

Chapter 7

The Use of Interactive Media in Identity Construction by Female Undergraduates in a Nigerian University

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ABSTRACT

The world has become a global village with the aid of the internet whose attributes and capabilities are constantly surpassing all other sources of information that existed before it. The internet facilitates accessibility and availability. Distance in communication has evaporated, making interpersonal and group communication across continents possible and easy. However, a more outstanding use is recorded in its interactive segment. These interactive media come in the forms such as Chat rooms, Facebook, and Email. The chapter examines the uses of the internet interactive media by a selected group of Nigerian female undergraduates in identity construction. Results show sample population prefer and use the facebook for internet interactions due to its affordances. The e-mail and chat room media followed closely in order of preference. The findings support the uses and gratification theory which holds that people manipulate the media for self gratification.

INTRODUCTION

Marshall McLuhan a mass communication theorist (Uche 1996) first theorized that the world is fast becoming a global village. This speculation has become a reality through the internet whose qualities and facilities constantly surpass all other sources of information that have existed before it. The information age has produced a wealth

of information which is supposed to be readily available to anyone who wishes to use it. Indeed with increased popularity of the number of on-line services, people having access to information appear to be growing at an exponential rate. The uses of the internet are many and this chapter seeks to examine its interactive segment as employed by a selected group of Nigerian female undergraduates.

Communication is life and the essence of living is justified with the ability to interact with one's immediate environment especially with

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-60960-209-3.ch007

other human beings. In the immediate past, this was possible through what is referred to today as the old media of communication, such as the broadcast and print media: the radio, television and newspapers.

The twenty first century story is different, with globalization. The internet has evaporated distance in communication. Bell and Gray projected that by the year 2047.....all information about physical objects, including human beings, buildings, processes and organizations will be online. This is both desirable and inevitable. Globalization or Internet Communication technology in the words of Brown and Duguid (2002), has replaced old media of communication since where old technologies inherently forced people together in factories, offices, schools, libraries, for interaction and relationship, new ones tempt them to stay apart while providing all of these on-line with tremendous freedom. Consequently, centripetal social needs, which call people together, compete with centrifugal technologies that allow them to move apart but closer with the click of the button. The world is connected with technology and space is no longer a barrier to interpersonal or group communication.

This chapter examines the uses of the internet interactive media employed by female undergraduates of Bowen University. Bowen University is a private Christian University owned by the Nigerian Baptist Convention, located in Iwo town in south-western Nigeria. Michener, Delamatar & Myers (2004) observed that some people pursue the search for self-knowledge and for a meaningful identity eagerly, others pursue it desperately. College students (undergraduates) in particular are often preoccupied with discovering who they are. A few, however, have experienced existential uncertainty.

Basically, females are particular about their person, class, status and others' perceptions of who they are, and the factors responsible for their societal acceptance. The availability of electronic media especially the internet provides these young

females the opportunity to avail themselves of different websites. The internet provides strong influences that shape their perception of reality and means to project their perception of reality of the ideal female. In examining various media; the uniqueness of each will be appraised and the reasons for preference of one over the others will be highlighted as well as the advantages and disadvantages of each.

The main objective of this study was to examine how these Nigerian female undergraduates construct identity by the use of internet interactive media (IIM).

Other objectives are:

- To explain identity construction among these female undergraduates and propose reasons for it.
- To ascertain why these young females use the interactive media available on the internet in identity construction.
- To determine the features and affordances of each internet interactive medium that makes it appropriate for young female identity construction.
- To determine the most suitable of all available internet interactive media for these young females.

BACKGROUND

Communication Defined

Disciplines such as Psychology, Anthropology, and Human communication have all given a variety of perspectives to the definition of communication. Eyre, Chapell and Read, as well as Ugboajah cited in James et al (1990) gave similar definitions of communication as follows:

Communication is not just giving information but understandable information, receiving and understanding the message. Communication is

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