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Academic social media use for research by postgraduates of Tai Solarin University of Education, Ogun State, Nigeria.

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Abstract

A study was conducted to examine academic social media use for research among postgraduate students of the Tai Solarin University of Education in Nigeria. Survey research design and random sampling were adopted to select 500 out of 2,473 postgraduate population of Tai Solarin University of Education. Out of 500 questionnaires administered 467 were returned and collated of which 403 questionnaires were found useful for the study. Statistical Packages for Social Sciences software version 20 was used to analyse data using descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation. Findings revealed that surveyed postgraduates use academic social media for every aspect of research activities; there is awareness of academic social media sites among the respondents while the frequency of use of academic social media sites among the respondents falls below average. The study recommends that postgraduates should collaborate more with researchers on academic social media to help them improve the quality of their research.

Keywords: academic social media use, academic social media awareness, Nigerian University of Education, TASUED postgraduates.

Introduction

Academic social media is an offshoot of the social network sites designed to facilitate the coming together of academics, researchers, scholars, as well as students such as undergraduates and postgraduates in a virtual environment for collaborative and knowledge sharing on research activities. Academic social media was described by (El-Berry, 2017) as a virtual platform where researchers can create a personal profile, collaborate and interact with other researchers and academics with shared research interests from around the world. Also, (Jordan, 2014) in an earlier study opined that academic social media can be described as websites aimed clearly at the ivory towers which permits users to create a profile and make connections with others basically on research and other academic forms of collaboration.

Over the years, it seems that there has been a steady and continuous rise in the evolution of academic social media sites as it is now expected to be utilised by researchers to share and collaborate on research activities. Some of the academic social media include Zotero, RefWorks, Mendeley, Academia.edu, ResearchGate, Google Scholar, LinkedIn, ResearchID and ORCID. Furthermore, the use of academic social media creates a platform for users most especially researchers, academics and students for their independent study. Moreover, academic social media intends to increase the reputation of postgraduate students and their prominence and hopefully the chance to advance in their respective careers.

In the same vein, as the use of academic social media seems to continue to rise among researchers, especially postgraduates, it seems they are gradually adjusting to the reality of its importance which is to improve their research skills as well as their information literacy skills. In a recent study by Ali & Richardson (2018), this opinion was further corroborated as it was reported that the majority of the respondents accessed the relevant academic social media sites at least once a day. However, El-Berry (2015) pointed out that academic social media is utilised weekly showing a steady rise in its usage.

In addition, for the use of academic social media to spread among postgraduates, consideration needs to be given to whether there is adequate awareness done to promote the use. Anecdotally, postgraduates at the Master's level seem to be less aware of most of the academic social media, unlike their Doctoral degree counterparts. This opinion is in contrast to Singson & Anees (2017) who submitted that majority of the postgraduates surveyed were aware of ResearchGate, Academia.edu, Mendeley, LinkedIn and Scholastica and the services it offers. In

addition, besides from being aware of academic social media, there are various reasons why postgraduates utilise it. This assertion was underpinned by Manca & Ranieri (2016) who identified personal and professional reasons for using academic social media by postgraduates. However, there are scarce empirical studies to establish the level of academic social media use for research by postgraduate students in TASUED, this has therefore necessitated the need to investigate the academic social media use for research by postgraduate students in the Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State, Nigeria.

Statement of the problem

It can be said that with the evolution of Information and Communication Technology, there is a steady and continuous rise in the introduction of academic social media sites into the educational space, as it is now expected to be utilised by researchers to share and collaborate on research activities. This collaboration is expected to help them improve the quality of their research and help them widen their horizon in the research world. Despite these obvious benefits, it appears that postgraduates have not been able to take full advantage. Extant works of literature have reported a low level of using academic social media for research by postgraduates. It was also revealed through empirical findings and anecdotal evidence that there is a gradual increase in the level of awareness of academic social media by postgraduates. Also, there seems to be a dearth of empirical studies that holistically researched the use of academic social media for research by postgraduate students at the Tai Solarin University of Education. Hence, this study seeks to investigate the use of academic social media for research by TASUED postgraduate students.

Objectives

The main objective of this study is to investigate the academic social media use for research of TASUED postgraduates. The specific objectives of the study are to:

- i. assess the extent of use of academic social media for research among TASUED postgraduates;
- ii. ascertain the frequency of use of academic social networking sites for research among TASUED postgraduates and
- iii. determine the level of awareness of academic social networking sites for research among TASUED postgraduates.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study;

1. What is the extent of using academic social media for research among TASUED postgraduates?
2. What is the frequency of use of academic social networking sites for research among TASUED postgraduates?
3. What is the level of awareness of academic social networking sites for research among TASUED postgraduates?

Literature review

Academic social media use for research

Research by postgraduates has continued to grow in leaps and bounds in tertiary institutions especially since research activities are now the focal point of any postgraduate who desires to graduate. However, there are new approaches as to how they can be carried out and this could be seen in the use of academic social media by postgraduates. Jeng, He, & Jiang (2015) described academic social media for research as platforms that help researchers carry out different online activities through the use of collaborative and academic-related tools, features, and services that ensures researchers can build a professional network with other researchers. Several academic social media are springing up across the research space, among them are Zotero, Academia.edu, ORCID, ResearchID, Mendeley and RefWorks. In addition, (Barbour & Marshall, 2012; Vasquez & Bastidas, 2015) itemised the features provided by different academic social media which include high popularity, collaboration services, online personal management, referencing and citation, research dissemination, and document management capabilities and impact measurement services.

Furthermore, to ascertain how often postgraduates have been accessing and utilising academic social media sites, some studies have revealed some interesting findings. Among them is (Jeng, He & Jang, 2015) who carried out a study on academic social media using an online survey, it was revealed that the majority of respondents visited their accounts weekly, while 36% of them accessed, the site at least once per month. However, more than half (53%) of the participants reported that they were checking the news feeds only monthly, not as frequently as visiting their accounts. By implication, even though it appears academic social media is utilised frequently by postgraduates, they are not harnessing it properly for research. In a similar study by Singson & Anees (2017) on the use of ResearchGate by researchers including postgraduates

in India, the outcome of the study revealed that respondents used their academic social media accounts weekly. This implies that there is still a lot that needs to be done to increase the frequency of their academic social media use for research.

Also, to identify the extent of using academic social media for research by postgraduates, Manca & Ranieri (2016) carried out a study on postgraduates in Italy. It was reported that while Italian faculty members including postgraduates make use of academic social media, such as ResearchGate and Academia.edu, for personal and professional reasons, their level of usage is quite low. Ali & Richardson (2017) carried out a study on the use of academic social media by postgraduates in Pakistan. The findings of the study revealed that the majority of the respondents joined academic social media to search for articles which aided their research. Other reasons why they joined academic social media included searching for those full-text articles which could be downloaded, as opposed to having to request a copy from the author, and interacting with peers either generally or more specifically to share details of their research.

Singson & Amees (2017) investigated a study on the use of the academic social network of students at Pondicherry University, India. The outcome of the study revealed that the main reason for the researcher using academic social media such as ResearchGate was to connect with people who have similar interests. Other reasons why academic social media was utilised by the respondents were to gain professional visibility with discipline, keep up with activities of a fellow researcher, keep in touch with a known researcher, follow topics that the community is paying attention to as well as expand the current social network.

In the same vein, the awareness of academic social media is paramount if it will be harnessed for the purposed of research. Hence, Tolorunleke, Adebayo, Akoji, Enejo & Lawal, (2019) carried out a study on postgraduates in South-western Nigeria Universities. The findings of the study revealed that postgraduates were aware that ResearchGate, Google Scholar, Academia, Mendeley and LinkedIn are academic social networking sites that can be used for research. In addition, a previous study conducted on awareness of academic social media by El-Berry (2015) revealed that the majority of the respondents have heard of one or more academic social media such as ResearchGate, Academi.edu, Mendeley, LinkedIn and Scholastica. Also, the majority of the respondents chose the ResearchGate to be the most common site they were aware of and followed by LinkedIn, Academia.edu, Mendeley and the least popular site was Scholastica.

Similarly, the findings of a study by Singson & Amees (2017) on postgraduates in Pondicherry University, India revealed that the majority of the respondents were aware of full-text sharing of research articles via the ResearchGate platform, whereas only 5% of the population are unaware of this service. This implies that the awareness of academic social media did not stop at knowing it by name but the postgraduates were familiar with what it does as a collaborative tool for research.

Methodology

This study is a survey research design of ex-post-facto type. The population of the study comprises two thousand four hundred and seventy – three (2,473) postgraduates for 2018/2019 and 2019/2020 academic sections of Tai Solarin University of Education, Nigeria while 20% of the population which gave 495 but rounded up to 500 made the sample of the study. A questionnaire tagged "Academic Social Media Use Scale (ASMU)" was used to gather data for the study. The questionnaire consisted of three sections (A, & B). Section A was the Demographic Information Scale that sought information such as college, year of entry, programme of study, gender and age. Section B was the Academic Social Media Use Scale (ASMUS) which measured the use of academic social media for research with twenty (20) items rated on a four-point Likert from strongly disagree to strongly agree with a value of one to four.

Face and content validity of the research instrument was done by three lecturers in the Department of Library, and Information Science, Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijagun and two librarians at Olabisi Onabanjo University Main Library. 500 copies of the questionnaire were randomly administered to the postgraduates for two days of compulsory maiden postgraduate students' conference/workshop organised by the postgraduate college of the school on the 27th & 28th of February, 2020 with the help of three research assistances before the commencement of each day workshop after thorough explanation about the purpose of the questionnaire. Out of the 467 questionnaires that were returned and collated, four hundred and three (403) copies were found useful for the study. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, and the mean and standard deviation to measure the demographic information of respondents.

Results Presentations

Table 1 presented the demographic information of respondents. Data revealed that the majority of the respondents 171(42.4%) were from the College of Specialised and Professional Education (COSPED) with the least majority 38(9.4%) from the College of Social and Management Sciences (COSMAS), 125(31.0%) and 278(69.0%) of the respondents were 2018/2019 and 2019/2020 academic session in a relative sense. The result further revealed that Masters 247(61.3%) and Male 215(53.3%) were the majority in terms of the program of study and gender respectively, 25-39 and 45-59 years of age with 257(63.8%) and 48(11.9%) of respondents from the majority and the least majority in the same manner.

Table 1: Presentation of demographic information of respondents

| Measure | Description | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------------|----------------------|-----------|------------|
| College | | | |
| | COSMAS | 38 | 9.4 |
| | COSPED | 171 | 42.4 |
| | COHUM | 44 | 10.9 |
| | COVTED | 55 | 13.6 |
| | COSIT | 95 | 23.6 |
| Year of Entry | | | |
| | 2018/2019 | 125 | 31.0 |
| | 2019/2020 | 278 | 69.0 |
| Program of Study | | | |
| | Postgraduate diploma | 41 | 10.2 |
| | Masters | 247 | 61.3 |
| | MPhil/PhD | 82 | 20.3 |
| | PhD | 33 | 8.2 |
| Gender | | | |
| | Male | 215 | 53.3 |
| | Female | 188 | 46.7 |
| Age range | | | |
| | 20-24 | 38 | 9.4 |

| | | |
|-------|----|------|
| 25-29 | 94 | 23.3 |
| 30-34 | 83 | 20.6 |
| 35-39 | 80 | 19.9 |
| 40-44 | 60 | 14.9 |
| 45-49 | 36 | 8.9 |
| 50-54 | 10 | 2.5 |
| 55-59 | 2 | 0.5 |

Table 2 presents the academic social media use for research among the postgraduate students of Tai Solarin University of education. Based on the criterion mean (= 2.50), each of the twenty (20) items identified in the variable were significant with the highest (= 3.15) and the lowest (= 2.78) were "to enrich my knowledge on research conduct and writing and to collaborate on a research project with foreign researcher" respectively.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics showing academic social media use for research among TASUED postgraduates

| Academic social media use for research | Mean | Std. Dev. |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|-----------|
| to search and retrieve information materials for research | 3.13 | .97723 |
| to systematically review the state of research regarding a specific topic in my field of study | 3.00 | .91286 |
| to identify gaps/unaddressed questions for further research in my field of study | 2.91 | .85268 |
| to plan research process in my field of study | 3.02 | .84946 |

| | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|--------|
| to discuss my research findings with regard to their potential applications | 2.94 | .83603 |
| to critically reflect on the social/ethical implications of my research | 2.89 | .84737 |
| to communicate my research findings to scholars and users of my research | 2.96 | .86111 |
| to solve research problem in my field of study | 2.99 | .84234 |
| to enhance my research skills | 3.09 | .86918 |
| to collaborate on research project with foreign researcher | 2.77 | .93345 |
| to communicate and seek help from my supervisor | 3.02 | .84192 |
| to collect data for my research | 3.00 | .82725 |
| to follow researchers | 2.88 | .87024 |
| to be familiar with different research methods in my subject area | 3.09 | .79889 |
| to get the current research findings in my discipline | 3.05 | .85854 |

| | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|--------|
| to be informed about the current theories in my discipline | 3.10 | .76063 |
| to be informed about the paradigm shifts in my discipline | 3.04 | .78042 |
| to enrich my knowledge on research conduct and writing | 3.15 | .79603 |
| for online research group discussion in my field of study | 3.00 | .82725 |
| for my career development / professional training | 3.13 | .85859 |
| Academic social media use for research | 3.01 | .64501 |
| Valid N (listwise) | | |
| criterion mean | 2.50 | |

Table 4 indicated awareness of academic social media among the postgraduates. The result revealed that the respondents were aware of some academic social media tools such as Google Scholar, Academic.edu, ResearchGate and LinkedIn while they are not aware of the other tools identified in the study.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics showing awareness of academic social media tools for research among TASUED postgraduates

| Academic social media tool | Yes | % | No | % | Remark |
|----------------------------|-----|-------|-----|-------|-----------|
| Academica.edu | 319 | 79.16 | 84 | 20.84 | Aware |
| ResearchGate | 266 | 66.01 | 137 | 33.99 | Aware |
| Penprofile | 114 | 28 | 289 | 71.71 | Not aware |
| LinkedIn | 291 | 72.21 | 112 | 27.79 | Aware |
| Google Scholar | 327 | 81.14 | 76 | 18.86 | Aware |
| Mendeley/Zotero | 123 | 30.52 | 280 | 69.48 | Not aware |
| ResearchID/ORCID | 185 | 45.91 | 218 | 54.09 | Not aware |
| ImpartStory | 145 | 35.98 | 258 | 64.02 | Not aware |
| Publons | 114 | 28.29 | 289 | 71.71 | Not aware |
| Method space | 157 | 38.96 | 246 | 61.04 | Not aware |

Table 5 represented how often the respondents use academic social media tools for research in the frequency table. The result showed that the respondents use Academic.edu, ResearchGate and Google Scholar frequently, LinkedIn and ResearchID / ORCID sometimes while they use Penprofile, Mendeley / Zotero, ImpartStory, Publons and MethodSpace rarely.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics showing the frequency of use of academic social media tools for research among TASUED postgraduates

| Academic social media tool | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Remark |
|----------------------------|-----|----|----|-----|-----|-----------|
| Academica.edu | 75 | 31 | 95 | 122 | 80 | Often |
| ResearchGate | 96 | 42 | 77 | 106 | 82 | Often |
| Penprofile | 95 | 57 | 69 | 53 | 29 | Rarely |
| LinkedIn | 104 | 66 | 84 | 69 | 78 | Sometimes |
| Google Scholar | 80 | 28 | 70 | 109 | 116 | Often |
| Mendeley/Zotero | 201 | 55 | 72 | 53 | 22 | Rarely |
| ResearchID/ORCID | 175 | 37 | 74 | 79 | 38 | Sometimes |
| ImpartStory | 200 | 47 | 68 | 59 | 29 | Rarely |
| Publons | 217 | 44 | 62 | 60 | 20 | Rarely |
| Method space | 206 | 33 | 72 | 65 | 27 | Rarely |

Discussion of findings

The findings of this study revealed that the extent to which postgraduates of TASUED used academic social media for research was to enrich their knowledge of research conduct and writing. This finding aligns with that of (Ali & Richardson, 2017) whose findings revealed that the majority of the respondents joined academic social media to search for articles which aided

their research. This shows that postgraduates are interested in improving their research writing skills hence they focus more on information resources that help them to achieve research writing skills through the use of academic social media.

The findings of this study revealed that TASUED postgraduates use Academic.edu, ResearchGate and Google Scholar which represent a minority of academic social media often while most of the academic social media are used on rare occasions. The findings of (Jeng, He, & Jang, 2015) is inconsistent with the findings of this study as it was revealed that the majority of respondents visited their accounts weekly which means that the academic social media used by TASUED postgraduates could be used on a daily, weekly or monthly basis.

Furthermore, the findings of this study revealed that TASUED postgraduates were aware of some academic social media tools such as Google Scholar, Academic.edu, ResearchGate and LinkedIn. Consistent with this finding is the study of (Tolorunleke, Adebayo, Akoji, Enejo & Lawal, 2019) who reported that postgraduates were aware that ResearchGate, Google Scholar, Academia.edu, Mendeley and LinkedIn are academic social networking sites that can be used for research.

Similarly, El Berry (2015) revealed that postgraduates are aware of ResearchGate, Acedemi.edu, Mendeley, and LinkedIn as academic social media used for research. By implication, it shows that these academic social media (ResearchGate, Academia.edu, Mendeley, Google Scholar and LinkedIn) are most popular with researchers, especially postgraduates.

Conclusion and recommendations

Studies related to academic social media use for research by postgraduates have been a continuous area of interest for researchers and scholars since Information and Communication Technology is rapidly advancing. The level of academic social media use by postgraduates is of prime importance in the quest to ensure postgraduates become more competent in research. The use of academic social media by postgraduates is crucial to research and as a result, improved awareness and use of academic social media need to be maintained to ensure quality research is carried out and made visible by postgraduates.

Therefore, it is expedient that the stakeholders such as postgraduates, university management, librarians and lecturers in Tai Solarin University of Education Ijagun continuously

pay close attention to the improvement in the use of academic social media of the postgraduates by following these recommendations:

1. The university management through the postgraduate college should institute policies that will mandate postgraduates to be registered on at least two major academic social media with proof. Also, they should organise occasional information literacy seminars, and workshops which will help them to be more aware of the benefits of using academic social media to help boost their research.
2. Lecturers should engage the postgraduates in research activities that will see them make use of academic social media.

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