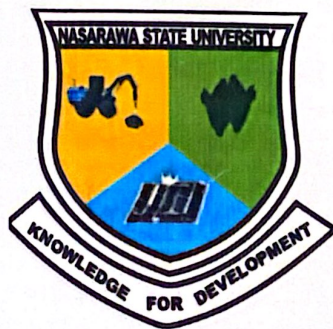


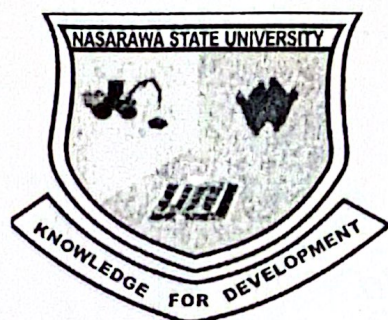
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CONTENTS

Family Relations: A New and Critical Discourse in Public Relations Jonathan E. Aliede and Aloysius C. Ifeanyichukwu	1
Role of Digital Media in Mobilising Youths for Political Participation in Nigeria: An Enumerative Study Abdulhameed Kayode Agboola and Fabiyi Sunday Oluwaseun	14
A Self-affirmative Discourse on the Surveillance role of Nigerian Mass Media in the Fight against Boko Haram Insurgency Friday Adakole Elijah	30
Prioritising News Angles through Framing Patterns: Lessons from Newspaper Reports of 2014 Ebola Outbreak Adelakun, Lateef Adekunle	49
Hate Speech in Online Readers' Comments during 2019 General Elections in Nigeria: Issues, Causes and Proffered Solutions Abdulhameed Kayode Agboola and Olanrewaju Fasasi	66
Water Dog in a Case: The Nigeria Press and Market-driven Model of Press Freedom Ekhareafo, Ofomegbe Daniel and Omojevwe Eruse	81
Red Sea/Mediterranean Mayhem: Evaluating the Social Media Campaigns as a Counter Measure against Illegal Migration among the Vulnerable Youths in Edo State, Nigeria Eze Onyebuchi Ezekiel, Idris Mohammed, Agbo Patrick Monday, Aliyu Abbas Muhammad and Adikea Kenneth	91
Women in Leadership in the Nigerian Media: A Study of Government Owned Media Organisations in Niger State Safiyyah Adam	104

Image-Making and the Nigeria Police Force Musa Liman, Asiha Kolo Lawan and Shamaki Daleen	119
Using Development Support Communication for “Change Begins With Me” Campaign John Dogara Ogoshi	131
Assessment of Newspaper Coverage of 2018 Voters’ Registration Exercise in Nigeria Galadima, A. Bala	143
Analysis of Selected Newspaper Reportage of Farmers/Headsmen Cleases in Nigeria Ekwueme Anthony, Chinedu Ugwuoke and Loveth Chekwube	157
Select Online Nigerian Newspapers’ Coverage of Herders/Farmers’ Conflict: Peace or War-oriented? Egielewa, Peter Eshioke	173
Female Gender Depiction in Select Nigerian Mainstream News Solomon. S. Kwakfut and Abraham Ekpo	191
Security Implications of the Social Media: A Study of Users’ Awareness and Precautionary Measures Perpetua Chinonye Umeaku and Agnes Joe Shaibu	207
Overview of Communication Policy Implementation Processes in Developing Countries Godswill O. Okiyi	221
The use of Public Relations by Nigerian Armed Forces in Countering Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria: Analysis of the Facebook Page of the Army Musa Liman, Asiha Kolo Lawan and Melea Jude Moses	236
Effect of Advertising Media on Consumer Buying Behaviour for Made in Nigeria Shoes in Plateau State, Nigeria Abdullahi Adamu Abubakar, Idris Ayokanmi and Garba Suleiman	244
Using Social Media for Electoral Participation by Port Harcourt Social Media Users Issaac Lasbrey Ihekwoaba and Emmanuel Happiness Onyemachi	266

SECURITY IMPLICATIONS OF THE SOCIAL MEDIA: A STUDY OF USERS' AWARENESS AND PRECAUTIONARY MEASURES

Perpetua Chinonye Umeaku and Agnes Joe Shaibu

Kwara State University Malete / Department of Mass Communication

College of Information and Communication Technology

perpetua.trust@gmail.com and agjoeshaib@gmail.com

Abstract

These days, social media is becoming a part of Nigerian youths' life due to increased access and use of the internet. To the users, it holds out a possibility of on-demand access to content anytime, anywhere, on any digital device. In spite of the inherent communicative advantages of social media, it is also associated with security risks. While literature abounds on the nature of risks users are exposed to, not much research has been done on their level of awareness of these dangers. This study sought to examine whether social media users are adequately aware of the security implications of risky social media use and are taking precautionary measures to guard themselves. A Survey was conducted among undergraduates of Kwara State University, Malete. Questionnaire was used as the research instrument to elicit information from 400 respondents drawn using the Stratified Random and convenience Sampling techniques. Results show that many of the users significantly demonstrated awareness of the implications of social media usage and protective attitudes, even as a fraction of sampled respondents' activities portends risky behaviour, in terms of acceptance of friend request from strangers and online dating. The study recommends that undergraduate students be encouraged towards the positive use of social media.

Keywords: Social media, uses and gratifications, security risks, precautionary measures

Introduction

Researches on the media habits of mass media audiences have been conducted over the years within the uses and gratifications approach and audience-based researches. Such studies seek to understand the media usage of targeted groups by investigating what media is consumed, how much is consumed and how often it is used (Schnauber & Wolf, 2016; Musa, Azmi & Ismail, 2015). With the increased access and the use of the internet, interest of researchers in this area seemed to have turned towards the effect of the media use on the users. Even as this remains of significance to the media selection process, this study is an attempt at evaluating social media risk awareness and

precautionary measures.

In the contemporary world, social media has permeated every field of human endeavour and its use prevalent. Its impact on communication processes within the traditional framework is felt, as it is now common place to rely on social media users for news through their I-reports (Bello & Kolawole-Ismail, 2017). Its features of interactivity, user-generated content and on-demand access have made it ubiquitous and endearing. However, despite these seeming advantages, social media use also has some security challenges stemming from inappropriate contacts made online. Social interaction on social media occurs through the cyber space, which raises security concerns. Researches on social media usage and its perceived influence on all spheres of life is a popular subject among communication researchers. This is due to its remarkable growth and popularity amongst people across all ages in the views of Ogbaeja and Nwafor (2017).

Orlu-Orlu (2017) explains social media as internet-based tools and services that enable users engage with each other, generate content, distribute and search for information online. These are interactive web-based media platforms that afford users the opportunity and place to connect, share opinions, experiences, knowledge etc. Social media is a platform or website and applications that allow people to communicate and share contents e.g. text, picture, audio, video file and multimedia contents, among others. It is primarily an internet-based application tool for sharing information. Its major features of interactivity and user generated content are made possible through Web 2.0. Social media are virtual communities of people where users interact with the sender of a message (Nwafor, Odoemelam, Orji-Egwu, Nwankwo and Nwaze, 2013).

(Orlu-Orlu (2017) and Acholonu (2013) identified six different types of social media which are; collaborative projects e.g. Wikipedia; blogs and micro blogs; content communities e.g. YouTube; social networking sites e.g. Facebook; virtual game worlds e.g. world of war craft; virtual social world e.g. second life. Some example of social media websites and applications are Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Blogs, WhatsApp, and Instagram amongst others.

Social media habits within the Uses and Gratifications Framework

Humans are confronted with myriads of decision making on a daily basis including which medium to turn to in fulfilling their needs. Given the increase in the available media platforms, Schnauber and Wolf (2016) suggest that users require selection strategies that involve sparse cognitive process but give a high chance of making a selection that fulfils their needs. Social psychology proffers habit as a selection strategy, which has also been associated with media choice.

Larose (2009) in Schnauber and Wolf (2016) points habits as automatic, non-conscious mental process that saves one's cognitive resources by relying on past gratifications. That is, media habits are formed based on previous gratifications got from the use of the media choice being activated. Empirically, there is a general consensus

that habits are formed through repeated use and perceived gratifications (Bhatt, 2017; Schnauber & Wolf, 2016).

However, Schnauber and Wolf (2016) in their study on how media habit impacted on media platform selection point out the limitation of measuring unconscious process such as habits in communication researches. But its understanding is crucial to explain patterns of usage, especially of the new media such as social media, whose use is addictive, especially to the younger generation.

This is captured in the uses and gratification theoretical understanding which assumes an active media consuming audience who are constantly motivated to seek out forms of media to satisfy their psychological and social needs (West & Turner, 2007). U & G can be used in explaining the motivations for social media usage, though it was conceptualized before the advent of social media. According to Folarin (2005), this theory rather sees the users as actively influencing the effect process, since he selectively chooses and attends to the media that meet their needs. This emphasizes users' capability to choose media content under certain conditions and for certain reasons, making effect tangential.

Social media users have an array of competitive platforms to go for the satisfaction of their needs; in other words, they are self-aware of their usage and interests, according to West and Turner (2007). Wainner (2018) explains that when users' needs are constantly gratified through their personal social media usage, they will be more likely to visit the same platform again to attain such gratifications.

These days, social media is a part of everyone's life and in Nigeria, people are using social media platform to; engage with friend and family members; develop social relationships; for companies to promote their products; earn income for some people e.g. freelancer; source of learning to many people e.g. students, academics. There is no doubt that social media has a lot of advantages ranging from getting in touch with friends, colleagues or family members, getting information on happenings around to using the media as a source of livelihood e.g. Nigeria News Update.

Owing to these advantages and more, social media have a growing usage level day by day. Up to date understanding of users' habit, usage pattern is considered significant because of its economic, social and cultural implications. In their study on the social media usage habits among high school students, Tezci and Icen (2017) reported that the most commonly used social media among the student who participated in the research were YouTube and Facebook, identifying top reasons for usage as sharing document, information, opinions and entertainment. Similar usage patterns among Nigerian students were also reported by researchers (Aramide, Ladipo and Adepoju, 2015; Ashara, 2019). However, they reported that the students spend more than five hours daily using social media, adding that apart from the communicative activities they engage in using social media, the students utilize it mainly for academic purposes. Aramide et al (2015), who examined the influence of social media use and addiction on students' self-perception reported a low level of social media even though these variables are significantly related

to the positive self-perception among students.

Security Implications of Social Media and Users' Awareness

In spite of the inherent communicative advantages of social media, it is also associated with security risks. Review of literature shows that most security threats associated with social media stems out of inappropriate contacts online, rather than the content of the media. Haruna and Danladi (2013) identified demise of people as one of such threat to life on social media, citing the unfortunate incident of Cynthia Osokogu, who died in the hands of friends she made via social media in Lagos State, Nigeria. They recommended that youths should be more careful in their social media usage so as not to expose themselves to the risk of losing their life.

Another security concern on social media as identified by Orlu-Orlu (2017) is that of sexual abuse. Since interaction on social media occurs in cyber space and not in the physical world there is possibility of people being deceived through Facebook Twitter, WhatsApp, etc. unsuspecting victims have been lured and abused sexually. 'Ábia rape' is one of such cases where a young girl was deceived via social media and sexually abused. Haruna and Danladi (2013) in their study found that excessive use of social media exposes young people to virtual relationships, which could be risky.

Chukwuere, Chukwuere and Khumalo (2017) also identify cyber bullying as one of the security risks faced online by users, especially girls and women. Cyber bullying is any kind of bullying perpetrated through the Internet. According to the two authors who explored literature on cyber bullying in South Africa, researchers globally are paying attention to cyber bullying due to the heavy implications on the intimidated victims which could include trauma, anxiety, agoraphobia and suicidal idea.

Impersonation (fraud) or identity theft is another security concern associated with social media use. A lot of people unknowingly give away more personal information than is necessary on the social media platforms, which is worrisome as several people have had their accounts on Facebook hacked or cloned. This is a security issue, as pedophiles could hide under stolen identity to lure their victims, who are children and are susceptible or easily trusting.

Hate Speech is another growing phenomenon on the social networking sites that constitutes a threat to the Nigerian society. Social media's increasing use in spreading hateful and inciting messages is one area that must be looked into and checked. Adeyanju and Haruna (2011) opined that during the 2011 electioneering period, Facebook was widely used to circulate inciting and provocative messages culminating in the violence that erupted in some northern states in Nigeria following the announcement of the election results (cited in Nwafor, et al, 2013).

Asemah and Edegoh (2013) in their study that sought to examine social media network and security challenges identified Facebook as a social media network with more security threats. Also, in a study that measured the security awareness of Social

Networking sites usage, the researchers, Ishak, Sidi, Jabar... and Suplan (2010) reported that women are more aware than their men counterparts in terms of the security implications of using social media sites, they tend to spend more time in its use and also behave in ways that reflect safe habit. Similarly, user's awareness and knowledge have been reported to have strong influence on users' attitude to behave securely when using social media (Zolait, Al-Anizi, Ababneh, Bu Asali and Butaiba, 2014).

Kuo and Talle, (2014) in their study that investigated the privacy concerns of social network site users in Taiwan, established that a positive relationship exist between SNS users' privacy concerns and their risk perceptions. Accordingly, users may demonstrate protective attitudes such as sharing minimal personal information, restricting others to access their profile or even providing intentionally fabricated information which will certainly influence the vibrancy and vitality of the social network sites, (Kuo & Talle, 2014). Even with the seeming abundance of literature on the security implications of social media and awareness among users, there seem to be only a few in Nigeria that examined users' awareness of risk and how much of their behaviour reflect safe habits with the avalanche of security information available to users. This research becomes necessary with the seeming preponderance of cyber-crime offenders among active users. Young and Haase (2009) identify university students as active users of the social media. According to Ishak et al (2010), this group of people are both targets of the crime and perpetrators of the crime who fall between the ages of 17 – 30 years.

Research Questions

1. To what extent do undergraduate students in Kwara State University use the social media?
2. How much of the Kwara State University undergraduate students' social media behaviours reflects unsafe social media use?
3. To what extent are Kwara State University undergraduate students aware of the implications of unsafe social media behaviour?
4. How much of precautionary measures do Kwara State University undergraduate students take toward safe social media use?

Methodology

A survey was conducted among the students of Kwara State University, Malec. Literature has identified undergraduates as digital natives who are the active users of the social media, hence the choice of this population as sharing the same characteristics with undergraduate students of other tertiary institutions. The population of Kwara State University undergraduates is 16,000 (Registry, 2019). Phillips Meyer's (1973) sample size decision table was used to select a sample from the population of the study.

Table 1:

S/N	Population	Size
1	1000	278
2	2000	322
3	3000	341
4	5000	357
5	10000	370
6	50000	381
7	100000	383
8	500000	384
9	Infinity	384

Phillip Meyers (1973) published table.

Drawing from the above table, a sample size of 370 could do for a population of 16,000. However, a sample size of 400 was used for the study based on the suggestions made by Wimmer & Dominick (2011) and Nwuneli (1991) that the higher the sample size, the more representative of the population and the smaller your error, the better the statistical inference.

The stratified and convenience sampling procedures were used to select 400 respondents from the study population. Kwara State University undergraduates were divided into sub groups based on their gender and levels of study then the levels and respondents were randomly selected from within these strata based on their availability. This improved the representation of all the groups within the population. The research instrument adopted for this study was the questionnaire. The questionnaire comprised four sections aimed at measuring the variables in this study which include: social media utilisation, social media behaviours of respondents, awareness of implications of unsafe behaviours and precautionary measures taken on social media.

Section A of the questionnaire was aimed at gathering data on the demographics of respondents which include age, gender and level. Section B solicited information on the social media utilisation which consists of questions on the use of social media, the social sites used, the gratifications sought, the frequency of usage and amount of time spent using social media on daily basis.

Section C comprised of questions to determine respondents' actions that reflect unsafe behaviours (disclosure of sensitive information, acceptance of friend request from strangers and dating via social media). Section D was in two parts. It sought responses on respondents' level of awareness of security implications of social media use and the precautionary measures taken on social media. These variables were measured on a five-point likert scale of "strongly Disagree", "Disagree", "Undecided", "Agree", "Strongly Agree".

Data collected were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences and presented in frequency tables.

Results and Discussion

Four hundred copies of questionnaire were distributed to the sampled respondents. However, 353 copies were correctly filled and returned, given a return rate of 88.25%. This was considered adequate for analysis.

Table 2 Demographic data of Respondents

	Frequency	Percentage %
LEVEL		
200	118	33.4
300	135	38.2
400	92	26.1
Missing	8	2.2
GENDER		
Male	129	36.5
Female	224	63.5
AGE		
16-25	316	89.5
26-35	34	9.6
Void	3	0.8
TOTAL	353	100

Survey, 2019

Data from table 2 shows that majority of the respondents were between the ages of 16 and 25, mostly females and were 200 and 300 level students. Members of this age bracket are mostly undergraduates of tertiary institutions but having more females is just a chance occurrence and has no implication for the study.

Table 3 Respondents' Usage of the Social Media

	Frequency	Percentage %
Yes	353	100
Total	353	100

Survey, 2019

All the respondents were social media users and is in tandem with literature that undergraduate students are active users of the social media (Young and Quan-Haase, 2009; Boyc, 2017).

Table 4 Frequency of Respondents' Usage of Social Media

	Frequency	Percentage %
Always	208	58.9
Occasionally	122	34.6
Rarely	16	4.5
Void	7	2
Total	353	100
Respondents' time spent on social media in a day		
Less than 1 hour	33	9.3
1-2 hour	128	36.3
2-4 hours	93	26.3
Above 4 hours	92	26.1
Void	7	2
Total	353	100

Survey, 2019

Data from table 3 reveals that more than half of the respondents were active users of social media. This is consistent with previous studies on the prevalence of social media usage, especially among undergraduates. Boye (2017) found that most students of Kwara State University were active on social media.

Table 5 Respondents' Disclosure of Personal Information on Social Media

	Frequency	Percentage %
Yes	25	7.1
No	315	89.2
Void	13	3.7
Total	353	100

Survey, 2019

Data above shows that most of the students do not disclose personal information on social media. This implies that they were aware of the risks associated in such and were taking precaution against them.

Table 6 Respondents' Acceptance of Friend Requests from Strangers

	Frequency	Percentage %
Yes	253	71.7
No	98	27.8
Void	2	0.6
Total	353	100

Survey, 2019

Data above reveals that majority of the students accept friend requests from strangers, a social media activity that may portend risk to the unsuspecting user. An example is Cynthia Osokogu's death in the hands of 'friends' made through social media.

Table 7 Response of respondents on dating via social media

	Frequency	Percentage %
Yes	63	17.8
No	277	78.5
Void	13	3.7
Total	353	100

Survey, 2019

Table 8 Response of respondents on dating via social media

	Frequency	Percentage %
Yes	63	17.8
No	277	78.5
Void	13	3.7
Total	353	100

Survey, 2019

Data above shows that a fraction of the sampled respondents were exposing themselves to some of the risks associated with social media usage, whose interaction occurs in cyber space. Haruna and Danladi (2013) argue that virtual relationships could be risky. 'Abia rape' is one of such cases where a young girl was lured and abused sexually through the social media.

Table 9 Respondents' awareness of risks involved in social media usage

	Frequency	Percentage %
Strongly Disagree	24	6.8
Disagree	7	2
Undecided	32	9.1
Agree	168	47.6
Strongly Agree	122	34.6
Total	353	100

Survey, 2019

Data presented above indicates that over 80% of the respondents, through their varying degrees of agreement, were aware of the security concerns associated with social media usage.

Table 10: Frequency of respondents' agreement to risks associated with social media usage

	Frequency	Percentage %
Disagree	25	7.1
Undecided	15	4.2
Agree	126	35.7
Strongly Agree	170	48.2
Void	17	4.8
Total	353	100

Survey 2019

Data above shows that majority of the respondents (83.9%) agreed to the possibility of being exposed to risks through the usage of social media.

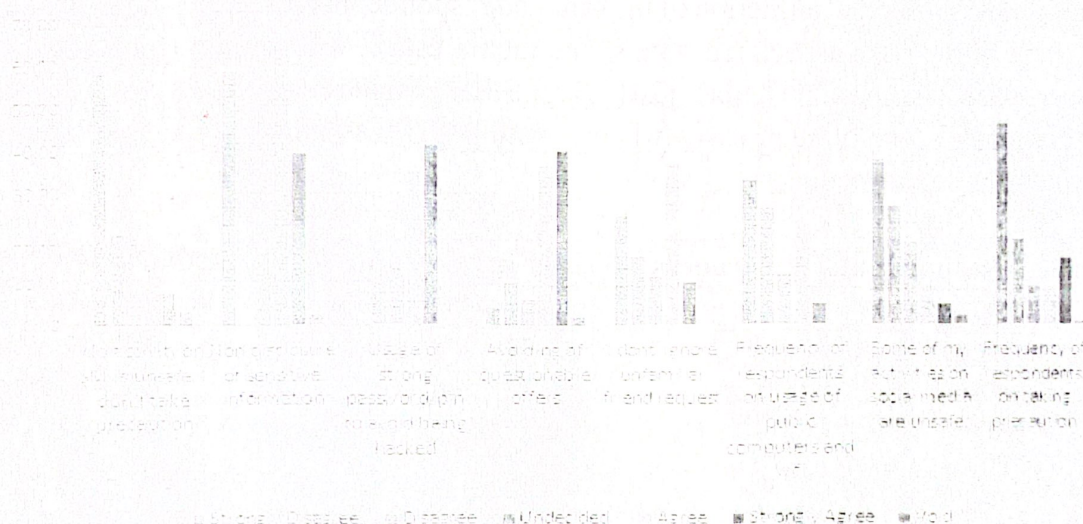
Table 11 Frequency of respondents' knowledge of precautionary measures

Frequency	Percentage %
Strongly Disagree	25
Disagree	24
Undecided	47
Agree	169
Strongly Agree	88
Total	353

Survey 2019

Figure 1

Chart of Respondents Level of Agreement to Precautionary Measures in Social Media Use



Data above indicates that the sampled respondents, through the varying degrees of agreement, knew the precautionary measures to take to avoid being victims of unscrupulous persons in the virtual world of social media.

Discussion of Findings

RQ 1: Social Media usage among Kwara State University Undergraduates

The study established the social media usage among undergraduates and found that all the respondents were social media users (see table 4). This is in tandem with literature that undergraduate students are active users of the social media (Young & Haase, 2009; Boye, 2017) which also implies that among these users are perpetrators of the cyber-crimes and those at risk of being victims of the crimes, according to Ishak, et al (2010).

RQ2: Social media behaviours reflecting unsafe social media use

This was measured to determine some of the social media activities the students engage in that may portend risk to users. On the disclosure of personal information through the social media, majority of the respondents, representing 89 percent avoid disclosing their personal information through the social media. However, majority of the respondents (71%) pointed out that they accept friend request from strangers which portends risk to unsuspecting users. However, the quantitative nature of this study limited the researchers in determining the motives for this action among social media users. However, the users' responses on dating via social media shows that a fraction of the sampled respondents were exposing themselves to some of the risks associated with social media usage, especially online dating. Haruna and Danladi (2013) argue that virtual relationships could be risky. 'Abia rape' is one of such cases where a young girl was lured and abused sexually through the social media.

RQ3 Respondents' Awareness of the implications of unsafe social media behavior

Data on respondents' disclosure on personal information in table 4 points to the fact that, social media users generally are significantly aware of the associated risk in social media use. In addition to this, the data shown in table 10 indicate that over 80% of the respondents, through their varying degrees of agreement, were aware of the security concerns associated with social media usage and they (83 %) agreed to the possibility of being exposed to risks through the usage of social media.

RQ4 Precautionary measures undergraduate take toward safe social media use

This was measured using a set of positive and negative statement to determine respondents' varying degree of agreement to important precautionary measures to take to avoid being victims of unscrupulous persons in the virtual world of social media, ranging from perception of social media activity, disclosure of sensitive information, the use of strong password, avoiding strange and questionable offers, ignoring friend request from unfamiliar person, to avoiding misleading adverts, among others. The data showed that the sampled respondents, through the varying degrees of agreement, knew the precautionary measures to take to avoid being victims of cyber-crimes which is significantly associated with their behaviour while on social media. These results are consistent with similar studies. For example Zolait et al (2014) reported that users' awareness and knowledge have strong influence on their attitude to behave securely when using social media.

Conclusion

This research specifically examined the social media users' awareness of the security implications of social media and the precautionary measures taken, with the view to validating and extending existing findings in the field, especially in Nigeria. Being a modest descriptive study, primary data were obtained from young people studying in Kwara State University, Malete which is one that attracts students nationally. The study

was anchored on Uses and Gratifications theoretical framework which helps to explain threat of addiction that may increase the chances of risky behavior and sees the users as actively influencing the effect process, since they selectively choose and attend to the media that meet their needs (Folarin, 2005). The researchers then sought to investigate the level of their self-awareness of their usage as it relates to associated risks and how this awareness translates to safe attitude to avoid the negative effect associated with social media use.

Although, there are a plethora of studies on users' awareness of the security implications of the social media, most of the studies are not only from other countries but have not looked at how their behaviour portends risky social media use. This study has therefore extended the frontiers of scholarship around social media habit by focusing on security awareness and precautionary measures taken by the youths, who not only the targets but perpetrators of crimes on social media.

This study provides some insights regarding the use of social media. Although, result indicate a fraction of sampled respondents whose activities portends risky behavior, many of the users, significantly demonstrated awareness of the security implications of social media usage and demonstrate some protective attitudes. This supports the notion of the active media consuming audience who are self-aware of their usage and interest, thus actively influencing the kind of "effect" of the media on them.

However, given that acceptance of friend requests and offers from strangers is considered risky, the respondents' admittance to accepting friend request from strangers and online dating activities remain a cause for concern with the level of awareness, knowledge and precautionary measures they seem to be taking. Kuo and Talley (2014), had argued that certain protective attitudes by users is likely to influence the vibrancy and vitality of the social media, but whether this research outcome relates to this argument can be a source of worry for researchers. Further research can also explore the gratifications sought for engaging in certain risky behaviour despite the level of awareness and knowledge on the risks involved in its usage.

This study has been limited in the aspect of not involving qualitative data and not providing demographic differences in gender in relation to awareness and precautionary measures, since many of the cases of victims of cybercrime recorded are females, hence further studies can examine relevant associations of gender in the research of this nature.

These limitations notwithstanding, the social media has come to stay and its usage will continue to surge as internet access increases and the number of smart phone users in Nigeria. The security information that users are constantly exposed has no doubt, significantly influenced users' awareness of the security risks and precautionary measures users are taking. It is therefore important that Nigerians strive to maximise the gains inherent in its use and stem the growing tide of insecurity of which the social media is a contributory factor. To this end, the study recommends that undergraduate students be encouraged towards the positive use of social media. Also, its use should be monitored by relevant authorities to guide against abuse.

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