

## **Facebook and Relationship Management among Students of Anambra State University, Uli, Nigeria**

**Leo O.N. Edegoh**

(Corresponding Author)

Department of Mass Communication  
Anambra State University, PMB 02, Uli,  
Anambra State, Nigeria  
E-mail: godloveslon@yahoo.com

**Ezekiel S. Asemah**

Department of Mass Communication  
Kogi State University, P.M.B 1008, Anyigba, Nigeria  
E-mail: asemahezekiell@yahoo.com

**Ita Bassey Ekanem**

Department of Communication Arts  
University of Uyo, P.O. Box, 1017, Uyo, Nigeria  
E-mail: itaekanem18@yahoo.com

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### **Abstract**

The study investigates facebook and relationship management among undergraduate students of Anambra State University, Uli, Nigeria. It adopted survey research method and used 300 students as the sample size. Anchored on the interactional view and technological determinism theories of the media, the study adopted purposive sampling technique and used questionnaire as instrument for data collection. Findings show that Anambra State University students are exposed to facebook. The findings further show that the students make friends on facebook and that they rediscover old friends through facebook. The paper therefore concludes that facebook is an important medium that can be used for relationship management among students of tertiary institutions. Based on the findings and conclusion, the paper, among others, recommends that government should make computer literacy mandatory for all students of tertiary institutions in Nigeria and that seminars and workshops should be organised for students, in order to enlighten them more on how to make positive use of the facebook to improve their studies and careers.

**Keywords:** Facebook, Relationship Management, Social Media and Undergraduate Students.

### **Introduction**

Social media are the tools and platforms that people use to publish contents and interact socially online (Heathfield, 2013). According to Heathfield, user generated content includes: conversation, articles, images or pictures, recipes and anything that an individual might share with others in their daily lives. Social media refer to media for social interaction which use

highly accessible and scalable publishing techniques. They include the various online technology tools that enable people to communicate easily via the Internet to share information and resources (Greendhow, 2009).

Global advancement in technology, modernisation and globalisation has resulted in global economic growth and unprecedented growth in social media of communication. Social networks of the electronic variety have become an inseparable part of the social culture of most societies, particularly the developed world. People have woven these networks into their routines, using facebook, 2go, linkedIn, online-gaming environment and other tools to build and maintain complex webs of professional and personal relationships.

In contemporary society, establishing social networks is more important than ever, in order to manage changes in technology and expectations in the current economy (Trubitt and Overholtzer, 2009). No doubt, social networks have become such a large part of students' lives in today's world; be it secondary or tertiary education. Social networks are a constant presence in the lives of students and have become a way to check on friends, play games and plan events. They also provide an outlet for self expression and sharing.

Smith, Salaway and Caruso (2009) opine that students can use social networks to express themselves and also, they have the ability to meet other students from all over the world. The existence of social network sites (SNS) has attracted millions of users globally. Thousands of social media sites exist and appeal to various groups for a variety of reasons (Heathfield, 2013). Most sites support the maintenance of pre-existing social networks, while others help connect strangers based on shared interest, activities or political views. Some social network sites also bring people together based on common language or shared interest, racial, sexual, religious or national based identities (Scolbe, 2006). Nigeria and indeed, many developing nations are experiencing rapid changes in technological advancement. As it is today, most information gathering and dissemination are done through the social media. Government parastatals and agencies, industries, companies, nongovernmental organisations, professional and non-professional bodies, individuals and particularly, students depend on social media for generation of needed information in their different spheres. In Nigeria, many students of tertiary institutions are believed to be making use of the social media in pursuit of their academic goal, but there are so many that are yet to acquaint themselves with the use of social media. The study therefore examines facebook and relationship management among undergraduate students of Anambra State University, Uli, Nigeria.

## **Statement of the Problem**

Social media are important tools for socialisation and entertainment. Social media have come to facilitate and ease social interaction in contemporary society, thus, making it easier for people to unite and communicate with long lost friends, obtaining information on what is happening around the world, making use of social marketing, advertising their products, getting information on academic level and so many others (Rebea, 2008). As a social medium, facebook has continued its long soak into the wider culture: millions of people have become aware of its use. Most developing nations are becoming increasingly involved in the use of facebook. Nigeria and other developing countries of Africa and the world at large are experiencing a boom in facebook usage occasioned by increased awareness of the medium, especially by university and other tertiary institutions' undergraduates.

The facebook and indeed, the other components of the social media have been fraught with problems right from the very beginning and the problems hinder the growth of social media use in our society. One major problem associated with social media networking facilities is lack of direct access by users. It may be argued that these social networks can be accessed through the use of application phones, but the problem lies in the prospective operator's

ability to purchase the application phone. Another major problem confronting social media is the misuse of the social networking functions of the social media by the users. Benkler (2006) attributes the high level of corruption in the economy to the misuse of social media in promoting dubious activities. Thus, the problem this study investigates is facebook and relationship management among undergraduate students of Anambra State University, Uli, Nigeria.

## **Objectives of the Study**

The following objectives are formulated to guide the study:

1. To determine the number of hours the undergraduate students of Anambra State University expose themselves to facebook.
2. To ascertain the regularity at which the undergraduate students of Anambra State University make friends on facebook.
3. To determine the rate at which the undergraduate students of Anambra State University rediscover old friends through facebook.
4. To determine the gratifications the undergraduate students of Anambra State University derive from using facebook.
5. To ascertain whether facebook relationship leads to physical contact.

## **Research Questions**

Based on the stated objectives, the study will provide empirical answers to the following questions:

- i. How many hours do the undergraduate students of Anambra State University expose themselves to facebook daily?
- ii. What is the regularity at which the undergraduate students of Anambra State University make friends on facebook?
- iii. At what rate do the undergraduate students of Anambra State University rediscover old friends through facebook?
- iv. What gratifications do the undergraduate students of Anambra State University derive from using facebook?
- v. Does facebook relationship lead to physical contact?

## **Conceptual Clarification**

Social media are online media that expedite conversation as opposed to traditional media (newspaper, magazine, television, and radio) which deliver content, but do not allow readers/viewers/listeners to participate in the creation or development of the content (Ward, 2013). There are several types of social media, ranging from social sharing sites such as YouTube and Flickr through social networks such as LinkedIn and Facebook. Ward (2013) sums up the unique importance of the social media as follows:

Social media have shot to the forefront of people's attention because of its fun. Thanks to social media; it is easy to share your ideas, photos, videos, likes and dislikes with the world at large and find out what they think of them. You can find friends, business contacts and become part of a community or a bunch of different communities. Social media give you what TV never could – a chance to be engaged and engage others.

Thousands of social media sites are in existence and they appeal to various groups for so many reasons. These social media include LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Ning, Flickr, Google,

StumbleUpon and Reddit. These Social media increasingly provide a platform for recruiting employees, servicing customers, professional networking, personal and professional branding and marketing products and service. The most popular social media sites as explained by Heathfield (2013) are:

**i. LinkedIn** – the professional site for professional networking, group discussions, publishing content and advertising jobs.

**ii. Facebook** – started out as a site for sharing pictures and chart among college students but has evolved into a significant platform for businesses. Facebook provides a way for families and friends to stay in touch and share their daily lives and pictures. It also allows you to create business pages that are separate from your personal page.

**iii. Twitter** – a platform where in 140 characters or less, people share their thoughts, share recommended reading, signal business that they need product help, and advertise jobs.

**iv. Ning** – allows users to build and maintain their own social networking sites.

**v. Flickr** – allows users to easily post pictures and share.

**vi. Google+** – recently arrived with a flourish, and once the option of business pages is added, will rival facebook for participants. This is because on facebook you have one list of friends with whom you share but Google comes with innovation of circles. You can add different people to different circles and decide what and how much you want to share with the people in each circle.

Relationship refers to a connection, association or involvement; an emotional or other connection between people. It is a state of affairs existing between those having relations or dealings (Webster, 2013). It is a particular type of connection existing between people related or having dealings with each other (American Heritage Dictionary, 2009). Relationship management is the process of being in charge of an emotional and sexual association between two people. It entails keeping one's connection, association or involvement going smoothly and far from crisis.

## Theoretical Framework

The paper is anchored two theories; namely: the interactional view of Paul Watzlawick and technological determinism theory of Marshal McLuhan. The interactional view was propounded by Paul Watzlawick who views a typical family as an interconnected system in which anything that happened to one individual in the system has impact on any other person in the system. This view tends to reinforce the central idea of the systems theory.

According to international view theory, an excess or absence of overt talk about communication is a symptom of a family in crisis (trouble). According to Griffin (2000) the theory has four major propositions; namely:

- i. One cannot not communicate; one cannot not influence.
- ii. Communication = content + relationship.
- iii. The nature of a relationship depends on how both parties punctuate communication sequence.
- iv. All communication is either symmetrical or complementary.

The first proposition – One cannot not communicate – emphasises the inevitability of human beings to communicate as social animals. It is either one communicates verbally or he

engages in meta-communication (non-verbal aspect). Meta communication is hinged on the action, not the context and it usually manifest as a result of trouble in communication. According to the theory, communication = content + relationship. How one chooses to communicate and the type of words used in communication can have great effect on a relationship. Proper choice of words is a necessary ingredient for any relationship to grow.

The nature of a relationship depends on how both parties punctuate communication sequence. This addresses mechanical accuracy of a speech. What one says or does, if not properly guided may make or break a relationship. This view reinforces the general belief and adage in Africa that words are chewed. The theory's fourth proposition is that all communication is either symmetrical or complimentary. Symmetrical interchange is based on equal power while complementary is based on differences in power.

This theory is relevant to the study because facebook relationship is dependent on communication – people engage in facebook because they cannot not communicate. For facebook relationship to blossom, the parties should both guide and guard their language and punctuate their communication to avoid misinterpretation and misunderstanding. People who use facebook employ it as a platform for exchange of their relationship content, be it ideas, photos, videos and so on.

Technological determinism theory was formulated by Marshal McLuhan in 1964. The basic premise of technological determinism theory is that the media are extensions of the human body; it holds that the media not only alter their environment, but the very message they convey (Asemah and Edegoh, 2012). The media bring new perceptual habits while their technologies create new environments. The theory asserts that technology, especially the facebook, decisively shape how individuals think, feel and act and how societies organise themselves and operate.

The relevance of the theory to the study cannot be over-emphasised. The technology of the social media and facebook, in particular, have altered our environment to the extent that people can now easily share ideas, photos, videos, likes and dislikes and have offered humanity a chance to be engaged and engage others (Ward, 2013). This opportunity did not exist some decades ago. Users of facebook are provided with opportunity to connect and be connected to by the technology made available by the social media.

## **Review of Related Literature**

Facebook, a social networking website launched in 2004, has millions of users worldwide and offers those with account an opportunity to interact with friends and the website itself. It is a platform that keeps users connected with those around them and what is happening in the world at any given time. Facebook is a way to direct others to events or products. Koyan (n.d) discusses the advantages of Facebook from four distinct standpoints, namely: friends, groups, entertainment and promotion.

### **i. Friends**

Facebook functions primarily to connect and network with friends and family. Using search and connection tools you find it easy to find current or long lost friends and to share content with friends and view content offered by them as well. Content includes anything from a post on your page (known as your Wall) to photos, videos and a personal bio. A user has the option to share little or as much with friends as he/she desire. These interactions offer users the opportunity to stay in touch with people, often some of whom the users would not be otherwise connected with on regular basis.

## **ii. Groups**

Users of facebook can create groups and event pages for special gatherings or topics. The primary purpose of these groups usually is to create (or bring) awareness to causes, such as in the aftermath of natural disasters, to provide information on how to donate money to help victims. A group may also be made up of a circle of friends or as a means to promote an upcoming event or gathering. A user can make his/her created pages private or public to allow the information be seen by only those he/she prefer or anyone that have access.

## **iii. Entertainment**

Facebook offers many types of games that can be played with friends and other users. These interactive games may offer a user the opportunity to pretend to run everything from a farm to your own mafia. This can be an interaction to share with current friends, meet new ones or simply pass the time. Many other applications also exist for entertainment purposes that offer everything from surveys to your biggest fan. All these features are optional and can be chosen at your discretion.

## **iv. Promotion**

Public figures as well as business also use facebook as a means of promotion. It is often necessary to create pages to allow users that may search for it the ability to gain information about a new product or promotional campaign. The sharing of these pages by friends and users creates free advertising for companies. Musicians, athletes and other celebrities use facebook to promote themselves (self promotion) showcasing to others the latest happenings in an effort to connect with fans and raise their popularity.

Other major advantages of facebook include its availability to chosen universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, research institutes and lots more and the high level of society associated with the platform; and the opportunity it offers users to check students who are in the same class, living within the same location or coming from the same academy.

Among the many sins of Facebook is the accusation that it provides a platform for criminals and criminal activities. One case in point, in Nigeria was that of the ill-fated facebook relationship between late Miss Cynthia Osokogu, a 24 year old post graduate student of Nasarawa State University (in Nigeria) and daughter of retired Major General Frank Osokogu who was drugged, gang-raped, tortured and murdered in a hotel room in Lagos on Sunday, July 22, 2012 by her facebook friends (Anyanwu and Dike, 2012; Awoyinfa, 2012; Oshunkeye, 2012).

Other demerits of facebook as a social medium include but are not limited to the following: i. It involves more and more people (crowding); ii. Long distance relationship weakening; iii. Unsupported by physical adjacency; iv. Contributes to wide range procrastination; v. Creates terrible addiction; vi. Possible stalking; vii. Acquaintances labeled as friends; viii. Contributes to poor academic performance of students (especially among heavy users); ix. Harbours criminals and facilitates criminality; 10. Facilitates immorality among youths; and xi. In rare cases, occasions physical harm or death.

Lynn Valverde and Leslie David have identified reasons why relationships fail. According to Valverde and Davis (2010) one of the major reasons why relationships fail is poor communication. This observation by the authors reinforces the central role which communication play in any healthy relationship. The other reasons the writers point out include: lost that loving feeling, financial problems, lack of time, sexual issues, marrying too young, loss of respect and admiration, opposites attract and butt heads, poor boundaries with

extended family, and substance and alcohol abuse. Some of these reasons advanced by these authors also account for high mortality rate of facebook relationships.

Articulating views on “How to succeed in Life” Charlie Gaston (n.d) raises five important factors. These factors which are germane to the topic under discussion must be imbibed if relationships contracted on facebook are to grow and mature. They are:

- i. Know your intention(s) and state your goals. It is important for anyone engaging in relationship (any kind of relationship) to first and foremost understand what he/she wishes to accomplish and why the accomplishment is worth the effort, time and sacrifice necessary for success.
- ii. Be realistic. It is crucial for anyone engaging in relationship to carefully look at the venture from many perspectives and measure the risk/reward ratio for his/her participation.
- iii. Know your strengths and weaknesses. You must utilise your strength to strengthen your weaknesses.
- iv. Learn how to be a more effective communicator, negotiator, problem solver, and general team player.
- v. Be positive. Work to solve problems and find a happy solution to every crisis.

## Methodology

The study adopted survey research method. A total of 300 copies of questionnaire were distributed to regular students of Anambra State University, Igbariam Campus. The researchers used purposive and simple random sampling. Purposively, 300 students who are on facebook in four randomly selected departments: Mass Communication, English, Economics and Public Administration, were issued the questionnaire as the respondents of the study.

## Presentation of Findings

**Table 1:** Return Rate of Questionnaire

Item	Frequency	Percentage
Returned and found usable	294	98
Not usable	3	1
Not returned	3	1
Total distributed	300	100

Table one shows that the return rate is 98% while the mortality rate is 2%. The return rate is higher than the mortality rate. The mortality rate of 2% does not affect the study because it is insignificant compared to the return rate of 98%. Thus, the copies were considered adequate enough to represent the population. The presentation and analysis of data that were obtained from the questionnaire were therefore based on the two hundred and ninety-four (294) copies that were returned and found usable.

**Research Question One:** How many hours do the undergraduate students of Anambra State University expose themselves to facebook daily?

**Table 2:** Provision of information on the number of hours the undergraduate students of Anambra State University expose themselves to facebook

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
1 hour daily	20	7
2-3 hours daily	64	22
4 hours and above daily	210	71
<b>Total</b>	<b>294</b>	<b>100</b>

Table two shows that 7% of the respondents (n = 20) expose themselves to facebook one hour daily, 22% (n = 64) expose themselves 2-3 hours every day and 71% (n = 210) respondents stay on facebook for up to 4 hours and above daily. This shows that the frequency of students' exposure to facebook is quite high.

**Research Question Two:** What is the regularity at which the undergraduate students of Anambra State University make friends on facebook?

**Table 3:** Provision of information on the regularity at which the undergraduate students of Anambra State University make friends on facebook

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Regularly	206	70
Occasionally	82	28
Never at all	6	2
Don't know	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>294</b>	<b>100</b>

Data in table three shows that 70% of the respondents (n = 206) make friends on facebook on a regular basis while 28% (n = 82) make friends on facebook occasionally, 6 (2%) of the respondents (n = 6) never made friends on facebook. It is evident from information in table three that students make friends on facebook and it is on a regular basis.

**Research Question Three:** At what rate do the undergraduate students of Anambra State University rediscover old friends through facebook?

**Table 4:** Provision of information on the rate at which the undergraduate students of Anambra State University rediscover old friends through facebook

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Often	229	78
Rarely	62	21
Never	3	1
Don't know	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>294</b>	<b>100</b>

Table four shows that 78 (n = 229) respondents often rediscover old friends via the facebook while 21% (n = 62) of the respondents stated that they rarely rediscover old friends through facebook. However 1% of the respondents (n = 3) asserted that they had never rediscovered old friends through facebook. Out of the three respondents who had never rediscovered old friends through facebook, two stated that they had never searched for their old friends on facebook. The information on table four bears evidence that facebook is a platform through which people can rediscover old friends.

**Research Question Four:** What gratifications do the undergraduate students of Anambra State University derive from using facebook?

**Table 5:** Provision of information on the gratifications the undergraduate students of Anambra State University derive from using facebook

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Chatting	206	70
Getting information	60	20
Academic purposes	20	7
Keeping away from boredom	6	2
Don't know	2	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>294</b>	<b>100</b>

Table five shows the gratifications which users of facebook derive from using the platform. 70% (n=206) of the respondents stated that they chat each time they engage others on facebook, 20% (n=60) hook on to facebook to search for information and 7% (n=20) use facebook to satisfy their academic needs. Two percent (n=6) of the respondents use facebook to contend with boredom while 1% (n = 2) could not specify the gratification they derive by using facebook. Data, therefore, show that students derive different gratifications for using facebook.

**Research Question Five:** Does facebook relationship lead to physical contact?

**Table 6:** Provision of information on whether facebook relationship leads to physical contact

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	171	58
No	120	41
Don't know	3	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>294</b>	<b>100</b>

Table six presents information on whether facebook relationship could lead to physical contact. Fifty-eight percent of the respondents (n=171) said yes that facebook relationship could lead to physical contact. However 41% (n=120) disagreed. One percent (n=3) remained undecided.

Data on table five suggests that there is a possibility for facebook relationship to lead to physical contact.

## Discussion of Findings

Findings of the study have clearly shown that students' exposure to facebook is high. This means that a good number of students are on facebook. It also means that a lot of students make use of facebook as a social platform for exchange of ideas. Advancement in technology has made it easy for students to have access to facebook as they can easily sign up and log into facebook with their cell phones provided these phones are application and internet enabled. The study also found that students spend ample time (much time) on facebook. This finding also upholds two major propositions of the interactional view of Paul Watzlawick which was one of the theories we reviewed in this study. In the light of the finding, Watzlawick appears to be right. One cannot not communicate; and communication = content + relationship.

In addition, findings show that students who use facebook not only make friends on facebook, but do so regularly. This finding is in line with the assertion of Smith, Salaway and Caruso (2009) that students can use social network (facebook inclusive) to express themselves and also, they have the ability to meet other students from all over the world. The finding also reinforces the submission of Ward (2013) that the social media provides users with the opportunity to find friends, business contacts and become part of a community or a bunch of different communities.

Another important finding is that facebook gives users the platform to rediscover old friends. People with whom one has lost contact for a long time could be traced and reconnected through facebook. Indeed, social media guarantee humanity ample opportunity for productive interaction (Ward, 2013).

On the gratifications that users of facebook derive by using the platform, the findings show that the gratifications are many and varied. The vast majority of the students use facebook to engage others in chatting, while others use it to get information and for their academic purposes. To some other users of facebook, the platform is an opportunity to stay away from boredom. This finding reinforces the central ideas of the uses and gratifications theory of the media.

Finally, the study found that relationship on facebook could lead to physical contact. This finding seems to re-echo the global village phenomenon of Marshal McLuhan and the central ideas of his technological determinism theory which this study has reviewed.

## Summary and Conclusion

The study reveals that students of Anambra State University, Uli are exposed to facebook and a good number of them are heavy facebook users; they stay on facebook for a long time or for many hours per day. Therefore, facebook usage by students is high. Students of Anambra State University, Uli, often make friends through facebook. Facebook is a forum for making new friends and strengthening old or already existing relationship. The students of Anambra State University, Uli, use facebook in rediscovering their old friends. The students derive several gratifications from using facebook. These gratifications could be in form of chatting, seeking information or in the form of academic pursuit. Facebook users could use the platform to establish relationship that could metamorphose into physical relationship but this hardly lasts for a long time. Based on the findings of the study, the paper concludes that students could use the platform of facebook as a social medium, to establish and maintain (manage) relationships.

## Recommendations

The paper makes the following recommendations:

- a. More students should avail themselves of the facebook platform as the present number is considered inadequate, giving the student population in Nigeria. More students should sign up to and own account on facebook in order to maximise the benefits of the medium.
- b. Students should concentrate more on academic issues when on facebook, rather than waste their time on mere chatting. Concentration on issues that will promote their academic wellbeing should be uppermost when using the social medium of facebook.
- c. Government should come up with legislation to regulate facebook usage and criminalise certain actions on facebook. Government and its appropriate agencies should also articulate and put in place adequate measures that will help in apprehending offenders and making them to face the law.
- d. Seminars and workshops should be organised by the appropriate government agencies to enlighten non-users of facebook on the need to be part of the platform and to sensitise everyone on the dangers inherent in the use of the medium.
- e. Government should address the rising cases of crime in the society by training, retraining, strengthening and equipping its security organisations particularly the police force to enable them rise to the new challenges posed by the social media.
- f. Government should address poverty in all its ramifications with a view to empowering individuals to own and maintain personal computer and application that could enable them access facebook.

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