Full Length Research Paper

An assessment to the use of Facebook as a communication tool by Midlands State University students from 2012 to 2013

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This article seeks to examine the use patterns of Facebook by Midlands State University (MSU) students as a communication tool from 2012 to 2013. It focuses on MSU students in Zimbabwe focusing on how social media networks such as Facebook can be used by university students to communicate academic, social and political issues in their day to day lives. Again, this will reflect on the efficiency and cultural impact that Facebook has in the academic world, particularly in Zimbabwe. The article will respond to issues such as: assessing the behaviour, attitude of the students themselves, and impediments they encounter when using social network sites such as Facebook. It will also analyse the uses of Facebook among college students as way of gratifying their needs, which include: establishing relationships socially and communicating with friends and family members. The article will be informed by such theories as information theory, electronic colonialism theory and the uses and gratifications theory. Only few students with access to it and with solid technological background to utilise it for social, academic and political issues maximise its availability. Facebook combines sound, still and moving images that can be used for social identity, apart from academic research and communication purposes. The article will be subjected to both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Therefore, unstructured and structured questionnaires, together with informal interviews will be used as data collecting techniques.

Key words: Communication, social cognitive theory, electronic colonialism, gratification, social networking sites, Facebook, users, wall-posting, behaviour and attitude.

INTRODUCTION

Facebook remains the currently most used social networking platform in Zimbabwe, hence its use by students at Midlands State University (MSU). Over two thirds of students at MSU testify that they are Facebook users. The purpose of the study was to analyse how Facebook affects college students' communication with fellow students, academics and other people socially. A social networking phenomenon has emerged globally

over the past few years. Currently, social networking sites (SNS), have grown from a niche to a mass online activity, in which tens of millions of internet users are engaged, both in their leisure time, and at work. Social networking sites are a category of sites that are based on user participation and user-generated content. The rapid growth of social networking that has been observed over the last two to three years is indicative of its entry into mainstream culture and its integration into the daily lives of many people. Parallel to this, is the considerable media coverage of the growth of social networking, its potential positive outcomes and concerns about the way some people are engaged in it. Social networking sites offer people new varied ways to communicate via the internet, whether through their PC or their mobile phone. They allow people to easily and simply create their own online pages and profiles, construct and display an online networks of contacts, often called 'friends'.

The research seeks to assess MSU students' behaviour and attitudes, as well as barriers they encounter when they use Facebook. It will respond to the question: Does the use of Facebook manipulate the behaviour and attitude of the MSU students through their use of the network? Again the article will assess the university students' uses and gratifications when they turn to Facebook as their communication network. The article will also examine the extent to which social networking sites contribute to upholding democracy, ideology and hegemony in particular social contexts. In his research on behaviours on social network sites, Skog (2005) found out that the status feature on Myspace strongly influenced how people behaved, and what they choose to reveal on their profiles. Use of this social network, indicates one's status as measured by activity, for example sending messages. He asserts that there are indicators of authenticity for example using a "real" photo instead of a drawing. In this research Skog (2005) brings to light various behaviours of social network users that are drawn from their use of social network sites, such as the kind of language they used, which was common to users on the same social network site. Skog (2005) however overlooks the fact that there are certain attitudes and inhibitions to the use of social networking sites. Ellison et al (2007) suggest that Facebook is used to maintain existing offline relationships as a means of solidifying offline connections, as opposed to meeting new people. These relationships may be weak ties, but typically there is some common offline element among individuals who befriend one another, such as in a shared class at school. Research in this vein investigated how online interactions interface with offline ones. For instance, Lampe et al (2006) discovered that Facebook users engage in "searching" for people with whom they have an offline connection, more than they "browse" for complete strangers to meet. Likewise, Lenhart and Madden (2007)'s research found out that 91% of U.S. teens who use SNSs do so to connect with friends.

Research on barriers

Given that SNS enable individuals to connect with one another, it is not surprising that they have become embedded in users's lives, especially on their behaviours and attitudes. Acquisti and Gross (2006) found out that there can be barriers in the use of Facebook in that there is often a disconnection between students' desires to protect privacy and their behaviour. The theme is also explored in Stutzman's (2006) survey of Facebook users and Barnes's (2006) description of the "privacy paradox" that occurs when teens are not aware of the public nature of the Internet. In analyzing trust on social network sites, Dwyer et al (2007) argued that trust and usage goals may affect behaviours of Facebook users who are willing to share. Research further discovered that Facebook users expressed greater trust in this particular network than MySpace users did, and thus were more willing to share information on the site. This distrust also proved to be a barrier to the use of social networking sites.

In another study examining security issues and SNSs, Jagatic et al (2007) used freely accessible profile data from SNSs to craft a "phishing" scheme that appeared to originate from a friend on the network. Their targets were much more likely to give away information to this "friend" than to a perceived stranger. Survey data offer a more optimistic perspective on the issue, suggesting that teens are aware of potential privacy threats online and that many are proactive about taking steps to minimize certain potential risks. Pew found that 55% of online teens have profiles, 66% of whom report that their profile is not visible to all Internet users (Lenhart and Madden, 2007). Of the teens with completely open profiles, 46% reported including at least some false information. Livingstone (2007) cited in his research, interviewed a small number of British teenagers (16 teenagers aged between 13 and16) in an ethnographic study, looking at their uses and behaviour when applying social networking sites. She discovered that the technologies did not in fact sustain the needs and desires of these teenagers. They had a sophisticated gradation of friendship, and this could not be supported by the social networking sites they used, as these generally do not permit distinctions among levels of friendship and intimacy. Livingstone on the other hand found out that teenagers present themselves in different ways based on their ages. Younger participants present a highly decorated, stylistically elaborate identity while older participants aim to create a notion of identity lived through authentic relationships with others (Livingstone, 2007). The creation of these identities, she argues, contains an element of risk which public policy may try and manage.

Boyd (2006), using an ethnographic approach, reveals

the possibility of unintended consequences. Although, members can control what appears on their profiles, they cannot control what appears on a friend's profile. Crude pictures on a friend's profile caused concern for a teacher when her students asked to 'friend' her. This placed her in an awkward position because allowing students access to her profile would also allow them to view her friends, whom she knew to have risqué pictures on their profiles (Boyd, 2004).This research demonstrates that concerns raised by navigating issues of privacy and trust were apparent in the first scholarly articles on social networking sites and have proved to be a barrier to users.

Facebook related studies

Other studies have unearthed implications for the psychological well-being and the internet and show that "individuals' preference for online, rather than face-to-face, social interaction plays an important role in the development of negative consequences associated with problematic internet use" (Caplan 2003). Findings indicate a tendency among students to identity dualities within their perceptions of self, family, real communities and virtual communities. McMillan and Morrison (2006) explore the impacts and implications of this in their piece Coming of Age with the Internet: A qualitative exploration of how the internet has become an integral part of young people's lives. Many students found out that the internet parallels their active and passive development of self as they determined their identities growing up. Most participants felt the internet was an active place of participation where they could solidify their offline identities and utilized an instrumental, more than hedonic approach in their exploration (McMillan and Morrison 2006). This research shows that a social networking site can manipulate the behaviours of users.

This study also revealed that students acquired skills more so on their own than from the aid of educators, parents, and other outside forces because they found motivation as a result of relevance of the internet to their everyday lives. McMillan and Morrison's 2006 study, in agreement with numerous others, discovered that most of the time youths were not concerned with radically altering their personality online ,and felt their identities on and offline were not substantially different. . This study helps this research as it tries to explain different behaviours associated with facebook use. Research conducted elsewhere has shown that "inflating and even mani-pulating others' perceptions of oneself has come to be expected, and no small portion of [users] disclosures involves a modicum of exaggeration, even with good chances of meeting offline observers of their online portraits. Furthermore, scholars have determined that the "self-directed identity claims" which may be found in users' profiles are likely 'symbolic statements made by

[users] for their own benefit, intended to reinforce their" self perception.

THEORETICAL CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Social cognitive theory

Social Cognitive Theory stemmed out of work in the area of social learning theory proposed by Miller and Dollard in 1941. Their proposition posits that if one were motivated to learn a particular behaviour, then that particular behaviour would be learned through clear observations. By imitating these observed actions the individual observer would solidify that learned action and would be rewarded with positive reinforcement. The proposition of social learning was expanded upon and theorized by Canadian psychologist Bandura (1976) Social cognitive theory is a learning theory based on the ideas that people learn by watching what others do and that human thought processes are central to understanding personality. While social cognitists agree that there is a fair amount of influence on development generated by learned behaviour displayed in the environment in which one grows up, they believe that the individual person (and therefore cognition) is just as important in determining moral development.

People learn by observing others, with the environment, behaviour, and cognition all as the chief factors in influencing development. These three factors are not static and independent; rather, they are all reciprocal. For example, each behaviour witnessed can change a person's way of thinking (cognition). Similarly, the environment one is raised in may influence later behaviors, just as a father's mindset (also cognition) will determine the environment in which his children grow. Social cognitive theory revolves around the process of knowledge acquisition and learning directly correlated to the observation of models. The models can be those of an interpersonal imitation or media sources. Effective modelling teaches general rules and strategies for dealing with different situations. To illustrate that people learn from watching others, Bandura (1976) constructed an experiment entitled "Bobo Doll Behaviour: A Study of Aggression." In this experiment he exposed a group of children to video featuring violent and aggressive actions. After the video he then placed the children in a room with a Bobo doll to see how they behaved with it. Through this experiment, Bandura (1976) discovered that children who had watched the violent video subjected the dolls to more aggressive and violent behaviour, while children not exposed to the video did not. This experiment displays the Social Cognitive Theory, because it depicts how people re-enact behaviours they see in the media. In this case, this research will measure qualitatively how social network users re-enacted the behaviours they directly

learned from their use of social network sites, and in this case, Facebook.

This theory explains behaviour in terms of cognitive and other interpersonal factors and environmental events all operate as interacting determinants of each other. It explicitly recognises that behaviour is not determined by just intrinsic factors and that an individual is a product of the environment .It recognises that individuals have an influence on what they do, their personal characteristics as to how they respond to their environment. Indeed ,changes in any of these three factors are hypothesized to render changes in others .One of the key concepts in Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), is an environmental variable and observational learning in contrast to earlier behavioural theories. SCT views the environment as not just an aspect that reinforces or punishes behaviour, but also provides a milieu where one can watch the action of others and learn the consequences of those behaviours. In this research this theory is relevant in that the behaviours and attitudes are formed through observation from the social network environment, and also that people join Facebook because of its influence from their friends. The Electronic Colonialism Theory (ECT) looks at how to capture the hearts and minds, and to some extent, the consumer habits of others. ECT focuses on the global media influence on how people think and act. The aim of ECT is to account for the manner the mass media influences the mind. This theory will assist researches to find out how Facebook influences the minds of students at MSU when communicating socially. Just as the era of the Industrial Revolution focused on manual labour, raw materials and finished products, so also the Information Revolution now seeks to focus on the role and consequences concerning the mind and global consumer behaviour. This article assessed the imagined images by students at MSU when communicating through Face-book, socially, academically and politically.

Uses and gratification theory

Blumler and Katz (1974)'s uses and gratifications theory suggests that media users play an active role in choosing and using the media to satisfy their needs. This approach focuses on why people use particular media for gratification. The theory arose originally in the 1940s and underwent a revival in the 1970s and 1980s. The approach springs from a functionalist paradigm in the social sciences. It presents the use of media in terms of the gratification of social psychological needs of the individual (Blumler and Katz 1974). Zillmann (cited by McQuail, 1987:236) discovered the influences of mood on media choice such as boredom, which encourages the choice of exciting content. On the other hand, stress encourages a choice of relaxing content. Blumer and Katz (1974) argued that audiences needs have social

and psychological problems which emanate from certain expectations. It is imperative in this article to examine the manner in which Facebook as an effective communication tool used by MSU students satisfies the student's social and psychological needs. Blumer and Katz (1974) argued that audience needs have social and psychological problems which generate from certain expectations and the mass media leading to differential patterns of media exposure which results in different particular gratification of needs.

Background to the study

The first hint of social networking websites was witnessed in the year 1997 through the formation of a company called Sixdegrees.com. The company was the first of its kind to allow users to list their profiles, provide a list of friends and then contact them. However, the company did not perform very well as it eventually closed three years later. The reason for this was that many people using the internet at that time had not formed many social networks; hence there was little room for manoeuvre. For instance, dating sites required users to give their profiles, but they could not share other people's websites. Additionally, there were some websites that would link former school mates, but the lists could not be shared with others (Cassidy, 2006).

Mark Zuckerberg gave birth to Facebook in early 2004, then at the facebook.com. At that time Zuckerberg (2004) was a sophomore at Harvard University. The name for Face book came from the publications that some colleges pass out to students at the beginning of the year to help students get to know each other better, called a Facebook. Facebook was created by Mark Zuckerberg and other Harvard students to remain networked through the Internet and to know each other. Face book became so popular, in a short space of time, and was soon accessed by other colleges. Over time, they have added many new features to their website. There are news feeds, more privacy features, Face book notes, the ability to add images to one's blog and comments, importing other blogs into Face book, instant messaging, and much more. Another feature that differentiates Facebook from other social sites is the ability for outside developers to build "Applications" which allow users to personalize their profiles and perform other tasks, such as comparing movie preferences and chart travel histories. The use of social networking sites has afforded users with a free market place of ideas where people can communicate freely without regulation. This led to the stimulus of uprisings, such as the Arab Spring, particularly in the Arab world. For example, the Tunisian, Lybian and Egyptian uprisings, are believed to have been mobilised through Facebook. Recently President Jacob Zuma asked South Africans to suggest on Facebook what his

annual state of the nation speech should focus on *(The Sunday Mail 20-26 February)* .In Zimbabwe Munyaradzi Gwisai was allegedly arrested for using Facebook to mobilise and incite the public to revolt against the Zimbabwean government.

In their role as the 'public sphere', social networks become the arena for arguments and deliberations, as well as for association and institutional collaboration. The extent to which such spaces thrive is crucial to demo-cracy. If only certain truths are represented, and alternative viewpoints are silenced by exclusion or suppression, and other voices are heard more loudly than those of others, the 'public' interest inevitably suffers. This exodus of people to SNS, especially to a juggernaut such as Facebook, begs for critical attention from scholars with a vested interest in behaviour and attitude. After all, as technology grows increasingly, more accessible and more routinely used, it should be of no surprise that individuals frequently turn to SNS as a locus for constructing their identity. This is shaped by their behaviour and attitude over the use of social networking sites.

METHODOLOGY

The study analysed the use of Facebook as a communication tool by Midlands State University (MSU) students from 2012 to 2013. In this regard, qualitative research methods were applied in order to obtain results that are closer to validity. Qualitative data was used to check on the accuracy of conclusions arrived at, with regards to the use of Facebook as a communication tool by MSU students. The study used questionnaires, interviews, focus groups and observations. Questionnaires made it easy to collect more data from a considerable number of respondents who comprised MSU students from different faculties. The results collected through questionnaires were quantified. On the other hand, interviews enabled the study to extract factual information on the use of Facebook for communication purposes by students at tertiary institutions. Again the researchers selected 300 MSU students who included 150 users of Facebook and 150 non-users of Facebook, ranging from 19 to 35 years of age. Through random sampling, researchers ensured that each sample unit had an equal chance of being accorded a chance to participate. Furthermore, targeted audiences were divided into males and females. This enabled the researchers to control the variables seen as important to the study. The questionnaires included open ended and closed ended questions that probed the attitude, behaviour and barriers to respondents, in a bid to quantify results. Out of 300 questionnaires distributed, only 280 were adequately responded to and returned. The researchers decided to choose only 300 students, since this was a justified number which would allow valid and reliable data to be collected. In addition, most of the students refused to participate, as they were busy with their assignments and preparing for the end of semester examinations. Only those who were willing to respond to the questionnaires and respond to interview questions were selected and observed. Again, 100 MSU students from various faculties were interviewed. Interviews were effective in this study, as they enabled the researchers to elicit qualitative data about the use of Facebook by MSU students.

The main questions respondents needed to answer were whether the use of Facebook by students at MSU from all faculties

influenced their behaviours and attitudes. Again the study attempted to respond fairly to the question on whether Facebook manipulated the behaviour and attitude of MSU students in this regard. Again the article assessed the uses and gratifications application of Facebook by university students. It also examined the extent to which social networking sites contribute to democracy, ideology and hegemony. Focus groups discussions (FGDs) allowed for a sample of respondents to be interviewed and re-interviewed, so that their reactions, attitude and behaviour could be studied. FGDs enabled the study to collect a variety of views from the students as they expressed how effective Facebook was, in social interaction. In addition, observations allowed data to be collected at the time they occurred, and as a result, researchers did not rely on the participants' interpretation of events alone. Students could not hide the truth on how they use Facebook through misinformation, evasions and lies.

FINDINGS

The findings from the study, suggested that almost all college students at MSU were using Facebook for communication and academic purposes, such as discussing assignments and their research topics. This strongly supports Lenhart et al (2010) who found that 71% of young adults have a Facebook account in America. Several reasons were given as why MSU students were using Facebook. The most popular reason was to communicate with friends and the family. Entertainment, fun and leisure, posting photos, political issues and educational purposes were other prominent reasons for using Facebook. The presented data was gathered using administered questionnaires, and personal interviews that were carried out with MSU student Facebook users. On the other hand, data was sourced from both male and female students within the range of 20 to 35 years, through focus group discussions. Gathered data was explained and presented through tables, pie charts and bar graphs.

Specific uses of Facebook by MSU students

One of the major research questions was based on how Facebook is used by students at MSU. This section presents the uses and gratifications of Facebook users. The research findings showed that students have different uses for Facebook which can be categorised into five segments as: communication, fun and leisure engaging, posting photos and comments, browsing profiles, political issues and other functions. Figure 1 summarises the different reasons why MSU students use Facebook. Figure 1 show that out of the 30 users who were interviewed, through questionnaires and FDGs, five used Facebook for communication, ten for fun and leisure, two used it for browsing profiles, two used for political issues and only one person used it for other functions. These results were calculated in percentages and presented in Figure 1. These results are consistent
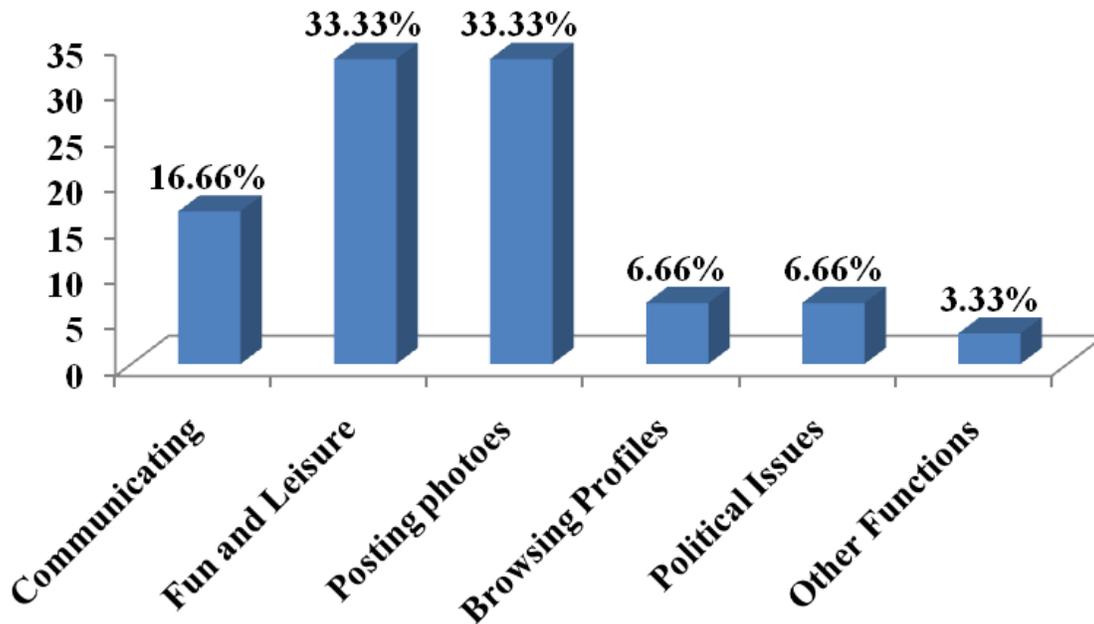
Figure 1. Summary of the different reasons why MSU students use Facebook

with Lampe at al (2007) research findings which showed that people use Facebook for different purposes. Blumler and Katz (1974)'s uses and gratifications theory, suggests that media users play an active role in choosing and using the media. It presents the use of media in terms of the gratification of social and psychological needs of the individual, (Blumler and Katz 1974). It was discovered in this study that students had different uses of Facebook, depending on their psychological, social and academic needs.

Uses for fun and leisure

It was discovered that from the majority of students who use Facebook, 33.33%, do so for social networking sites, much more than just a functional activity. Most students in this segment are between the ages of 19 and 24. Many users gained significant emotional rewards from contacting and connecting with their friends, and taking part in various online activities and games. An important features of social networking sites, was the ability to contact others in a playful way, using 'pokes' or similar gestures. Pokes are said to be a way of gesturing to other users and getting their attention. These gestures, or symbolic cues, are fun for many users, and provided a level of excitement as they could log on to see what messages they had. They could also provide social status and reassurance, depending on the number received and from whom they were received. For most users who used Facebook for fun and leisure, it

emerged to have become an addiction for most of them. As a result it adversely affected their behaviour and attitude towards their academic studies, as they spent most of their time on Facebook and not attending to their academic demands.

Posting photos and comments through Facebook

From the interviews contacted in this research, most users seem to be enjoying posting photos and videos on their social networking sites, in addition to their profile photos. Photos were found to be important both for constructing and revealing one's identity, and for sharing important events and moments with a wide group of people (especially family and friends). Posting comments also enabled users to reveal certain perspectives on social issues like relationships and fashion. Other users would then comment on these posts or click on *like* to show that they liked the comment or think in the same way with the other users. Female users were especially found to enjoy posting and commenting on Facebook. The main reason by Gombrich (2000) is Art and Illusion, where the key concept is the collection of the perceptual and psychic act. He goes further to say that there is no "innocent look"; but perceiving images is always influenced by our knowledge of the world, and of other images through which an image is brought into existence by perceiving and understanding it. By sending messages, Facebook users send different signs to those who receive and see them. When posting a photograph

showing a glamorous lifestyle, users are trying to send a certain social standing to their friends. A sign is something we perceive, and which represents something else. Peirce cited in Gombrich (2000) states that there are many kinds of signs. Peirce (2000) emphasizes the overlapping and flexibility of the sign categories in signifying practices. Photograph is both icon and index; a portrait equally, particularly to a person who knows the sitter. The richest signs are usually combinations of different types. This is shown in this study as photos had many meanings attached to them by the users who post their comments on Facebook.

Different uses of Facebook for communication purposes by MSU students

Communication was the most mentioned activity on social networking sites in administered questionnaires, FDGs and interviews among students. 16.66% of the users said they used Facebook for communicating socially. Students mentioned talking to friends and family members whom they see often, those they see rarely, and looking for old friends whom they lost touch with. It is worth noting that this research discovered that when people communicate through Facebook, it was mostly with people they know in some way. About two-thirds reported talking to friends and family members; a third looked for old friends and talked to people who were friends' of their particular friends. From the FDGs, the researchers discovered that many Facebook users benefit immensely by communicating on Facebook, Most respondents through questionnaires reflected that they kept in touch, managed their relationships or received positive feedback from peers. There are potentials for people to make negative or upsetting comments in a very public way. From interviews, it was indicated as a common drawback mentioned by users of Facebook, although only a minority had actually witnessed it. Unlike in the real world, users felt that Facebook did not have firm rules, social conventions and obvious boundaries. This meant that users could communicate openly without any restrictions. This was in line with the concept of a public sphere which talks of "a whole polity" that cares about the common good and has the capacity to deliberate democratically. As stated in the literature review, Facebook in its role as the 'public sphere', has become the arena for argument and deliberation, as well as for association and institutional collaboration.

Use of Facebook for social purposes

The findings from the study indicated that using Facebook in contrast to other media, came with many benefits, since it is very interactive and effective for communication

purposes. From questionnaires administered to the ten users, the most common benefit listed was that students could communicate for free as there is wireless network at the university, which is accessible to all students. This meant that instead of calling on their mobile phones for information on lectures or assignments, they could simply communicate via Facebook as internet network is available. Therefore, it is affordable and cheaper. Another advantage listed by the majority of the respondents was that Facebook allowed users to interact with people whom they wouldn't normally communicate with on face to face basis. The study proved to be in line with Schramm (1954) 'Two Way Symmetrical Model, as findings showed that users communicated in a two way process when they send mails or posted comments on Facebook. This facilitated privacy, as users could send messages on personal levels unlike on the wall where everyone could see. Most respondents to questionnaires, focus group discussions and interviews, said that Facebook was interactive, instantaneous and therefore effective for social interaction. In this regard, has facilitated easier and instant networking among MSU students, and the global community.

Use of Facebook for academic purposes

For academic purposes, Facebook proved not to be very effective as people would log in for entertainment other than academic reasons. From the researchers' observations it is evident that for MSU students, Facebook is mostly used for social interaction than for academic purposes. Lasswell's (1947) channel recognises the use of the five senses in communication, meaning that his transmission model is important in interpersonal communication. His model shows that communication is linear. Through observation, the researchers discovered that users send messages via e-mail or on chat and the sender can communicate with the receiver through the internet. The message sent would reinforce the concept of who says what, in which channel, to whom and with what effect. The academic messages sent on Facebook by students concerning lectures as well as research got the responses anticipated and required as stated in this theory.

Students use of Facebook political reasons

Questionnaires administered reflected that students are increasingly apathetic about politics, and due to the popularity of Facebook among students, some see social networking sites as an ideal way of reaching them and stating their views. Apart from individuals' profiles, Facebook allows users to set up their own interest group profiles, which individuals can add as 'friends', receive

updates from and be involved with the group. There was a wide range of groups on social networking sites, including groups based on degree programmes, geographic location, former high schools, activities, charities, social issues, political issues and political parties. Very few respondents in the qualitative sample used social networking sites for the purpose of taking part in political issues. A minority, mostly comprising older users, acknowledged that social networking sites could have a wider application beyond their social communication purpose, and that they could be used to bring about positive social political change. No one had yet done this. These findings have shown that very few MSU students engage in political activities, and therefore the public sphere concept is not effective in the political arena. Facebook has therefore facilitated an alternative platform for subaltern resistance instead.

Disadvantages of using Facebook to MSU students

Using Facebook also proved to come with many disadvantages for many students, as proved from the interviews conducted by the researchers. 60% of the users interviewed listed Facebook's addictive nature as a disadvantage. For instance, instead of studying, students spent most of their time on Facebook chatting with friends. Facebook proved to have eradicated boundaries that come with personal interaction. 40 % of the users interviewed said that this had caused most students to write on walls and say something vulgar that they wouldn't have normally said on a face to face basis. This proved to have caused many friendships and relationships to fall out. Facebook proved to have influenced behaviours for many of the students, as it liberated them, by according them chances to freely express themselves. Other students seemed to have lost their morals as they wanted to be part of the glamorous life on facebook, thereby posting nude photos .This however influences how other students view them in the real world. A minority of the students also complained that they had lost their partners as some would prefer dating good looking guys on Facebook. These results show that although Facebook has brought many benefits, it has also come with many disadvantages, as information is easily available, This has facilitated crime, as users can easily access each other's personal details and abuse them.

Behavioural change towards study time through use of Facebook

The findings of the study also reflect that students' behaviour has been influenced by Facebook, because most of their free time is spent on interacting on Face-

book instead of studying. The research also discovered that students have been negatively influenced in their language and type of dressing, through too much exposure to and use of Facebook .What they see and hear on Facebook has become the norm of their day to day activities .Some students even admitted to dating because they display their relationship status on Facebook. Fashion trends, the type of movies to watch or even the type of music to listen to, is determined by one's social networks, as people would want to be in the same style with their fellow students. In FDGs, students also admitted to being addicted to Facebook such that at times if they logged on to the internet for research, they would instead find themselves on Facebook. This had proved detrimental and retrogressive on their academic carrier. Fourth year students also said that Facebook gave no limitations to speech. From this information, it is evident that Facebook influences the behaviour and attitude of its users. One of the key concepts in social cognitive theory is an environmental variable and observational learning in contrast to earlier behavioural theories. These findings indicate how excessive use of Facebook has the potential to influence behaviour and attitude. Facebook has fuelled loose morals, loose tongues, and treachery and lies. In some instances users in FDGs submitted to having put wrong age or work information, because they wanted to attract certain people. Facebook can thus be said to have influenced the behaviours and attitudes of its users retrogressively. This can however be criticised by the fact that behaviours cannot be influenced through the use of the internet alone, but through other agents of socialisation which are, the home, school and religion.

MSU students reactions towards use of Facebook

The study through questionnaires, interviews and focus groups, found out that MSU students fell into distinct segments based upon their use patterns of Facebook, and in particular, how they interacted with others on these sites. The researchers found out that MSU students who use Facebook are demographically from various age groups and sex, and this corresponded well with the Ofcom research. From the questionnaires distributed to male MSU students between the 19 and 20 years, it emerged that most of them, if not all fall under Alpha socialisers. Attention seekers are those users who want to be noticed. From the interviews conducted by the researchers, it was noted that most female MSU users of Facebook fall between 19 and 24 years, and would post comments and photos just to get attention. Followers are those people who followed trends. In this research, they are those who joined because their friends are on Facebook. Through focus group discussions, most respondents said that they had joined Facebook because

> I'd add anyone who is beautiful. [How would you find them?] Through friends, I'd look through friends and add them like that - Male 19 (studying media)

Figure 2. Alpha socialisers.

their friends were also on Facebook. Faithfuls are those MSU Students who use Facebook, and would want to keep in touch and become functional in their hobbies through their use of Facebook. All these segments are to be discussed in detail below.

Alpha socialisers

Judging from Figure 2 alpha socialisers consisted of regular users who went on Facebook often, but for short bursts of time. They search through the profiles of people they did not know (usually those of the opposite sex), commented on their pictures in flirtatious ways and added them as friends. For Alpha Socialisers, 'friends' on Facebook comprised anybody they had added to their friends' list. From the FGDs conducted, it was discovered that Alpha socialisers are the type of Facebook user's, and in this case, students whose focus was to hook up with new friends through searching for those who are online, and with existing contacts. Through contacting friends of friends, and even friends of friends of friends, it was possible for their networks to be very large. The statement above is a true representation of how Facebook has socialised its users into believing that friendships are based on looks, and thus this has eradicated true notions and perspectives on cultural friendships. This is consistent with Bandura (1976)' social cognitive theory, which states that people learn by watching what others do and that human thought processes are central to understanding personality. By observing what other users do on Facebook, students have developed certain personalities, and this has influenced their behaviour and attitude on their use of Facebook and on daily basis.

Attention seekers

This group comprised social networking site users, comprising male and female MSU Students between 19 and 24 years, who craved for interaction with others. From the observation made by the researchers, most of the users posted their photos to their friends, in provocative poses, partying, drinking and portraying glamorous lifestyles. Attention Seekers were willing to collect friends from all over the world, but tended to have actual online interaction with only a few people. Attention Seekers' profiles had a big effect on their social identity. In the real world, they felt they were insecure; therefore

social networking sites afforded them a boost on their ego. It was important to them that others commented on their photos and comments. This gave them a sense of acceptance and increased their self-esteem. The statement above is a reflection of how Facebook has created a generation of individuals who hide behind electronics. This statement is strongly supported by McPhail (2002) through his electronic colonisation theory that stipulates that "foreign produced, created, or manufactured cultural products have the ability to influence, or possibly displace, indigenous cultural productions, artefacts, and media to the detriment of receiving nations. People's notions of sociality have been replaced by the use of Facebook, and in turn affecting the behaviours and attitudes of users. The research findings support the electronic colonialism theory, as MSU students are a reflection yielding to the manufactured cultural products that have manipulated their well being and conscience. As shown in Figure 3.

Followers (male and female, 19 to 24 years)

The article finding through administered questionnaires, interviews, FGD and observations, indicate that users comprising MSU students aged 19 to 24, tended not to be early adopters of social networking sites, but instead followed trends in order to be part of what was going on with their peers. For Followers, it was crucial to behave and look like their friends online, as it gave them access to the 'in crowd'. They tended to have an intensive relationship with social networking sites initially, which then got diluted over time, as they were not as passionate about the sites as were the other typologies. The statements showed in Figure 4 above from respon- dents through interviews show that MSU students' decisions are usually affected by the environment around them, and this is in line with Bandura (1976) 's social cognitive theory which states that there is a fair amount of influence on development generated by learned behavior displayed in the environment in which one grows up. Bandura (1976) further argued that people learn by observing others, with the environment, behavior and cognition, all as the chief factors in influencing development. From the FGDs, interviews and questionnaires conducted by the researchers, this study discovered that 50% of the MSU students had joined Facebook social network site, because of their friends and this tallies well with the above explanation about Bandura (1976)'s social

> I usually post new photos on Facebook every week because I enjoy people's comments – female (20)[why do you enjoy people 's comments] because it's really flattering because in the real world people don't always get to comment

Figure 3. Attention seekers.

> I joined because when I came to college everyone was on Facebook and I didn't want to feel left out, once I joined I realised how fun it was, before that I was only really doing it because most my friends were- female 19
>
> One of my friends suggested that I become a member of Facebook so I did. To begin with I was on it most nights, now it depends what it going on in my class and with my cousins-female 22
>
> I do spend quite a lot of time on it, I enjoy posting my new photos and the things people say about them – female 20

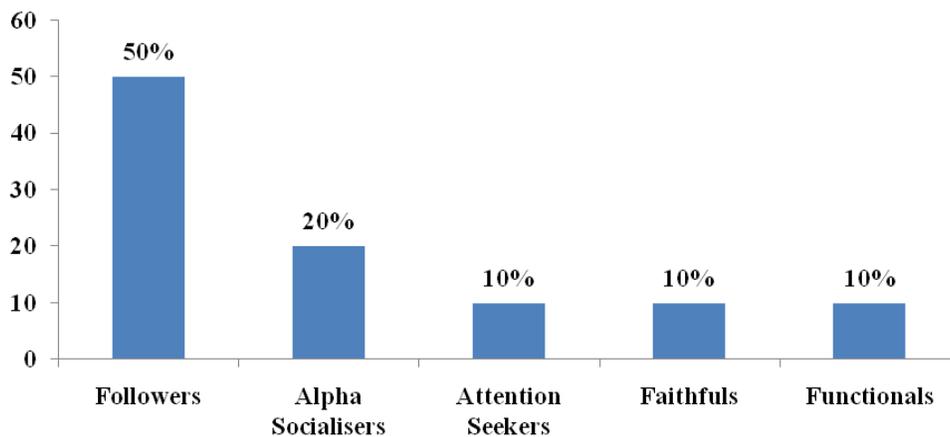**Figure 4.** Followers on Facebook (male and female, 19 to 24 years).

Figure 5. Summary of the behaviour of MSU students who used Facebook from 2012 to 2013.

cognitive theory.

Functional (male, 20 to 35 years, minority of the sample)

This last group of males between 20 and 35 years was single-minded in their use of social networking sites. They logged on for a purpose, such as checking their mail box, rather than conducting small talk, flirting or looking at others' pictures and leaving comments. From FGD's conducted by the researchers, MSU students admitted that they are often being pestered to join Facebook by friends who were more involved in the sites, but were themselves more occasional users, generally logging on for short visits. For Functional, 'friends' on Facebook were simply people they knew and with whom they shared common interests and hobbies. At a base level, social networking sites served a certain purpose, but only at a certain given time. This research found out that of the 30 users, comprising 15 males and 15 females, that were sampled, 15 were found to fall under the Followers category. *Alpha socialisers* totalled 6 males and females combined. Out of the 9 remaining in the sample, one third was for the *Faithful*, another third for the *Functional* and the remaining third for *Attention seekers*. Figure 5 above shows the summary of how students at MSU used Facebook from 2012 to 2013. From the 30 MSU Facebook users who were interviewed,

> Facebook has destroyed so many relationships and caused havoc ,it's better not to be on Facebook than to cry foul when things go wrong (how) some married people can communicate with their ex or the ex can send silly messages which can cause confusion in a relationship--- male 23 fourth year

Figure 6. smallest non-user group of Facebook.

> I am not on Facebook because I have no knowledge on how to use the internet and Facebook and I'm afraid to ask my friends as it seems like everyone is on Facebook....female 20 first years.

Figure 7. Technically inexperienced non-user of Facebook.

50% fell under Followers ,20% under Alpha socialisers, 10% fell under Attention seekers ,10% under Faithfuls and 10 % under Functionals.The percentages for the research outcome were obtained from administered questionnaires, FGDs, interviews and observations which were conducted by the researchers of this article.

REASONS FOR MSU STUDENTS NOT USING FACEBOOK

Non-user segments

The study included a portion of 30 MSU student's non users of Facebook, in order to find out their attitudes to social networking sites and impediments for not using them. Administered questionnaires, interviews, and FGDs conducted, indicated several reasons why other MSU students are non-users of Facebook. The responses elicited reflected that some students were simply having no interest in using Facebook as an activity. Others did not have time to use Facebook. Some preferred to rely on face-to-face and other forms of social interaction, while others had witnessed the negative side of using social networking sites among friends. They in turn chose to 'steer clear'. On the other hand, some students had concerns about their safety and being stalked by other users' .Others lacked the knowledge of using the internet and computers to the level of using Facebook. The reasons given for not using social networking sites could be categorised broadly into four groups namely: no interest, concerned about safety, technically in-experienced, and intellectual rejecters (no time)

Safety and security

This is the smallest non-user group in the sample, and

included older respondents especially those in their fourth year level, ranging from 24 years and above. It included both male and female students. Two respondents out of the 22 non users gave safety reasons for not using Facebook. They preferred having their own private lives and feared being harassed. They did not want to complicate their relationships; therefore they preferred not to use the social network site. Of the 30 that were sampled under the non users segment, three gave safety reasons for not using Facebook, making up 10% of the non users. As shown in Figure 6.

Technically inexperienced

This group was bigger than the 'concerned about safety' group. 50% of the non users gave technical reasons for not using Facebook. Most of the students in this group are in the Faculty of Arts and Faculty of Education. Some were in their first year; others were also older respondents who proved to be technophobic. They felt a general lack of confidence with computers and preferred traditional means of social interaction. Most of them had little or no access to, or experience of, the internet. There were also some in this group who wanted to use social networking sites, but just did not know where to start. They were often embarrassed to ask for help from their friends. As shown in Figure 7.

Intellectual rejecters- No time

This was also the second smallest group in the sample making 17% out of the total sample. These are mostly fourth year students who are about to complete their studies. Most students in this group thought that social networking sites were a waste of time, for people who were preoccupied with self-promotion. Many in this group

> If the lord is with us who can be against us............post by a female user 23 yrs

Figure 8. Intellectual rejecters- No time

> Apa ndinonakirwa ndega (I am having a good time) (referring to girlfriend' s photo)

Figure 9. Understanding posts by users on Facebook.

are confident individualistic students who spent much of their free time in the library rather than on Facebook. Their mobile phones are for making calls and not for Facebook. As shown in figure 8. This group was also the smallest, mostly comprising male students in their fourth year. They do not use Facebook simply because they are not interested. This group totalled 23% of the non user segment. As shown in Figure 8.

Building a social network

MSU students who are users of Facebook are busy creating their own social networks by inviting those they wanted as friends into their network. Having a potentially large network of friends proved to have a number of benefits for users such as; keeping in touch with friends and the family, keeping in touch with people not seen on regular basis, finding old friends, contacting friends of friends, and contacting people they didn't previously know at all. By extending their social networks, users had the opportunity to communicate with people who share their interests, and those from different countries, cultures and backgrounds. This proved to be the fundamental principle of social networking. On Facebook, a friend proved to be anyone who either accepts an invitation, or has their invitation accepted, to be friends. Some users even accepted as friends people who they did not like or did not wish to talk to, as they wanted to expand their friend list. Besides the physical benefits of communi-cating with others and expressing oneself, site users describe emotional benefits, including feeling part of a group and getting attention. They also talked about the joy of getting feedback from their peers when they log on and have a friend invitation, messages or comments on their photos.

Safety and privacy

This research discovered that privacy and safety issues did not emerge as 'top of mind' for the majority of users. Facebook is associated with the respondents' leisure time and promoted a sense of ease and fun. Most MSU

Facebook users were less aware and seemingly unwilling to consider that there could be a more serious side to this activity. Almost all respondents were able to say what the privacy status of their profile was. Only 3% were unable to disclose.10 % of the non users also gave safety reasons for not using Facebook.

Understanding posts by users

The researchers carried out content analysis on the posts that were posted by MSU Facebook users on their Facebook walls, and found out that Most MSU Facebook users seemed to like to post words of inspiration, favourite statements or at times statements that has to do with what is happening in their lives. Many seemed to use English, and there are few students who could use Shona or Ndebele. Posts varied by age, most inspirational statements or quotations from famous authors and verses from the Bible came from older users. This post is an inspirational message posted by a female user to her social network and gives hope to those who believe in Christ. This however differs from another post on the wall of a 19 year old male user. This comment on Facebook shows the level of maturity and personality. This shows that MSU students have different uses for Facebook. Whereas some view Facebook as a platform of giving inspiration, others perceive it as a platform of boasting about their personal lives. As shown in Figure 9 and 10.

CONCLUSIONS

This article mainly focused on both male and female MSU students, particularly those ranging from 19 to 35 years of age. It analysed the use of Facebook as a communication tool by students at MSU from 2012 to 2013.The research revealed that students at MSU use Facebook for different purposes which shape their behaviours and attitudes. The uses of Facebook by MSU students were demographically determined by their age and at times their sex. Again it was found out that MSU students use Facebook to pass on information about their lectures and assignments. It also showed that the inter-

> I think being on facebook is a sheer waste of time ,it's better to spend your time doing more productive things ,if I want to communicate I can always use my phone male 24 fourth ear

Figure 10. Understanding posts by users on Facebook.

action of trust and privacy concern in social networking sites is not yet understood to a sufficient degree to allow accurate modelling of behaviour and activity. The results of this research, strongly support Lampe et al (2007)'s perception that people use social network sites as Facebook to manage relationships initiated offline. This includes maintaining contact with high school friends and getting to know new classmates better. This research also found out that students at MSU use Facebook for hooking up with new people and for their academic purposes as well. It was also evidenced in this research article that Facebook enables its users to believe that they are in complete control of associates whom they interact with, and that their sociality is autonomously and autocratically directed by allowing them to construct their personal network, accept or decline Friendship attempts, and manipulate their presentations of self with extreme artificial ease. Findings through questionnaires, interviews, observations and FGD's revealed that Facebook as a new media technology has also replaced other channels of communication that students used to associate with for information dissemination. Furthermore, research findings proved that students spent most of their time on Facebook for social and not for academic purposes. The researchers in this article therefore, recommend that students use Facebook as an opportunity to further their knowledge base in academics.

Conflict of Interests

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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