

Mobile Phones and Social Networking as Tools for Promoting Reading and Literacy Learning

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ABSTRACT

Tremendous transformations in ICTs have questioned traditional concepts and constructs of reading and literacy. The use of mobile phones, especially those designed as 'smart phones', and access to various social network platforms have increased the volume of what people see and read daily and the frequency of interaction with different digital texts. The present study has investigated 200 respondents (staff and students) of two universities in Nigeria to ascertain the extent to which mobile phones and membership of online social network platforms promote reading and the literacy practices of Nigerian university students and academics. It was revealed that mobile phones and membership of social network promote reading to a high extent along the age variable. However, the literacy practices of students were low on critical literacy activities. Bearing in mind that the Web 2.0 revolution is a communication shift which must be harnessed to promote reading and literacy learning in Nigeria, it is concluded that teachers should first of all avail themselves of the affordances of new media and technologies and consequently provide students more opportunities to engage in and with digital texts; expose learners to the multiple and complex nature of new literacies; and encourage constant literacy learning to leverage young Nigerian adults join the collaborative, competitive and digitized global community of young learners.

Keywords: Literacy, Mobile Phones, New Media, Reading, Social Networking.

Introduction

It is not an understatement to say that contemporary human existence is defined by computers, mobile phones, and broadband internet access. The impact of these phenomenal and transforming technologies clearly defines human life and learning in the 21st century. Cut off from these defining and tremendous technologies, such a society or individual is virtually dead. One therefore imagines if there was a giant switch controlling all the computers, mobile phones, and broadband internet access in the world and this great switch was turned off, the loss, chaos and confusion which will result. The catastrophe would be comparable to an apocalypse of the end time.

Global statistics continue to show that more and more people depend on these communication technologies not only by teens and young adults but also adults whose lives and activities are now shaped by access to and utilization of these technologies. People now live media-saturated lives whether at home, the workplace or on the streets. People are glued to screens whether it is computer monitors, cell phone screens, video player screens, television screens and other new forms of screens which new technologies make available.

In Africa, within the past decade, media consumption has increased exponentially along national, racial, gender, socioeconomic, age and other kinds of classification

(Essoungou, 2012). Citing a UN International Telecommunications Union report, Essoungou (2012) reveals that 'Africa took the lead in the global shift from fixed to mobile telephones' adding that within a couple of years when mobile phones came into Africa, the continent has more than 400 million subscribers, a figure still growing which makes its market larger than North America. The conclusion is that 'rarely has anyone adopted mobile phones faster and with greater innovation' as Africans have done given the phenomenal growth in the use of mobile phones across Africa. What may be of concern is not just ownership and access to mobile phones in Africa but the type of phones, the uses to which the phones are put, and the affordances of the accessible apps. In order words, the connectivity concern, which informs in part, the focus of this paper, is to find the extent to which young Africans appropriate internet affordances driven by membership of social media platforms.

Generally, more people have access to mobile internet. However, what people do with the mobile internet is more important to some people. While there is an upsurge of internet use among Africans which is put at 100 million as at the end of 2010 (which may have increased largely by now), studies suggest that when Africans go online especially with their mobile phones, the spend greater amount of time on social media platforms and do less of sending and receiving e-mails, reading news and posting research queries (Essoungou, 2012). Although internet penetration rate is still

considered low in Africa when compared to data from other continents, the increasing use of 'smart phones' among young Africans indicate a growing use of mobile internet facility.

New Media, Reading and Literacy

Social networking which started in 1984 is one of the defining segments of the World Wide Web (www) revolution. Estimates by Alexa and reported by Ochefu (2012) show that 2.191 billion people log to social network sites every day. This is not surprising because online social networking (OSN) is designed to build online communities of people who share information, interests and activities within a virtual space. These social network sites enable people to send and share messages, images, and video that can be read or seen by large number of people online. OSN enables people to continue to converse and dialogue in real time in spite of spatial separation.

Sending and sharing messages in social network may take any of two forms (a) Texting (sending digital words and images) and (b) Sexting (sending semi-nude and sometimes nude images of senders to friends and other people). Whichever form

the message comes, what is important is that young people are more at ease in exploring and using social media. Thus Sylvester and Greenidge (2010) note that "For many students, their comfort level using technology exceeds that of their teachers and parents and, consequently, they confidently explore new software, devices, or other technological tools". The ease and comfort with which young people use and manipulate these new technologies accounts for the categorization of Prensky (2001: 2005) that young people or students especially those born in the 80s are 'digital natives' since they are native speakers of the digital language while most teachers and parents are 'digital immigrants', people who are entering into the new world of digital language. Digital natives are those who are immersed in a technology saturated culture where computers, the internet, cell phones, instant messaging, and social networking are readily available and 24/7 interaction is expected (Prensky,2005).

In 2012, the top ten social network sites in terms of registered users globally are presented in the table 1 (Ochefu, 2012).

Table 1: Top Ten Social Network Sites in 2012

S/no	Social Network	Registered Users (million)	Focus
1	Facebook	900	General
2	Twitter	500	General
3	YouTube	300	General
4	Windows Live Space	180	General
5	LinkedIn	160	General but mainly business and open to 18 years and above
6	Badoo	154	General and open to 18 years and above
7	Bebo	117	General
8	Friendster	90	General and open to 16 years old and above. No children allowed.
9	Flixters	63	General and open to 13 years and above.
10	MySpace	30	General

Source: Adapted from Ochefu 2012.

The growing influence of social network demonstrates the future of digital technology and the creation of the 'networked individual' in the words of Ryan (2010). According to Ryan, 'the coming power of the networked individual is the new vital unit of effective participation and creativity' creating new kinds of citizens known in some parlance either as 'netizens' or 'digital citizens'. Raji-Oyelade (2012) provides a typology to identify and describe the new four kinds of citizens of the world viz: e-literate literate, e-illiterate literate, illiterate e-literate, and pretendant e-literate. It is expected that university students and teachers should ordinarily fall in the e-literate literate category. Thus this paper aims at determining the extent to which new media (mobile phones and social network) promote reading and literacy learning in Nigeria especially among university students and teachers.

Many studies and surveys have captured how new media impacts on reading and literacy learning. Perez (2010) reports a study from Ruder Finn which revealed that Americans are spending nearly three hours per day on their mobile phones which is considered 'a better platform for social networking than the PC'. The study however revealed that 91% spent the time socializing in the mobile web involving activities such as posting comments on social networking sites (45%), connecting with friends on social networking sites (43%), sharing content with others (40%), and sharing photos (38%). An earlier study in 2009 by the Kaiser Family Foundation on the media usage of Americans aged 8-18 years revealed that young people in America lead a 'media-saturated lives' spending about 90 minutes a day on cell phones. Although the study revealed that only 1.13 hours was spent on reading out of the 10.45 hours young Americans spent on the media, Nick Bilton in a New York Times article reported a study at the

University of California in San Diego that the average American reads or hears about 100,000 words a day from the web, television and other media. The conclusion is that while there is less reading of print media, a great deal of reading from screens of one kind or another during the day has increased to about 350% in the last 30 years. While there is no comprehensive survey reporting on the situation in Nigeria nay Africa beyond episodic reports, the America situation suggests that with the explosion of mobile 'smart' phones in Africa and more access to mobile web through access to social network sites, there is an exponential increase of what young Africans read. Determining what young Africans do with their mobile phones and in social network sites is one of the motivations for this study.

Mobile Phones, Social Networking and Literacy Instruction

In 2009 the International Reading Association issued a position statement on integrating ICT and associated digital reading and writing into literacy instruction. The document states:

To become fully literate in today's world, students must become proficient in the new literacies of 21st century technologies. As a result, literacy educators have a responsibility to effectively integrate these new technologies into the curriculum, preparing students for the literacy future they deserve (IRA, 2009, n. p.).

We shall now explore some research insights on the integration of ICTs in literacy instruction to justify why mobile phones and social networking are tools for reading and literacy learning.

The July 2013 Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project survey of Advanced Placement and National Writing Project teachers revealed that 'digital tools encourage students to be more interested in their writing by encouraging personal expression and providing a wider audience for their work' (Purcell *et al.*, 2013). Specifically, 78% of the 2,462 teachers sampled say that digital tools such as the internet, social media, and cell phones 'encourage student creativity and personal expression'; 96% agree that digital technologies 'allow students to share their work with a wider and more varied audience' and 79% agree that these tools 'encourage greater collaboration among students'.

Some of the fears about the new media referred to as 'verbal togetherness', 'social cement' or 'social communication' are that it is less informational, less dialogic, makes use of more stereotyped phrases and with nihilistic consequences (Miller, 2008). In spite of these negatives, scholars still see in social media a veritable tool for literacy instruction. Lewis (2012) for instance maintains that "... we shape and are shaped by social media (as well as new communicative practices associated with them)" arguing that "Online social networking is a practice largely taken up by youths that provides an interesting study of the juncture between communication and self-representation. According to a 2009 Pew Research Center survey which Lewis writes on, 73% of youths 12 to 17 years of age who regularly access the internet are members of social

networking websites, with 66% of them having profiles on MySpace.com". In fact, Beach (2012) reveals that "...despite being blocked in many schools, teachers are increasingly employing Facebook and Twitter for academic purpose of sharing knowledge" and suggests that "Literacy teachers can participate in professional learning networks (PLNs) as digital learning commons for sharing ideas and resources" (p. 450). This is why Hutchison and Reinking (2011) harp on the fact that "ICTs provide unique affordances for reading and writing and thus they require unique skills, strategies, and dispositions that one may build upon, but also exceed those associated with conventional printed forms of communication" as the justification for teachers integrating ICTs in literacy instruction.

The position of Hutchison and Reinking (2011) underscores the increasing use of digital texts in promoting literacy instruction. Because of the accessibility and portability of digital texts through laptops, or handheld computers as well as electronic tablets such as Kindle, iPad, and Nook, reading instruction which incorporates digital text according to Thoermer and Williams (2012) "... can serve to motivate students to want to read and help increase students' reading fluency in the classroom today". In other words, they argue that "Living in a digitalized world calls for educators to reconsider non-traditional means of teaching reading". Echoing the same thrust, Larson (2010) affirms that "In today's world of increased accountability and strong focus on individualized student support systems, digital reading devices may provide the much needed support to both students and teachers". Thus, digital texts accessed through computers or electronic tablets such as the iPad offer an appealing medium of reading text that can motivate students to want to read and "... help increase students' reading fluency in the classroom today". This is because with digital texts, "Students are able to manipulate font size, dictionary usage, text-to-speech features, and note-taking faculties" (Larson 2010; Thoermer & Williams, 2012).

Generally, digital readers and e-books have been found to facilitate and increase reading interests and engagement. Although the multimodal features (animations, sounds, etc) of interactive e-books may potentially distract children as they read and make sense of the story (Burrell and Trushell, 1997; Matthew, 1996), reading motivation appears higher after children interact with multimodal texts, especially with children with reading difficulties (Glasgow, 1996; Fasimpaur, 2004; Larson, 2010) because new digital media has the potential to engage disadvantaged learners in textual practices (Mills and Levido, 2011) and provide "...new opportunities and extended possibilities for individual engagement with and interpretation of the text" (Larson, 2010). Arguing for devallainizing video, Hall and Stahl (2011) points out that "High level discussions, inference generation, and critical thinking can be conducted using compelling material presented on video while children are developing fluency with print-based skills" adding that "...video offers another opinion that has been relatively untapped in vocabulary development of ELs and other students with limited academic language backgrounds". This position is supported by Xin and Rieth (2001) who studied the effect of what they called video-assisted vocabulary instruction for

students with learning disabilities in grades 4 to 6 and revealed that video-assisted instruction produced greater gains in word meaning acquisition when compared with students who only received paper and pencil instruction. They concluded that "By thoughtfully integrating video clips into literacy lessons, teachers can build comprehension skills with young children and enhance the acquisition of new vocabulary for students of linguistic diversity" by using "today's web-based media options to make stories come alive and for students to travel to the far reaches of the world while sitting in their classrooms" (Xin and Rieth 2011).

Blogging is one of the social network practices which has been used in classroom instruction and extensively explored in the literature. Blogs are interactive forms of computer-mediated communication (CMC) that allows students to converse asynchronously via a forum on the internet. Students are able through blogs to post texts and share hyperlinks, images, and multimedia in addition to creating their own threads of conversation (West, 2008). Blogs help create a medium for students "to provide feedback to one another, hold a discussion with or without the instructor present, and foster a collaborative learning environment" (Hungerford - Kessler, et.al. 2012) as well as enable instructors to post notes, links, and resources for students.

Research has documented the efficacy of blogging as an instructional tool at different levels. West (2008) investigated the extent to which 11th grade American Literature students were able to create hybrid and situationally embedded identities in the blogs. Her research revealed that the identities of the students were shaped by the blogs themselves, her students' reactions to texts they read, and a variety of events in the students' lives.

Yang (2009) analysed the blog contributions of 43 English as a foreign language teachers in two teacher education programmes and found that the use of blogs not only enhanced the teachers learning of course content, but also enabled them to create Communities of Practice (COP) where people shared their opinions and the challenges and strengths they felt as educators while feeling supported by one another. Collaborating Jang's study, Johnson (2010) found that the use of blogs in a teacher preparation programme allowed students to know their peers both personally and academically. Johnson argued that by having pre- and in-service teachers analyse other authors' blogs, they were not only able to develop a more close connection to those who write the blogs, but also think about ways in which they can as teachers, do the same in their own classrooms to benefit their students. In other words, through reading people's blogs and writing their own, students learning can be greatly improved.

Integrating new literacies in general, and blogs in particular, in the classroom requires new skills and strategies that prepare students "to access and contribute information to a world-wide knowledge base" (Johnson, 2010). By using tools like blogs, students are learning how to critically evaluate what they read and to recognize the ways in which they read information in the internet. Johnson's conclusion supports the fact that technology can "actively engage students in their own learning, encouraging the exchange of critical questions and thoughts,

and expanding students' understanding of various issues by supplementing textbooks and learning with first-person international and intercultural perspectives and ideas" (Gorski, 2005). Gorski, however, posits that this will not be possible unless the teacher encourages students to take advantage of these learning opportunities.

Methodology

From the presentation so far, it is clear that ownership of mobile phones, access to the internet as well as membership of social networking websites and engagement in literacy practices using new media and technologies in Nigeria deserve investigation. This study therefore seeks to locate how young Nigerian university students and their teachers interface with mobile phones and social networking websites. Specifically, the study is guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent does ownership of mobile phones and membership of social networking promote reading and literacy learning among university students and academic staff in Nigeria?
2. What specific reading and literacy activities do Nigerian students and academic staff use mobile devices and social networks to accomplish?

Two Nigerian universities were used for the study: Benue State University, Makurdi (a public state-owned university) and Veritas University, Abuja (a private and faith-based university). Two hundred members of the two university communities (staff and students) were sampled for the study. One hundred and four were drawn from Benue State University, Makurdi while ninety-six were from Veritas University, Abuja. The 200 respondents were given a questionnaire which was designed to find out the extent to which mobile technologies and social networking facilitate reading and literacy learning in Nigerian universities. The findings of the study are presented below.

Tools of Analysis

Statistics used were Mean, percentages, frequency, line and bar graphs as well as rank order. Statistics used were Mean, percentages, frequency, line and bar graphs as well as rank order.

Findings

One of the objectives of this study is to determine the extent to which ownership of mobile phones and membership of social network platform promote reading and literacy learning among academic staff and students in selected Nigerian universities. Tables 1, 2, 3 and 4 below present the mean and standard deviation of the extent to which respondents were encouraged to read because of membership of social network platform by institution, gender, age and status.

Table 2: Means and standard deviations of the extent to which respondents read more because of membership of social network platform by institution and gender

Items	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Decision
Institution				
Benue State University, Markudi	3.0192	104	1.39333	Average
Veritas University, Abuja	2.4583	96	1.2971	Low
Total	2.75	200	1.37366	Average
Gender				
Female	2.7021	94	1.43557	Average
Male	2.7925	106	1.32174	Average
Total	2.75	200	1.37366	Average

The findings presented in Table 1 suggest that the ownership of mobile phones and membership of social network group promote reading in the institutions used for the study as well as the gender variable on the average even though it is reported low for one of the institutions used for the study. These findings agree with the common assumption that people would generally read more because they own mobile phones and maintain membership of a social network. Table

2 which presents the mean and standard deviation of the extent to which respondents read more because of membership of social network platform by age support the fact that "Online social networking is a practice largely taken up by youths..." revealing that "73% of youths 12 to 17 years who regularly access the internet are members of social networking websites..." (Pew Research, 2009).

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation of the extent to which respondents read more because of membership of social network platform by age

Age	Mean	N	Standard Deviation	Decision
16 - 20 years	3.5636	55	1.18265	Agree
21 - 25 years	2.95	60	1.32031	Undecided
26 - 30 years	2.8	30	1.34933	Undecided
31 - 39 years	1.65	20	0.9333	Disagree
40 years and above	1.7143	35	0.89349	Disagree
Total	2.75	200	1.37366	

The criterion mean are 1:00 - 1.49 = (SD), 1.50-2.49 = (D) 2.50- 3.0 = (U); 3.1 - 4.49 = (A), 4.50 - 5.0 = (SA).

From Table 3, the respondents between ages 16-20 agree that they read more due to membership of a social network platform. Those between ages 21-30 are not sure but those from age 31 and above disagree that membership of a social network group engenders more reading. This is understandable considering the digital divide between 'digital natives' and 'digital immigrants' on one hand and the categorization of e-literates by Raji-Oyelade (2012). Unfortunately, this is the age bracket most of the university teachers used for the study fall into.

Table 3 presents the mean and standard deviation of the extent to which respondents read more because of membership of social network platform by status. Table 3

Table 4: Mean and standard deviation of the extent to which respondents read more because of membership of social network platform by status

Status	Mean	N	Standard. Deviation	Decision
Teaching staff	3.84	25	1.34412	Agree
Students	2.59	175	1.30911	Undecided
Total	3.22	200	1.37366	Agree

shows that teaching staff agree that membership of social network platform makes one read more while students who generally fall within the age bracket of 16-20 are undecided. Although the students' response agrees with those of age 21-30 in Table 2, it is possible to argue that the difference between online reading and offline reading as perceived by teachers and students may account for the difference. However, the cluster mean of 3.22 for both staff and students show that respondents agree that they 'read' more because of membership of social network. One can therefore conclude that ownership of mobile phones and membership of online social network increase reading frequency positively among teaching staff and students in the university community.

Table 5 below which presents the mean and standard deviation of the extent to which ownership of mobile phones and membership of social network promote reading and literacy learning does not only reinforce earlier findings but also support the fact that teachers seem to align more with

the new conception of reading and literacy (Coiro, 2012). While students are undecided if ownership of mobile phones and membership of social network group will promote more reading and learning, teachers agree categorically as shown in the mean of 3.09 in Table 5.

Table 5: Mean and standard deviation of the extent to which mobile phone promote reading and literacy learning

	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Decision
1. I read more because I am a member of Social Network Platform	200	2.75	1.37366	Undecided
2. I will read and learn more if I am taught using any social network	200	2.88	1.54191	Undecided
3. My students will read and learn more if taught using any social network	200	3.09	1.54262	Agree
Grand Mean	200	2.91		

Criterion mean: 1:00 - 1.49 = (SD), 1.50-2.49 = (D) 2.50, 2.50- 3.0 = (U); 3.1 - 4.49 = (A), 4.50 - 5.0 = (SA)

The second objective of the study sought to identify the specific reading and literacy activities staff and students of Nigerian universities use mobile devices and social networks to accomplish. Table 6 and 7 below present the frequency of

preferred tasks which staff and students use mobile phones and social network platforms to perform as well as the kind of literacy activities usually performed using smartphones and social network platforms.

Table 6: Frequency of preferred tasks performed using smartphones, laptops or tablet computers

S/No	Description of tasks	Frequency(no. 200)	Percentage
1	Internet searches	156	78
2	Browse new journals	123	61.5
3	Browse newspapers	117	58.5
4	Social networking	115	57.5
5	Read the Bible	77	38.5
6	Read full-text literature	65	32.5
7	Browse magazines	60	30
8	Watch video content	54	27
9	Watch webinars	13	6.5
10	Others	3	1.5
11	None of the above	1	0.5

From Table 6, internet searches have the highest frequency of preferred tasks carried out by staff and students followed by browsing of journals, newspapers and social networking respectively. Other activities such as reading the Bible, reading full-text literature as well as browse magazines also had high frequency. Watching video content and webinars show low frequency. A graphic representation is shown in Figure 1 below.

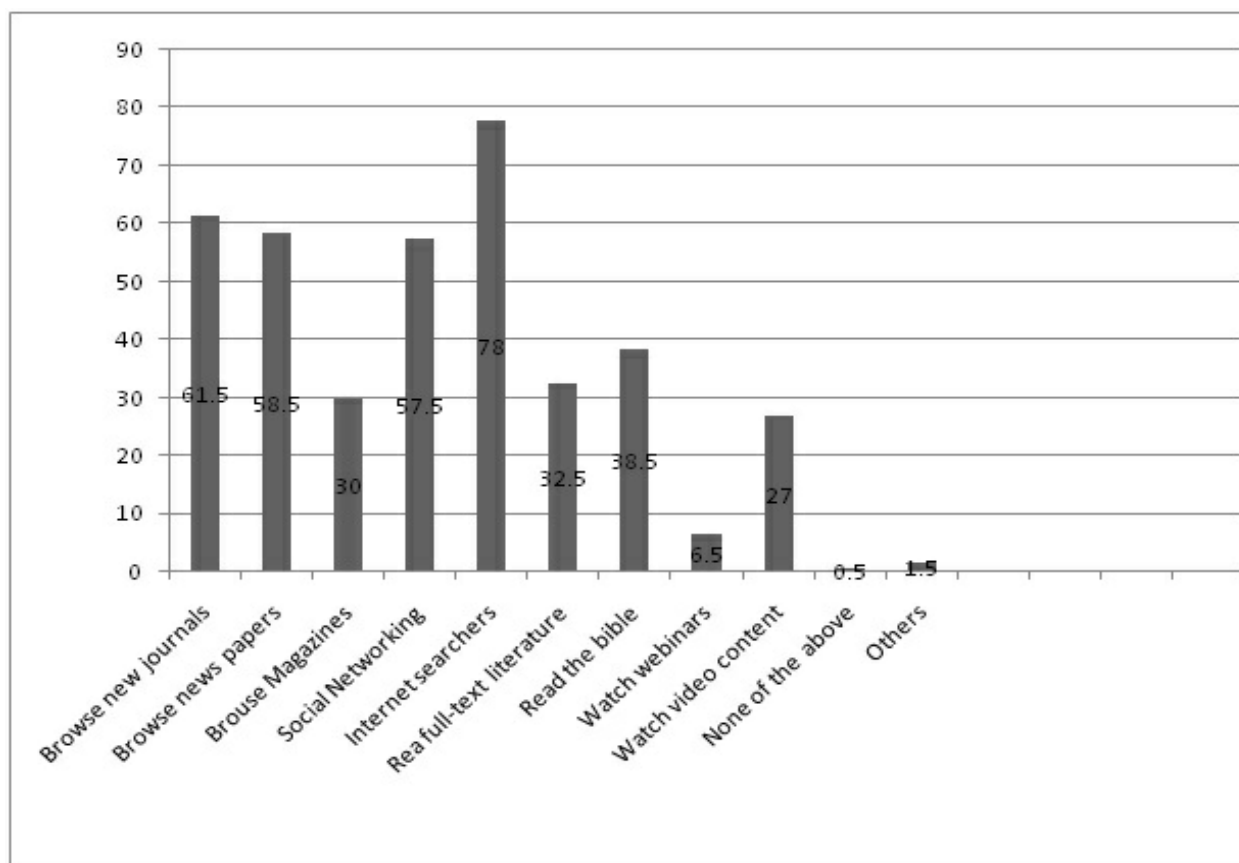


Figure 1: Percentages of preferred tasks performed using smartphones, laptops or tablet computers

Table 7 presents the frequency and rank order of the literacy activities which the respondents performed using mobile devices and membership of social network.

Table 7: Frequency of literacy activities carried out using smartphones, laptops and tablet computers

Item Description	BSU	VUA	Ranking order
1. Locating information online	80	64	1
2. Sending e-mails	53	65	2
3. Using reference site online	44	37	3
4. Searching for information online	47	39	4
5. Communicating using instant messenger	34	44	5
6. Reading a story online	37	32	6
7. Evaluating information online	30	29	7
8. Creating a word document	15	37	8
9. Playing education games online	25	25	9
10. Collaborating online with students	20	22	10
11. Gathering pictures online	18	23	11
12. Collaborating online with teachers	15	18	12
13. Synthesizing information	16	9	13
14. Publishing information on website	13	10	14
15. Publishing information on wikis or blog	5	12	15
16. Others	1	1	16

Table 7 shows that locating information online, sending e-mails, using reference site online as well as searching for information online dominate the literacy activities performed. Communicating using instant messenger, reading a story online, evaluating information online, and creating a word document came next in frequency in that order. Collaborating

online with students and teachers had low frequency which reveals that not much collaboration with digital devices and new media is going on at the moment in Nigerian universities if one can generalize. Critical literacy activities such as synthesizing information, publishing information on websites, wikis and blogs which are found to be critical for literacy

learning (Alverman, 2005; West, 2008; Yang, 2009; Johnson, 2010; Hungerford-Kresser *et al.*, 2012) are yet to be exploited

by the respondents used for this study. Figure 2 below is a graphic representation of the findings.

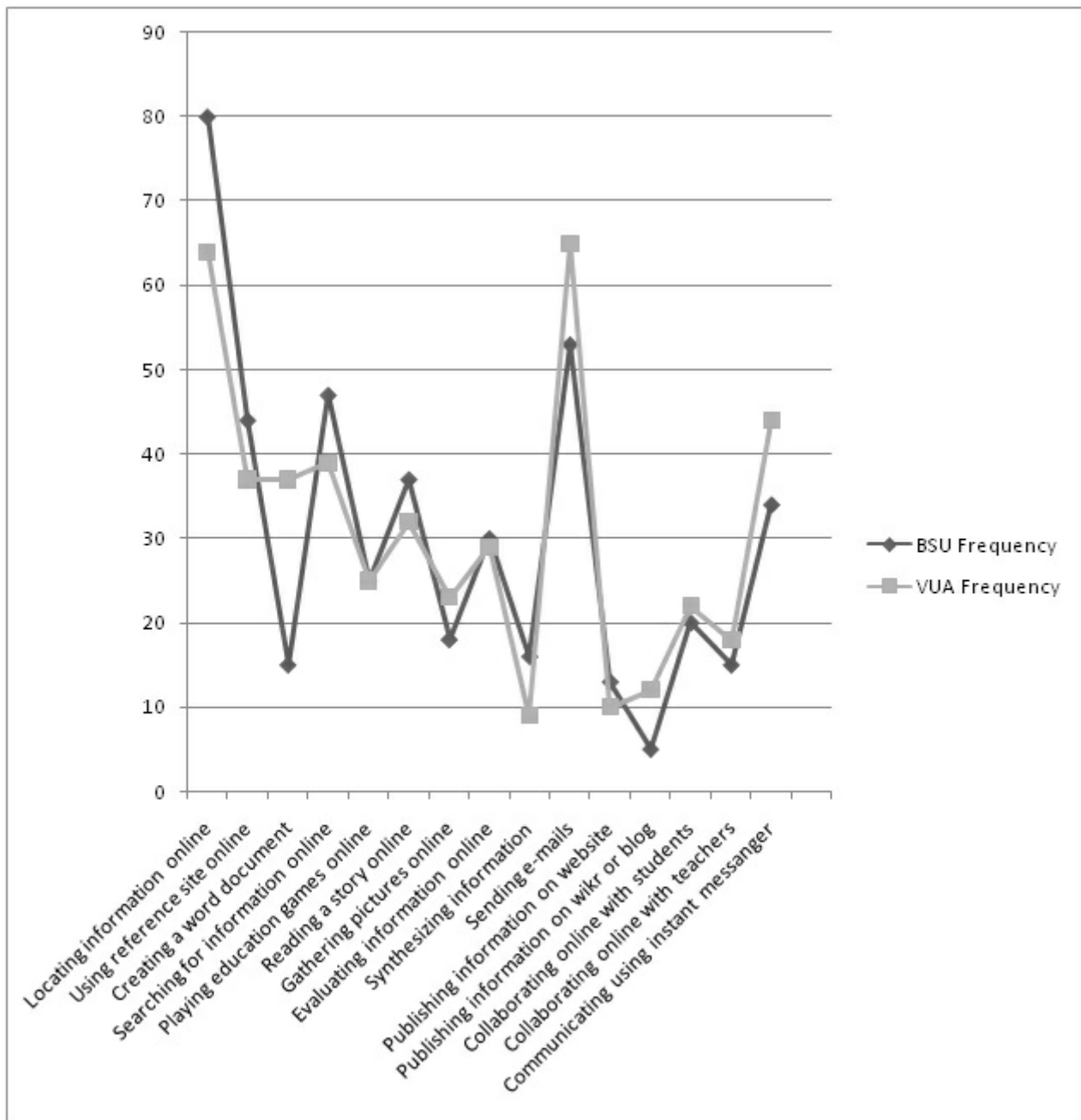


Figure 2: Frequency of literacy activities carried out using smartphones, laptops and tablet computers

Discussion

The findings of this study have shown that ownership of mobile phones and membership of social network group promote reading in the institutions used for the study. The study supports the fact that young people tend to read more because they own mobile phones and maintain membership of online social network. This clearly supports the findings of the Pew Research (2009) findings that "Online social networking is a practice largely taken up by youths", especially those between 12 to 17 years. Our study also reveals that those between 16-20 agree that they read more due to membership of a social network platform. What these findings through up is that we cannot hope to improve reading and

literacy learning if we do not meet children where they are and where their interests lie. In other words, rather than villainize ICTs, emphasis should be placed on how to make the youth more skilled in using them. Turn of events in a global information society suggests that hooking onto ICTs is not a vice but a virtue.

Browsing and online social networking are more than just visiting pornographic sites; online social networking more than just meeting the wrong persons and an unprofitable pastime. The critical point is not just ownership of mobile phones or membership of online social network but what we do with these new technologies. As Mills and Levido (2011) clearly note, "Relying on technology to engage students is not

the answer. Finding meaningful ways to use the technology may help with engagement." In the same vein, (Prensky 2005) maintains that for "tech-savvy learners to use digital technologies effectively and develop the critical literacy skills needed to communicate effectively in a digital environment, new literacy skills must be taught." And this is where teachers cannot afford to lag behind if they must continue to teach and expect students to learn what is relevant.

Other studies have shown that online reading by adolescents is not very skilled, especially their ability to locate and critically evaluate the information they encounter online (Leu *et al.*, 2011). Thus as Kellner and Share (2007) point out, what is required is "the development of critical media literacy to empower students and citizens to adequately read media messages and produce media themselves in order to be active participants in a democratic society" rather than insisting on teaching students to read and write only with letters and numbers and ignoring the fact that "We live in a multimedia age where the majority of the information people receive comes less from print sources and more typically from highly constructed visual images, complex sound arrangements, and multiple media formats" (Kellner and Share, 2007).

In this study we found that students were undecided if ownership of mobile phones and membership of online social network will promote more reading and learning against the categorical agreement of teachers. The seeming disparity between the response of students and their teachers may be accounted for in the difference between the different understandings of what reading is. It does appear that the students still perceive reading from the traditional offline form while the teachers seem to align with new forms of online reading. In fact, Davies *et al.* (2006) cited in Hodgson and Harris (2012) reported that many contemporary students 'find themselves living in linguistic contexts that simply don't correspond to traditional expectations'. Based on The Royal Literary Fund Report, Writing Matters, it is evident that 'the home language of many students in Britain today is not necessarily standard English' and 'if you spend much of your day listening to CDs, texting friends, speaking on your mobile, watching DVDs or surfing the Internet, then you are not reading in the traditional manner' (Davies *et al.*, 2006).

In other to bridge the disconnect, Coiro (2012) makes an important distinction between online text (digital text found on the internet) and offline text (information text on the printed page) pointing out that the defining difference between offline and online reading comprehension is that "offline texts reside in familiar and bounded spaces that remain static over time, while online texts are part of a dynamic and unbounded information system that changes daily in structure, form and content". Elaborating further, she makes it clear that a typical offline reading assignment asks students to read a common text, answer questions about the main ideas, and respond to these ideas through writing, art, or class discussion. In contrast, a typical online reading assignment requires students to sift through disparate sources to locate their own texts, synthesize the most reliable and relevant information within those texts, and respond with online communication tools as e-mail messages or blog posts. (p. 552).

The implication is that while teachers understand the difference between offline and online reading, it appears teachers in Nigeria do not sufficiently engage learners in online reading thus the students are undecided whether ownership of mobile phones and membership of online social platforms will promote reading and learning. This assumption is corroborated as we consider the preferred tasks and the various literacy activities which students engage in using online social networking.

While internet searches and browsing had high frequency occurrence of the most frequent literacy activities engaged by students, collaborating online with students and teachers and engaging in critical literacy activities such as synthesizing information, publishing information on websites, wikis and blogs had low frequencies. Yet, these are avenues for real sharing and learning. The efficacy of blogging as a veritable tool for learning is well documented (Alverman, 2005; West, 2008; Yang, 2009; Johnson, 2010; Hungerford-Kresser *et al.*, 2012). Thus if a class chooses to use microblogging and students microblogged once a day keeping to the 140 characters by blog, in a class of 30 students, students can read about 4,200 characters within a thread. If we estimate 140 characters to be about 30-50 words per post, then one post of an average of 40 words could generate 800 words per thread. Depending on the stream of posts in a day, one can estimate how many words students would read in a day using microblogging. If this kind of online social network practice is sustained in a class in addition to other online social network activities, students are not only going to enjoy reading but they would be motivated to read because there is meaningful and pleasurable engagement. It is for this reason that Mills and Levido (2011) admit that one of the immediate results of iPed pedagogy is that "reluctant writers approach writing tasks on the screen with significantly greater enthusiasm and a readiness to produce texts than when writing with pencils on paper."

Conclusion

In this study, we have shown the pervading presence of the new media specifically mobile phones and online social network as tools for promoting reading and literacy learning. These defining technologies have within so short a period, penetrated the world like no other technology or human invention has done (Leu *et al.*, 2011). Consequently, these "new technologies and new social practices rapidly and repeatedly redefine what it once meant, in a simpler world, to be able to read, write and communicate effectively" (Leu, 2000). In the words of Leu (2000),

To be literate today often means being able to use some combination of blogs, wikis, texting, search engines, facebook, foursquare, Google Docs, Skype, Chrome, iMovie, contribute, Basecamp, or many other relatively new technologies, including thousands of mobile applications or "apps". To be literate tomorrow will be defined by even newer technologies that have yet to appear and even newer social practices that we will create to meet unanticipated needs. Thus, the very nature of literacy continuously changes; literacy is deictic. It is becoming increasingly clear that the deictic nature of

literacy will require us to continuously rethink traditional notions of literacy.

It is this deictic nature of literacy which provides the plank to understand and appreciate the sometimes disparaged remarks of Alvin Toffler (1991) that "the illiterate of the 21st Century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn". This is the same assertion stressed by Karchenner-Klein and Shinas (2012) when they maintain that students, as digital natives, still have a lot to learn and that as teachers we have to keep our eyes on the moving target because literacy is constantly changing. Teachers should therefore direct efforts at "professional development by maintaining a finger on the pulse of technological advancements". In other words, teachers cannot help but incorporate these technologies and the new media practices in reading and literacy instruction because, ultimately, the decision regarding whether and how to use technology for instruction rests on the shoulders of classroom teachers. If educators are to achieve fundamental or second order changes in the classroom teaching practices, we need to examine teachers themselves and the beliefs they hold about teaching, learning, and technology (Etmer, 2005).

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