



## USES AND GRATIFICATIONS OF SOCIAL NETWORKING WEBSITES AMONG YOUTHS IN UYO, NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

*This study examined the Uses and Gratifications of Social Networking Websites among Youths in Uyo, the capital of Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. The population of the study was 86,662 with a sample of 381 respondents derived from the multi-stage sampling procedure. The study used the survey method as the research technique while the measuring instrument was the questionnaire which contained 13 items – eight close-ended and five open-ended questions. The data for the study were analysed through the use of tables and were expressed in simple percentages. The study found out that youths in Uyo registered in at least 46 social networking websites which indicates that they are internet-savvy and is part of the global social networking. It also found that the youths were active users of social networking websites and accessed the websites for various purposes and gratifications. It also established that the youths were not always fulfilled in their expectations of social networking sites, although they made use of these websites daily. The study recommended that service providers should, as their contribution to national development, reduce the cost of access to enable more youths in Uyo metropolis to register with and use social networking websites.*

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**Keywords:** Cybercafés, Online, Domains, National development.

### INTRODUCTION

Communication is central to human life; it sustains and maintains human relationship and social interaction. It is the transfer of information from one person, context or group to another (Giddens *et al.*, 2005). According to Alder and Elmhurst (1999), Robins (2005) and Kinicki and Williams (2006), communication is a definite process involving the source or sender, encoding of cues or

prompts, the message or purpose, channel or medium of transmission, decoding, the receiver and feedback. In essence, communicators often consider which channel to use in order to reach a given target audience rather than using the other forms of communication. One of such channels is the Internet. The Internet has significantly changed these thoughts as it has become the first choice of many establishments, organisations, institutions and even individuals for sending and receiving messages in order to achieve co-ordination and manage relations among people. Over the last decade, the Internet phenomenon has witnessed wonderful developments, one of such innovations being the creation of social networking sites which attract a great number of users, particularly youths, with amazing features and capabilities made available to everyone using them (Adrea, 2010). According to Cranston and Davies (2009), while social networking sites cannot be said to have replaced the old media and other existing means of communication, they have enhanced the functioning of the older media of communication.

Social networking websites can be understood as platforms on which a range of activities take place, as well as locations for interaction among individuals, groups and communities. A majority of social networking websites do a lot more than just allow youths to have a profile and a friends' list; they build upon and integrate many communication tools and technologies (e.g. e-mail, messaging, video sharing and photo-sharing). Thus, the use of these social networking websites for different purposes and the degree to which youths have access to them in different parts of the world and in different socio-economic contexts have necessitated this study to specifically ascertain the variations in social networking websites usage among youths in Uyo, the capital city of Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The Internet, since its inception in the 1990s, has significantly changed the methods used by people in communication, banking, shopping and transacting various deals. In view of this, a remarkable change has been experienced in the communication industry, due to the rapid growth of social networking websites over the last two to three years. This is an indication that social networks are fast becoming a mainstream culture that is being integrated in the daily lives of many people (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). A close observation of users of the internet at cybercafes in Uyo metropolis reveals an increasing interest by youths to surf social networking websites. The craze for social networking websites among these youths has necessitated the question: for what purposes do the youths in Uyo metropolis use social networking websites? And what gratifications do they derive from the usage?

### **Research Questions**

This study posed the following research questions:

- 1) What are the uses and gratifications of social networking websites among youths in Uyo, Nigeria?
- 2) How often do youths in Uyo use such social networking websites?

- 3) For what reasons do the youths use the social networking websites?
- 4) To what extent are the needs of the youths satisfied through the use of the social networking websites?

### **Operational Definition of Terms**

In this study, social networking sites are online domains used by youths in Uyo metropolis for socializing, connecting and meeting people. Similarly, social network services are online services, platforms or sites that focus on building social relations among youths in Uyo metropolis of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The term is used interchangeably with social networking websites. Youths are defined as young males and females between the ages of 15 and 30 in Uyo metropolis. In this work, “uses” as a concept means the selection of social network websites by youths in Uyo metropolis as a communication channel to perform a particular activity. Gratification means the satisfaction of the needs of youths in Uyo metropolis, or how much the social networking sites help the youths in realising their yearnings and aspirations.

### **The Study Area**

The study area of this work is Uyo, the capital city of Akwa Ibom State, in the South Eastern tip of Nigeria. Its metropolis sprawls into the adjoining local government areas of Itu, Ibiono Ibom and Uruan Local Government Areas. It has an area of 168km<sup>2</sup> with a population of 554,906 people. (National Population Commission, 2006). Uyo is bounded on the East by Abak Local Government Area, on the North by Abak, Ikono, Ibiono Ibom and Itu Local Government Areas, on the East by Uruan, Ibesikpo Asutan and Nsit Ibom Local Government Areas and on the South by Etinan and Mkpato Enin Local Government Areas. The population density is 1400/km<sup>2</sup>.

Uyo became a state capital on 23rd September, 1987, the day Akwa Ibom State was created out of the erstwhile Cross River State, as the 21st State of Nigeria. The State lies wholly within the tropics along the South South corner of Nigeria and the Gulf of Guinea, and situates on Latitudes 4<sup>0</sup>32'1" and 5<sup>0</sup>33'1" North and Longitudes 7<sup>0</sup>25'1" and 8<sup>0</sup>25'1" East. The state is bordered on the East by Cross River State, on the West by Rivers and Abia States, and on the North by Abia and Cross River States and on the South by Atlantic Ocean and the Southermost tip of Cross River State.

### **Social Networking Websites**

Social networking websites are web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection and view and transverse their list of connections and those made by others within a system. The nature of these connections may vary from site to site (Boyd and Ellison, 2007). What makes social networking websites unique is not only that they allow individuals to meet strangers, but they also enable users to articulate and make their social networks visible. This can result in connections between individuals that would otherwise not have been made. These meetings are frequently between latent ties who share some offline connections (Haythornthwaite, 2005). On

many of these websites, users are not necessarily “networking” or looking to meet new people; instead, they are primarily communicating with people who are already a part of their extended social network. While social networks have a wide range of technical features, their backbone consists of visible profiles that display an articulated list of friends who are also users of the system. Profiles are unique pages where one can “type oneself into being” (Sunden, 2003). This works with the use of a username, valid email address etc. After joining a social networking site, an individual is asked to fill out forms containing a series of questions. The profile is generated using the answer to these questions, which typically include descriptors such as age, location, gender, interest and “about me” section where the user is expected to tell a little about him/herself. Most sites also encourage users to upload a profile photo and some allow users to enhance their profile by adding multimedia contact or modifying the profile’s look (Boyd and Ellison, 2007).

A social network service is an online service, platform or domain that focuses on building and reflecting social networks or social relations among people who share similar interests or activities. A social network service essentially consists of a representation of each other (often a profile), his/her social links and a variety of additional services. Many of the sites provide support and maintenance to other pre-existing social networks but others aim at connecting strangers and friends, based on shared interest such as sports, political views and a myriad of other activities (Purcell, 2006). Other sites cater for diverse audiences, while others attract people based on their common social interests such as race, sexual orientation, religion, nationality identity etc (Romm *et al.*, 2008). Since their introduction, social networking sites have attracted millions of users who integrate these sites into their daily living. Here is a timeline to show the progress of the social networking world as posited by Laura (2010):

**Classmates.com (1995)** is a social networking site created by Randy Conrad. The website helps users to find, connect and keep in touch with friends and acquaintances from school. Classmates have more than 40 million active members in the United States and Canada.

**Sixdegrees.com (1997)** was named after six degrees of separation concept. It allowed users to list friends, family members and acquaintances and see their connection with any other user on the site. It was one of the first manifestations of social networking websites in the format now seen today. Sixdegrees closed in 2007. At its height, the website had about a million users.

**Friendster.com (2002)** has more than 115 million registered users and more than 61 million regular visitors per global month. The web is also used for dating, discovering new events, bands and hobbies.

**Myspace.com (2003)** was launched after *euniverse* employees with *friendster* saw its potential and mimicked the more popular features of the social networking sites. *Myspace* became the most popular social networking website in the United States in 2006. The 100th million account was created on August 9, 2006.

**Facebook.com (2004)** is the most popular social networking website boasting 350 million users. It was founded by Mark Zuckerberg who studied at Harvard University. The original concept of

*facebook* came from the colloquial name for books given out at the start of the academic year by university to help students get to know one another better. *Facebook* is an online site, which requires users to register themselves and create a personal profile. A valid email address is the only requirement to join *facebook*. Users can search for anyone on *facebook* and view the users' photo, but by default, can only see profiles and photo albums of other users in their own network. Within a profile, users can share interest, list work and education history, post photos, and publish notes by posting on "the wall." A news feed section shows all action such as photo/profile changes and wall posts of other users that have been added as "friends"; tagging the names of other users in photos enables those photos to also show up on the profiles of the "tagged individuals."

**Bebo.com (2005)** is an acronym for "blog early, blog often." It is similar to other networking sites; the site has two specific modules: a comment section and a list of user friends. The site claims 40 million users.

**Twitter.com (2006)** is a social networking website that enables its users to send and read messages known as "tweets." Tweets are text-based post of up to 140 characters displayed on the author's profile page; delivered to the author's profile page and are delivered to the author's subscribers known as followers. It is sometimes described as the "sms of internet" and is very popular with about 5 million users.

**Google.com/buzz (2010)** is the newest social networking site designed to integrate the googles web-based programme, G-mail. Shared links and messages show up in the user's inbox. Buzz focuses on integrating photos, videos and links as part of the "conversation" aspects of Gmail. Alongside these open services, other social networking websites were launched to support niche demographic before expanding to a broader audience. These social networks are targeted at a specific audience, according to Daniel Nations, former About.com guide (2010). This includes social network services for family, business associates, friends etc. By targeting a specific audience, a niche social networking website is able to create an automatic bond among people. The following is a list of the niches social networking sites.

**43 Things (2000)** is a social networking website that targets goal-setting. Members are interlinked by the goals they are going after and the goals they have completed.

**Broadcaster (2000)** centres on video, allowing people upload their own video clips and engage in video chats with other members and send video email. It came also in 2000.

**Blankplanet (1999)** is one of the oldest social networks and the most popular special interest social networking site. *Blankplant* caters for African-Americans.

**Care2 (1998)**, also called **green living**, offers email blogging, shopping admore, all centred on those wishing to live a green life.

**Dodgeball (2002)** aims at mobile users. Dodgeball interacts with mobile users to send text messages to friends alerting them that someone is online.

**Flixster (2007)** came with the tagline, "stop watching bad movies." *Flixster* combines social networking with movie reviews.

**Last Fm (2004)** prides itself as a social music site, and allows members to create their own radio station that learns what the person likes and suggests new music, based on interest. One can listen to radio stations of friends and other members.

**Linkedins (2003)** is a business-oriented social network. Members invite people to connect instead of friends. *LinkedIn* is a contact management system as well as social network, and has a question-and-answer section similar to Yahoo! Answers.

**Meetup (2006)**: This is a social network with an event organisation theme. It allows members to organise anything from political rallies to spontaneous bar hopping.

**Reunion (1999)** is targeted at finding lost friends, family and old class mates. It is one of the social networking websites that require payment for premium features usually found for free on other websites.

**Take part (2006)** is a social networking website dedicated to social activism. It was established by participant media, the company behind such films as *Syriana* and *An Inconvenient Truth*.

**Wayn (2003)** is an acronym for “Where are you Now”. In 2003, it became a social networking website aimed at travellers.

**Hi5 (2003)** has a large database of video since 2003 and one can add to his/her profile. Hi5 allows users to also add their own music and share same. One can organise his friends into friend folders to keep them separate from family or acquaintances and keep photos organised for ease of access.

**Orkut (2004)** This is a social networking site where one can meet new friends and keep in touch with them by adding them to one’s friends’ list or joining the same communities as them. There are lots of different communities in Orkut that one can join, so one can find friends who share the same qualities.

**Plurk (2001)** is a mini blogging social networking site. All the posts of all the people you are following can be found on your profile timeline. Photos and videos can be added to your posts and direct messages can be done too.

Generally, there are specific social network services that are designed for accessibility by mobile users. Such mobile sites include nimbuzz, 2go, dodge-ball, snaptu, bbm, qeep, whatsapp etc. However, some web-based social sites also support limited mobile interactions, for example, twitter, facebook, Naijapal, Africanplanet, netlog, badoo, ovi, myspace, cyworld etc. Many other social networking websites attract homogenous populations from specific geographical regions or linguistic groups, age, educational level and other factors.

There are many Nigerian-oriented sites which cater specifically for Nigerians. They include:

- (i) **Nairaland.com** also called “giant that till this moment”. No Nigerian site has been able to push “*Nairaland*” aside since its establishment in 2005. Nairaland was opened to Nigerian users to give them a voice at home and provide massive resources for information.
- (ii) **Naijaborn** is a custom-built social network service that creates a searchable, detailed, user-generated database for the global Nigeria Community since 2009. It is a site which is used by many Nigerians and where their creative works are displayed. It features

profiles of active members, a public user-generated blog, status update features and a place for users to upload music, arts and other media forms from their experiences. Technically, *Naijaborn* is a platform that strives to index Nigerian talents worldwide and make it easily accessible to the world.

- (iii) **Webtrendsng.com** is a webtrend tracking and analysis website, focused on keeping tabs on happenings around the worldwide web as they relate to Nigeria. It provides Nigerians (individuals/businesses) with information they can use. *Webtrendsng* conducts daily research for users' insightful information that will help them to understand the web better and how it can be used to their advantage. Since its launch in 2009, *webtrendsng.com* has been able to shape the Nigerian internet space with the right information.
- (iv) **Gbooza**: This is a Nigerian news social network which is a free, multifunctional portal and platform for Nigerians and friends of Nigerians to connect worldwide. It is for all who are interested in social networking, unity, peace, friendship and progress of Nigerians and the world. Users can post information about events, festivals, seminars, concerts, parties and workshops to the event calendar: news and other information are posted on "my page" forum of this networking site. Gbooza is also a complete educational platform for enlightenment in sports, worldwide events, national events, online movies, business, jobs and news on the other user's forum or blogs. This site was created in 2010.
- (v) **Timmynaija** is a Nigerian site created in 2005 and aims to bring Nigerians together for mainly networking purposes. *Timmynaija* features daily Nigerian news interviews, reviews, multi-media and a fast growing community of users. It has been delivering daily news alerts to Nigerian music industry, hiphop lovers, two-way pagers, cell-phones and email addresses.
- (vi) **Nigerian Channel** allows users to meet, connect and interact with other Nigerians anywhere in the world. It was established in 2010. It connects users with their friends and families, helps users to make new friends and build relationships. *Nigerian Channel* enables users to easily share photos, videos, events, interests and memories with friends, families and Nigerian community groups.
- (vii) **Naijapals** is one of Africa's largest online social networking and entertainment communities which enables users to meet new people. It provides updates on Nigerian entertainment and metro news, gists, opinions, latest music, Nollywood movies, confessions and interactive discussion forum. Naijapal came into existence in 2007.
- (viii) **Nigeriaconnect.com** is the number one entertainment site for Nigerians in the Diaspora. It has a setup radio/TV for the users to link the homeland with news features, talk shows and commentaries. It was created by Marshall Anakwo in 2008.
- (ix) **Gnaija** connects users to people around them. It allows them to make friends, say what is on their mind, create a group or join existing ones, chat with other members, add blogs, comment on businesses, events and so on. Not only can users update their *Gnaija* "my page" status, the application used on *Gnaija* allows members to update their facebook and twitter status with a single click. The site was established in 2009.

## REVIEWS OF STUDIES

A meta-analysis was conducted by [Coyle and Vaughn \(2008\)](#) in order to ascertain how college students in Texas in the United States used social networking websites. Their findings indicated that 41% used social networking websites for keeping in touch with friends, 17% found it fun and entertaining, and 12% used them to look for and post photos. Of the 35,000 subjects, no respondents indicated educational uses of social networking sites. [Dwyer, \(2007\)](#) carried out a study on “Digital Relationships in Myspace Generation.” The research aimed to find out how people used social networking sites. The researcher found out that students at Hawaii International in the United States used social networking websites to maintain strong, existing relationships and develop new ones. Members described an increase in their social productivity and reported the use of social networking websites to re-establish connections with lost friends and to view friends through their profiles. In a study investigating the relationship between individual religiosity and the Internet, social networking use at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, [Nyland and Near \(2007\)](#) performed an exploratory factor analysis on how people used social networking sites and found five individual uses of social networking sites: These were: meeting new people, entertainment, maintaining relationships, learning about social events, and sharing media. In the study, no relationship was found between religiosity and overall social networking use. However, those individuals who were religious were more likely to use social networking sites to maintain existing relationships.

Using a population from Michigan State University United States, a study by [Govani and Pashley \(2005\)](#) explored the relationship between the uses of facebook and how individuals were involved with their campus environment. Overall, they measured five individual motivations for social networking use:

- (i) Filling up free time;
- (ii) Acquisition of information about trend, events, music etc;
- (iii) Keeping in touch with previously established relationships;
- (iv) Meeting new people, and
- (v) Because everyone else is doing (using) it.

One of these, the fifth, had the highest mean score (4.07 out of 5), indicating that it is a strong motivation. This confirms that students’ frequency at social networking sites was because of peer pressure ([Govani and Pashley, 2005](#)). The strength for the rest of the uses was as follows: to keep in touch with offline relationships (3.64); to fill free time (3.60); information acquisition (2.25), and to meet new people (1.97). These findings suggest that individuals are using social networks primarily as a social medium to communicate with already existing relationships, rather than with new ones.

## Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study is the Uses and Gratifications Theory, also called Needs and Gratifications Theory. It is a model that focuses on why people use certain media rather than on the content. Uses and Gratifications theory was propounded by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler and Micahel Gurevitch in 1974. According to Daniel (2010), the uses and gratifications model posits that audience members have certain needs or drives that are satisfied by using both non-media and media sources. This approach focuses on what people do with the media rather than what the media do to people. Okunna (2002) says uses and gratifications theory is concerned with the social and psychological origins of needs, which generate expectations of mass media or other sources, and which leads to differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities) resulting in need gratification and other consequence, mostly unintended ones. According to Severin and Tankard (2001), the uses and gratifications theory involves a shift of focus from the purposes of the communicator to the purposes of the receiver to determine what functions mass communication is serving for audience members. Thus the rise of the uses and gratifications perspective was a shift from the old view that the audience was passive (a dominant concept in the magic bullet theory) to the realization that mass media users were active in their selection of preferred content and messages from the media. One of the tenets of the uses and gratifications theory is that audiences are active, and they seek to find out the mass media that satisfy their gratifications. The Internet has enabled audience to find and also have more options from which they are able to select the websites and web pages that satisfy their specific needs. The Internet also allows audiences to be in more control of the media.

Ruggiero (2000) claims that the deregulation of the media and the convergence of the mass media and digital technology have changed the number of times and ways people are exposed to the media. New media give their users more choice and possibilities to enjoy and use media. While using the new media, people are actively combining several motives to fulfill their yearnings and aspirations, properly referred to as gratifications. This also happens when they are using social networking websites. The uses and gratifications approach is therefore a good way to analyse the motivations and satisfaction of the youths in the Uyo metropolis. From a uses and gratifications perspective, social networking sites have a wide range of information material, thus those who utilise their services and resources should be able to satisfy a wide array of needs.

## METHODOLOGY

The research design for this study was survey. Survey describes and explains why certain conditions exist (Wimmer and Dominick, 2009). The research method was relevant in this study because it brought to the fore, the reasons youths in Uyo metropolis signed on to different social networking websites.

The population of the study comprised all youths in Uyo metropolis. Uyo metropolis in this study is as defined by the Uyo Capital City Development Authority. The population of youths in Uyo metropolis is about 86,662 (National Population Commission, 2006) The youths were selected for this study because they formed the most vibrant segment of the society and were thought to be those who used the social networking websites more than any other group in the society. From the population of 86,662, Meyer (1979) standard was used in selecting a sample of 381. This study adopted the multi-stage sampling procedure to reach the respondents. The city was first divided into eight clusters along the major axes of the city (see Table 1). The city was divided into clusters to enable the researchers to access all parts of the city which had cybercafés where much of accessing the social networking websites occurred.

The second stage of the sampling was the purposive sampling procedure. Two cybercafés were purposively selected from each of the clusters. This was done to ensure that youths in all parts of the city were fairly represented. This process produced a total of 16 cybercafés where youths using the social networking websites could be accessed for the study. Since the study made use of 16 cybercafés, each of the cafes, according to the sample of 381, produced 24 respondents. The third stage in the sampling procedure was available sample, a situation in which the 24 respondents required per cybercafé and who met the relevant criteria (between ages 15 and 30) and had recently accessed a social networking website were selected for the study. Details of the clusters and names of cybercafés selected are contained in Table 1 presented at the Appendix.

### **The findings**

The sample for the study was 381 respondents. Accordingly, 381 copies of the questionnaire were administered on the respondents. Out of this number, 23 respondents either did not return their copies of the questionnaire or did not complete the questionnaire correctly, and therefore such copies could not be used for analysis. The data for this study were therefore based on the responses of 358 subjects. The respondents, according to the data, registered in 46 social networking websites: 2go, facebook, nimbuzz, whatsapp, myspace, twitter, mxit, badoo, netlog, yahoomessenger, flickr, africanplanet, ebuddy, flixster, legwork, nigeriacconnect, blankplanet, yokoos, qeep, smiggle, eskimi, webta, blackberrymessenger, nigerpet, rockettalk, dodgeball, bebo, on chat, presport, itsnry, naijaconnect, mobiluk, skype, hi5, googletalk, avatar, mtn chatup, 9icefaces, 9jia.com, MSN, nairaland, chatpro, naijapal, friendster, mocospace and naijahotjobs.

The findings also indicated that 200 respondents (55.9%) visited facebook the most, while 93 respondents (26%) visited 2go the most; 19 (5.3%) visited twitter, 13 (3.6%) visited yahoo the most; Ninibuzz website had 10 respondents (2.8%) visiting it the most; while BBM had eight respondents (2.2%) who most visited the website. The rest of the respondents, 28 in number (7.8%), visited other websites. For the regularity of access to social networking web sites, 131 respondents (36.5%) said they daily accessed the sites with which they registered; 65 (18.2%) accessed weekly; 12 respondents (3.4%) accessed their social networking websites monthly, while

150 respondents (41.9%) said they accessed the sites as often as they were chanced. This is shown in Table 2. Respondents gave different reasons for initially registering with social networking websites. On the need to connect with old/new friends, the data had 90 (25.1%) respondents; 25 (7%) said they registered to have fun and relaxation; 17 (4.7%) respondents said they used the websites to promote their businesses; 25 (7%) respondents gave the reason that social networking websites made them socially balanced; 20 (5.6%) said they gained information while 50 (13.9%) registered to develop a relationship. See Table 3 for details. Many reasons informed that regularity of the respondents' visits to the different social networking websites. One hundred and sixty respondents (44.7%) did this because of the availability of airtime, while eight respondents (2.2%) visited because of the availability of a personal computer. For 99 respondents (27.7%), the regularity of visits was determined by the availability of online friends, while for 73 respondents (20.4%), regular visits were a function of ease of connection. Availability of power supply was a determining factor for 18 respondents (5%). Table 4 gives the details. Of the 358 respondents, 125 (34.9%) said their expectations were always fulfilled through their use of social networking websites. For 28 respondents (7.8%), their expectations were rarely fulfilled; while for 197 respondents (55%), their expectations were sometimes fulfilled. The expectations of eight respondents (2.3%) were never fulfilled, as presented in Table 5. The respondents also offered reasons for unfulfilled expectations while on the social networking websites. The absence of the expected type of friends was the reason for 146 respondents (40.8%); 119 respondents (33.2%) cited the absence of online friends at a particular time, while 62 respondents (17.3%) attributed their unfulfilled expectations to lack of update from friends. Thirty one respondents (8.7%) said lack of update from site hosts accounted for their unfulfilled expectations. This is presented in Table 6. On if the respondents moved to other social networking websites in the event of unfulfilled expectations with the ones they were using, 71 respondents (19.8%) said they always moved; 51 respondents (14.3%) said they rarely moved; 163 respondents (45.5%) said they sometimes moved, while 73 (20.4%) said they never moved to other social networking websites in spite of their unfulfilled expectations. This is presented in Table 7. Several problems limited respondents' access to social networking websites. One hundred and seventy respondents (47.5%) identified bad network as a limiting factor, 81 respondents (22.6%) identified lack of airtime (funds), 44 respondents (12.3%) said they had no time to browse, while 16 respondents (4.5%) identified lack of power supply. Fifteen respondents (4.2%) said they limited their access because they would not love to meet some persons online. Thirteen respondents (3.6%) spoke of handset problems while the rest of the respondents, 19 in number (5.3%), gave sundry reasons. Details are presented in Table 8.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

### Research Question 1: What are the social networking websites used by youths in Uyo?

From the data generated, youths in Uyo metropolis registered in 46 social networking websites, prominent among them being facebook, 2go, twitter, myspace, yahoomessenger, and nimbuzz.

These 46 websites have already been reported. That youths in Uyo metropolis have registered in all least 46 websites is an indication that the youths are Internet-savvy in the first place, and are part of the global networking made possible by social networking websites. It also indicates some measure of diversity among youths in the use of social networking websites. Ordinarily, one would have thought that the youths would restrict themselves to the very popular social networking websites such as facebook, 2go, twitter etc, but they have gone beyond that to explore many others, and are not willing to be bound by a few websites in trying to derive maximum gratifications from the information and communication technology (ICT) revolution. This shows that the youths in Uyo have keyed into the demands of the current age – seeking information through the net. This also suggests that if this trend continues, before long most of the youths will be on one social networking website or the other.

**Research Question 2: How often do youths in Uyo use such social networking websites?**

One hundred and thirty one respondents (36.5%) accessed social networking websites daily, 65 respondents (18.2%) accessed weekly; 12 (3.4%) accessed monthly while 150 respondents (41.9%) accessed whenever they were chanced.

The above data indicate that youths in Uyo are frequent users of social networking websites. Many of them have made the websites part of their life, hence they visit daily, weekly, monthly as the case may be. That 150 respondents (41.9%) visit the websites whenever they are chanced only suggests that as important as the social networking websites are, they do not control the life of some youths who are active in going to school, work or learn a trade. They are busy people who, nevertheless, still find time to visit the websites for one reason or the other. Yet, their different engagements have not been able to make them lose sight of the need to be on a social networking website. As often as they have chance – it could be many times a day – they keep abreast with what the social networking websites media have to offer.

**Research Question 3: For what reasons do the youths use social networking websites?**

From the data, youths in Uyo use social networking websites for various reasons. These include connecting with new and old friends, having fun and relaxation, promoting their businesses, being socially balanced, easing boredom, being trendy and developing a relationship. Others are checking on friends' comments, watching movies, getting the latest information, engaging in research, playing games, maintaining business contacts and updating status/wall. The findings of this study are in line with the findings of an earlier study on “The relationship between individual religiosity and social networking use at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah,” by [Nyland and Near \(2007\)](#). The study found five individual uses of social networking sites to include meeting new people, entertainment, maintaining relationships, learning about social events and sharing media. However, those individuals who were religious were more likely to use social networking sites to maintain existing relationships. The various reasons reflect the diversity of the respondents' needs. This is in line with the uses and gratification theory which holds that consumers of media contents may have different uses for such contents in order to meet certain gratifications. It is not surprising,

therefore, that youths in Uyo, as a result of individual differences, have different uses for the social networking websites. This also shows that the websites offer many uses and gratifications to different persons. It shows the dynamic nature of the social networking websites in meeting the needs of youths in Uyo metropolis. The findings are also in line with the findings of the study by [Coyle and Vaughn \(2008\)](#) on how college students in Texas used social networking websites. Their findings indicated that 41% used social networking websites for keeping in touch with friends, 17% found it fun and entertaining, and 12% used the sites to look for and or post photographs. This demonstrates the multi-dimensional needs of youths who have turned to the websites to meet their needs.

**Research question 4: To what extent are the needs of the youths satisfied through the use of social networking websites?**

The data from the respondents indicate that 34.9% were always satisfied; 7.8% were rarely satisfied; 55% were sometimes satisfied while 2.3% were not satisfied at all. The lack of satisfaction stemmed from absence of expected types of friends, absence of online friends at a particular time, lack of update from friends and lack of update from site hosts. The implication of these findings is that although the social networking websites do meet the needs of the youths, they are not always satisfied. It leaves a hole between expectation and fulfillment. So many people take the internet generally and social networking websites in particular as automatic solutions to problems once one has accessed them. But as the findings indicate, the websites are not hypodermic needles or bullets that solve problems once they are fired. This means that in spite of the popularity and importance of social networking websites in the lives of their users, the sites can, at best, give information that can solve some problems sometimes. One of the reasons given for lack of satisfaction is that the site hosts do not provide new updates. This is an indication that the websites have weaknesses of their own. That the absence of expected friends online can cause dissatisfaction means that a user cannot be entirely happy with social networking websites without the availability of his/her type of friends. The websites are meant for interaction and without it, the very essence of accessing the websites is unfulfilled.

In summary, the study made the following findings:

- 1) Youths in Uyo metropolis use at least 46 social networking websites for various reasons.
- 2) Most of the youths use the social networking websites daily, weekly and monthly. Quite a number access the websites as often as they have the opportunity.
- 3) Youths in Uyo metropolis use the social networking websites to connect with old and new friends, to play games, to establish relationships, to watch movies, to maintain business contacts, to engage in research, to ease boredom, among other reasons.
- 4) The needs of the youths in their use of social networking websites are not always fulfilled as a result of absence of online friends at a particular time and as a result of lack of update from friends and site hosts.

Therefore, the study concludes that youths in Uyo metropolis are active users of the social networking websites and they access the websites for various purposes. It also concludes that although they may use the websites daily, the youths are not always fulfilled in their expectations for using the social networking websites.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings above, the study recommends as follows:

- 1) The Nigerian government should come out with ICT programmes that will enable the youths to acquire or own laptops to facilitate their access to the Internet.
- 2) Service providers should strive to improve their network so as to reduce the frustration experienced by youths in trying to access social networking sites.
- 3) As a result of respondents' compliant of the high cost of access to the websites, the study recommends that service providers, as their contribution to national development, should reduce the cost of access to enable more youths in Uyo metropolis to register with social networking websites.

## APPENDIX

**Table-1.** Clusters and Cybercafes selected

S/N	Cluster	Name of Cybercafes
1.	Wellington Bassey Way and its adjoining street.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• e-spot cyber café at No. 1 Wellington Bassey Way.</li> <li>• Bazikfikz at 51 Wellington Bassey Way.</li> </ul>
2.	Oron Road to Uruan Street	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Magic Pixel Cybercafe at 20 Oron Road</li> <li>• Codal Cyber café at 59 Oron Road</li> </ul>
3.	Nwaniba Road and adjoining streets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kaniex cyber café at 32 Utang Street</li> <li>• Cyber cae at No. 1 Nwaniba Road</li> </ul>
4.	Oron Road by Uruan street to Udo Udoma Avenue, including Osongoama Estate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reima Netlinks cybercafé at 202 Oron Road</li> <li>• Amabeth cybercafé at 322 Oron Road</li> </ul>
5.	Abak Road by State Secretariat, including Federal Housing Estate and the adjoining streets.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Genesis cybercafé at 32 Abak Road</li> <li>• Hotlinks Cybercafe at 70 Abak Road</li> </ul>
6.	Aka Road and the adjoining streets to Aka junction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Webcenta cybercafé at 15 Aka Road</li> <li>• Modern cybercafé at 133 Aka Road</li> </ul>
7.	Ikot Ekpene Road and the adjoining Street from Ibom Plaza to Nkemba.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Datalinks at No. 5 Ikot Ekpene Road</li> <li>• McGiraffe cybercafé at 69 Ikot Ekpene Road.</li> </ul>
8.	Ikpa Road including the town and Annex campuses of the University of Uyo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Microtrends cybercafé at 23 Ikpa Road</li> <li>• Students cybercafé at University of Uyo Town campus.</li> </ul>
<b>Total = 8</b>		<b>16</b>

Using the multi-stage sampling procedure, 0.44% of 86,662 was taken as sample, giving a total of 381 youths in Uyo metropolis as sample size.

**Table-2.** Regularity of Access to Social Networking Websites

<b>Regularity</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>	<b>%</b>
Daily	131	36.5
Weekly	65	18.2
Monthly	12	3.4
When chanced	150	41.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>388</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table-3.** Reasons for Initial Registration with Social Networking Websites

<b>Reason</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>	<b>%</b>
Connect with old/new friends	90	25.1
Have fun and relax	25	7
Promote own business	17	4.7
Be socially balanced	25	7
Be informed	20	5.6
Develop a relationship	50	13.9
Respond to friends' regular request	36	10.1
Ease boredom	30	8.4
To be trendy	25	7
Interact with others	40	11.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>358</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table-4.** Reasons for Continued visit to Social Networking Websites

<b>Reason</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>	<b>%</b>
Communicate with friends	95	26.5
Get the latest information	30	8.4
Maintain business contacts	17	4.8
Be entertained	40	11.2
Socialise	55	15.4
Engage in research	10	2.7
Watch movies	25	6.9
Play games	15	4.2
Update their status/wall	35	9.8
Check friends' comments	36	10.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>358</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table-5.** Fulfillment of Respondents' Expectation

<b>Degree</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>	<b>%</b>
Always	125	34.9
Rarely	28	7.8
Sometimes	197	55
Not at all	8	2.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>358</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table-6.** Causes of Unfulfilled Expectations with Websites

<b>Cause</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>	<b>%</b>
Absence of expected friends	146	40.8
Absence of online friends	119	33.2
Lack of update from friends	62	17.3

Lack of update from site hosts	31	8.7
Others	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>358</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table-7.** Movement to other Websites on Account of Unfulfilled Expectations

Degree	No. of Respondents	%
Always	71	19.8
Rarely	51	14.3
Sometimes	163	45.5
Not at all	71	
<b>Total</b>	<b>358</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table-8.** Reasons Limiting Access to Social Networking Websites

Degree	No. of Respondents	%
Bad Network	170	47.5
Lack of Airtime	81	22.6
Lack of Time	44	12.3
Lack of Power supply	16	4.5
Wrong persons online	15	4.2
Handset problem	13	3.6
Others	19	5.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>358</b>	<b>100</b>

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