

**INFLUENCE OF INTERNET ON GRADUATING STUDENT'S
PROJECT REPORT WRITING: THE SOUTH-EAST PROJECT
SUPERVISORS EXPERIENCE (2014-2024).**

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ABSTRACT: This study on the influence of the internet on graduating students' project report writing aimed to assess the emerging trend of graduating students in Nigerian higher institutions relying on internet content when writing their project reports. The study sampled student project supervisors' opinions in South East universities and polytechnics for a period of ten years (2014-2024). The researchers employed a combined research approach: content analysis and surveys, with questionnaires and interview instruments as the primary data collection instruments. Results revealed that on average, over 60% of graduating students downloaded their project reports from the internet, especially with the help of an artificial intelligence site. In conclusion, the study submitted that the level of students' dependence on the internet for their academic work is alarming. It recommended sensitisation workshops and seminars for students to alert them to the risks of mortgaging their natural intelligence to artificial intelligence, even though the internet is helpful.

Keywords: Internet, AI, Project writing, Students, Supervisors

INTRODUCTION

Graduating students in all tertiary institutions all over the world are made to embark on project writing and presentation as part of the requirements for a successful graduation. In Nigeria, for instance, graduating students in polytechnics and universities, across all departments, are assigned to project supervisors who supervise, moderate, and guide student researchers as they undertake their projects. In each of the disciplines, sciences and humanities, etc., students were taught various courses in research, and probably how to go about project writing and presentation. They are drilled in courses like research, research methodology, literature review, data and its presentation and analysis. Other areas of interest include how to carry out field or laboratory research, appropriate instruments to be used in order to gather accurate data, and, of course, how to reference and write acceptable references at the end of the work.

Project writing and presentation, with its substantial credit load, is intended to be a lifelong course for every student. But discovery has shown that some students hate to hear anything about it. As a result of the hatred, this group of students, especially at the undergraduate level, often resort to manoeuvring in the course. They engage in malpractice while writing their projects for a course considered all-encompassing and spanning other disciplines. According to Odiboh, Salawu and Doghudje (2019)

Mass Communication has become one of the most interesting academic disciplines, especially in arts and social sciences. Eighty-seven per cent of higher institutions in Nigeria offered it as a course of study and admission seekers' first choice of course in their domiciliary faculty (arts or social sciences) of the offering higher institutions. Obviously, a discipline of all-encompassing ought not to be treated with naivety while conducting research in it. To allow careless attitude in mass communication research amounts to succumbing to some allegations from scholars outside the disciplines that mass communication scholars and students were not thinking ahead. According to such critics, many mass communication scholars seemed cast in the stone of the sender-message-channel-noise-receiver-feedback theoretical cycle without the need to rethink routine practices. Therefore, it should reflect on the future and retool its pedagogy and practice based on profound thoughts and ideas.

These authors, wrongfully or rightly, alleged in their submissions that our missing re-think-reflect-retool chain was the reason mass communication did not have a theory of its own. Be it as it may, mass communication must realise that it is an independent academic discipline and an important aspect of modern man's study of interactions, and as such, has to reposition itself with the modern world realities, especially with the emergence of social media/internet occasioned by development in Information and Communication technologies (ICTs). Mass communication is increasingly becoming a serious discipline for scientific study in both the academic and business worlds (Obasi, 2013). As a result of this, it has the potential to be a force for improving the human situation globally.

With the power inherent in mass communication as a discipline, its scholars and students should brace up to face the challenges of empirical investigation in the course. Apart from peripheral links to other disciplines of study, mass communication has numerous interesting research areas that call for investigation daily. Some of these areas include communicators, message, channel, audience, community media systems, media socialization and interactions, internet and new media, advertising, public relations, readership and graphic studies, to mention but a few. From time to time, problems arise in these areas and demand both short-term and long-term solutions. It is only through quality research that such problems can be solved.

Mass communication research

Research is a careful investigation, an inquiry that employs a systematic approach to solve an identified problem concerning human existence. It is a process of finding a solution to a problem. In all honesty, the term research refers to an empirical investigation into a problem, leading to the creation of new knowledge or ideas. In mass communication, it is the study of information related to identifying, exploring, and measuring the factors that surround communication (Obasi, 2013). Therefore, the primary focus of mass communication research is to examine how the content of mass communication affects its audience. It is concerned with identifying, exploring, and measuring the factors surrounding communication, in any form and on any topic. Mass Communication has shaped and is still shaping the field, and indeed, where the field is going. Today, the field has expanded and could be found very significantly in other fields of endeavour, especially in the humanities, management, science, technology, commerce and industry.

With such massive expansion, obviously, the concern of media researchers would be to address the numerous problems confronting the discipline. The researchers must focus on these areas to elevate the discipline to an enviable height. So, in the choice of research topics, researchers, either at the undergraduate or post-graduate level, should develop their topics from any of these areas. With the emergence of internet-related media: social media, new media, including artificial Intelligence (AI), the scope of mass communication research has seriously increased, demanding natural intelligence and academic guidance from the project writers and the supervisors.

Objectives of the study

1. To find out the influence of the internet on students' project writing.
2. To ascertain the level of influence the internet has on students' academic performance.
3. To investigate the level of checks project supervisors put on students' AI internet-assisted projects.

Research questions

1. How does the internet impact students' project writing?
2. What level of influence does the internet have on students' academic performance?
3. What level of check do project supervisors put on students' internet-assisted projects?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Expected Contributions of students' project reports to mass communication development in Nigeria

Information is power, and it is acquired through communication. Onah (2006) communication is an effective tool that prepares people's minds and readily clears the ground for different development agendas to thrive. For development purposes, the correlation function of communication should be applied in full (Nwosu, 2007). This singular function of communication facilitates participation by allowing the target audiences to engage in one another's communication experiences. Oyero (2003) communication plays a decisive role in promoting human development by stimulating people's awareness and participation and improving their knowledge and capabilities.

Since communication plays a pivotal role in human development by driving the development agenda, it is necessary to review the work on communication research conducted by our graduating students and scholars in mass communication to critically examine its impact. The choice of Nigeria for this topic is strategic, given the number of institutions of higher learning that offer research in mass communication. It is assumed that out of the total number of 274 universities in Nigeria, Federal (62), State (63) and private (149) and 140 polytechnics, Federal (31), State (48) and private (61). Interestingly, over 200 such higher institutions offer mass communication as a major discipline. In addition to universities and polytechnics, there are other research institutes, journalism institutes and colleges of education. Although some of those institutions do not offer mass communication as a speciality, some do offer communication studies or communication

education. In all, on a yearly basis, over 8,000 research topics are conducted in Nigeria at polytechnics and universities at both undergraduate and post-graduate levels, and in other institutes.

Given the large number of research topics conducted annually in Nigeria, it is expected that many of the problems confronting the discipline would have been addressed. But it seems that no significant progress has been made. This is because the much-expected role of research is not noticed. Obasi (2013) listed a good number of roles research should perform; include:

- To establish the reliability and validity of theoretical claims.
- To distinguish opinions from facts.
- To advance knowledge.
- To increase understanding of educational phenomena.
- To contribute to building theories.
- To provide solutions to identified problems.
- To help increase our skills in investigation, training, leadership, rules and practices.
- To assist in human and material development, etc.

It is evident that research in Nigeria's mass communication discipline does not perform the aforementioned roles. The discovery revealed that many researchers in this field do not adhere to research ethics, rules, and regulations. Many of them engage in research misconduct, fabrication, plagiarism, and copyright infringement. Research ethics concerns the adherence to procedures that are morally right. It can be explored from a tridimensional perspective: collecting and analysing data, societal responsibility, and treating respondents ethically. In fact, research ethics is a specialised discipline that studies the norms of research. Any violation or disobedience to those rules and norms constitutes research misconduct.

Research misconduct denotes irresponsible conduct of research, which involves three key factors: fabrication, falsification and plagiarism. Fabrication means the fabrication of data and results and their subsequent recording or reporting. Falsification is the manipulation of research objects, equipment or procedure or entirely changing and removing data in such a way that the results or records are not properly represented in the study, while plagiarism is the use of another person's idea or work, without giving the appropriate credit to the person. That means presenting another person's work or idea as one's own idea or work. It appears that research misconduct is endemic on the internet, particularly in the artificial intelligence (AI) era.

Influence of internet on students' project writing and presentation

Jet-age students, or modern students, are those born during this era of digital communication. Undoubtedly, they are introduced to computer education, even from home. They know computers more than their textbooks. Some of them are referred to as internet students because they often carry their handsets with them at home and at school, and even when walking on the street or main road, they use them to read messages, chat, listen to music, or watch movies. Many of these students are addicted to internet-induced life, and they prefer to use it in the classroom rather than pay attention to the lectures.

One may then ask: what is the internet? How has it permeated students' lives to the extent that they become bed mates for every student, and even for adults? A simple definition characterises the internet as a global computer network that provides a variety of information and communication services, consisting of interconnected networks using standardised protocols. This definition further confirms that the internet is a worldwide system of interconnected computer networks and electronic devices that communicate with one another using established protocols. The system allows people to share information and communicate with one another.

Examples of internet-based networking services include social media, email, mobile applications, internet telephony, and streaming media services. Very often, people use the internet and social media interchangeably without a clear distinction. They are not the same, as one is an example of the other.

Social Media: The almighty AI

The term social media refers to the collection of applications like Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), WhatsApp, LinkedIn, YouTube, Instagram and other similar websites. Again, social media comprises online platforms and tools that enable users to create, share, and exchange information and content with others, thereby fostering online communities and networks, connecting people with visual communities through text, video, photos, and other materials. Further descriptions treat social media as a collective term for websites and applications that focus on communication, community-based input, interaction, content sharing, and collaboration. Social media is a form of interactive media that allows users to communicate through posts, videos, blogs, forums, and images. As noted by Ogbuoshi (2025), the International Journal of Social Media and Interactive Learning Environment (IJSMILE; 2024) defines social media as comprising online platforms, tools, and technologies that facilitate social interaction, content creation, community engagement, networking, and information dissemination. Solls (2011) argued that social media is the organisation of information, transforming people from content readers into publishers, a shift from a one-to-many broadcast model to a many-to-many model rooted in conversations between authors, people, and users (students). Andrew Weinreich (1997) is documented to have developed SixDegrees, the first genuine social media platform, which enabled users to create profiles and establish connections with friends.

On the website or platform that students often consult while writing their projects or ordinary classroom assignments, Google stands out among others. Google is a multinational technology company known for its search engine, cloud computing, and other products and services, including Artificial Intelligence (AI), founded by Larry Page and Sergey Brin in 1998 and now part of Alphabet Inc. With AI, a technology that enables machines to perform tasks typically associated with human intelligence, the game has changed. Artificial intelligence can learn, reason, solve problems, and make decisions, including assisting students with project writing. In fact, social media, with its ever-expanding scope in formal, human-dominated task-performing roles, has come to stay. Scholars now believe that social media platforms have become integral to students' lives, influencing various aspects of their educational experiences, including project writing and classroom assignments. Google's Chat GPT app demands /asks any question, within a few seconds, the answer appears, whether correct or false, as not all information from social media is correct in

content and context. So, social media impact on students' project writing encompassing both positive and negative dimensions, affecting their research capabilities, writing skills and overall academic performance.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopted Technology Acceptance Theory (TAT), proposed by Fred in 1986. This theory posits that the use of an information system is determined by behavioural intention, and that behavioural intention is determined by a person's attitude toward using the system and their perception of utility. The theorist insisted that a person's attitude alone does not determine his use of the system, but rather the impact that such a system would have on his performance. The perceived usefulness is the degree to which an individual believes that using the system can positively impact them in achieving their aims.

A good number of studies that used TAT attest that the theory is apt in giving background support on why some people, especially students, choose a particular system, like the internet, for their academic exploits.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researchers employed an online survey design. This involves creating and implementing a web-based survey to collect structured data from the target audience, namely lecturers from selected polytechnics and universities in the South-East zone of Nigeria. The online questionnaire was carefully designed, vetted, structured and sent/distributed via a web platform created by the researchers.

Research Population

The population of the study consists of one hundred and twenty (120) purposely sampled because they were project supervisors from 2014 to 2024 at various polytechnics and universities selected from South-East Nigeria. The project supervisors fall within the category that supervised HND, 1st-, and 2nd-degree final-year projects during 2014-2024. The sample size was the same as the population size. All of them reviewed/content analysed copies of the projects they had supervised within the period under investigation. The analysis and observations they submitted formed our findings.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The researchers were amazed by the extent of the internet's influence on students' academic activities, including project writing. It was striking to observe that students increasingly relied on the internet for project writing. Such discoveries were across broad, polytechnics and universities, study revealed that over fifty per cent of students writing their final year projects, and even ordinary classroom term papers and assignments relied heavily on the internet, mostly on AI information. Almost all the internet-assisted projects feature the following characteristics:

- Long list of reference materials, with little or no Nigerian authors.
- Wrong departmental formats in structure, contents and pagination.
- No mention of books used in the department, especially in research studies or other similar works.
- Quick turn-in of project reports within a few weeks of project topic approval.
- No evidence of Questionnaire copies, distribution, collection exercise and coding of questionnaire data.
- Afraid to be subjected to turn-it-in processes or a machine.
- No evidence of contributing to the local problem's solution.
- Massive promotion of foreign ideology

Regarding the extent of the internet's influence on students' academic performance, the study observed that students' use of the internet and AI, in particular, is particularly concerning. In fact, it has given rise to what one might call an academic epidemic. Technology, rather than serving as a supporting tool, is now threatening the integrity of higher education in Nigeria. Public opinion suggests a growing concern about students' increasing dependence on the internet in academic settings. The researchers posit that this reliance on AI-generated content in research papers, dissertations and theses is very unethical.

But for students, the temptation to use AI-generated content is super-strong. With the ability to produce coherent, well-structured, and even well-polished texts, Project student writers see AI tools as a magic solution to the pressures of project research and academic writing. With a simple prompt, the AI engine churns out a publishable paper, project, assignment, etc. that can meet the requirements of the supervisors or lecturers.

Data collected on the level of project supervisor's ability to carefully check the student's project, assess it, vet it and accept it, showed that some of our lecturers are yet to grasp the knowledge of internet operations, especially the Artificial Intelligence information overload. The study broadly agrees that the only way out of this emerging academic cheating is to subject every project report to a turn-in machine; AI is eroding the integrity of academic research and the very purpose of learning and research. The study further observes that students who submit AI-generated work as their own misrepresent their academic abilities and undermine the integrity of the academic process.

Conclusion

The experience of many project supervisors of final year students in the South-East tertiary institutions: universities and polytechnics, was that the internet has a great influence on students' academic works, including project writing. This new technology tool is quickly becoming a companion for every student, as it provides easy ways to answer academic questions. AI has both positive and negative influences, and these two dimensions are struggling to achieve balance in the eyes of evaluators.

Recommendations

Given the growing acceptance among students that AI can answer many academic questions, the study strongly recommends regular workshops and seminars to inform students about the risks of relying heavily on AI-generated content for their academic development.

The study observed the alarming rate at which students, especially project writers, hold on to AI and other platforms as the only solution mechanism or tools to excel, and recommends to the universities and polytechnics management in the South-East to subject, at least, every project report, to turn-it-in machine as the only alternative apparatus that can save our tertiary institutions from total erosion of academic integrity. That proper check could be the only saving grace before our university products become chaff and worthless.

The study also noted that not all the academic staff, especially those who supervise students' projects, are computer literate, so the researchers recommended that the management of our universities and polytechnics mandate every academic staff to go for in-house training on computer operations, especially now that Artificial Intelligence (AI) has entered into all spheres of human endeavour, including academic. Only when a lecturer or project supervisor is competent and knowledgeable in the use of computers can such staff harness the power of AI across the learning environment. This recommendation is apt, now, before we lose our graduates to artificial knowledge that does not endure for life.

Every higher institution must prioritise digital literacy education and integrate research ethics into its curriculum to avoid distractions from academic focus, reduce the quality of project writing, and combat misinformation often shared on social media.

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