth levels use the Internet more than those of the third levels. Distance is not considered a

barrier to the use of Internet rather, it determines the time and frequency of visit. As such traveling from distance to use Internet constrained the students to fewer visits and longer hours stay when they visit the Internet, and Internet search by students is motivated by the quest for academic materials needed for knowledge improvement.

Based on the above findings, it is recommended that;

(a) University libraries should install and provide Internet services in their libraries. Such services could be provided at subsidized rate and hence reduce students the risk of searching for information outside the library. By so doing, libraries could generate funds and maintain its integrity;

(b) Since university students use Internet heavily, the Use of Library Programme in universities should be reviewed to include the use of Internet as a form of literature search;

(c) Libraries which have installed the Internet should embark on capacity building on staff who will use their knowledge of library operation to explore the Internet and give adequate services to Internet users.

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