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## FACEBOOK SOCIAL MEDIA: A CHANNEL FOR PROMOTING INFORMAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA.

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### ABSTRACT

*Informal learning is part and parcel of human lives; in which individuals engage in learning processes throughout their lives. A vast amount of intentional and unintentional learning is facilitated every day through social media. The paper specifically focuses on informal learning (unplanned and unorganized learning) among Nigerians via Facebook. The discussions are limited to Facebook social media because it is the most common and frequently used social medium through which Nigerian irrespective of their ages, gender, educational, socio-cultural and geographical background communicate as well as share their experiences, opinions, interest, knowledge, and ideas. Facebook in Nigeria has empowered users to collaboratively create, distribute and exploit information in a “wisdom of the crowd” fashion thereby promoting informal learning.*

**Keywords:** Facebook, social media, informal learning.

## INTRODUCTION

Informal learning among humans is as old as human beings. The oldest means through which informal learning takes place is via face to face interaction among individuals. However with the advent of internet, through social media platforms informal learning occur online. This paper focuses on Facebook social media; as a means through which informal learning is promoted among Nigerians. The social interactions Nigerian Facebook users engage in allow a great deal of learning informally. Through status updates and posts the users learn from more experienced users; this kind of learning is typically informal because it is unorganized and has no fixed structure or objective.

## SOCIAL MEDIA

Web 2.0 emerged in the twenty first century, which allows the creation and sharing of knowledge, ideas and opinions with others. According to Sourina (2015), web 2.0 refers to the tool which enables ordinary user to be able to create and publish rich multimedia content with a global audience at an affordable cost through web sites and other digital communications channels. Hence, it is the foundation technology and ideology behind social media.

Konert (2015), defines social media as a group of interest based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of generated content. “Social media refers to content found on the internet that is user-driven as opposed to being produced by a traditional news agency or other professional entity” Dolan (2013). Social media empower individuals to interact with others online and share ideas and comments as well. Similarly, Bozarth (2010), states: “social media refers to online material produced by the public, distinct from content produced by professional writers, journalist, or generated by the industrial or mass media. Nearly every human on the planet may be able to connect with almost every other person in other to share information, knowledge and ideas in different ways, almost instantly. People carry along with them devices that can connect them not only with billions of people but also with digital traces those people left online and thing they have shared. Examples of social media according to Bozarth (2015) are; those from communication (such as blogs), collaboration (such as wikis), communities (such as Facebook), reviews and opinions (Amazon reader review) and multimedia (such as you tube). However, for the purpose of this paper, discussions are limited to Facebook only.

## FACEBOOK

Facebook was initiated in (2004) by Mark Zuckerberg during his undergraduate program at Harvard university. Though, Facebook was created and designed as a complement for the paper-based students’ directory that was distributed so that the students and faculty could get to know each other better and put faces with names, now it is used worldwide.

Facebook comprises of many forms of social media such as messages, photos, videos, events, discussions and links. It therefore, allow the user to set up a profile, outlining interests personal history, even photos and other data that is of interest. Over the years Facebook has exploded, and according to internet researches at Royal Kingdom (2013), now there are over one billion users across the globe. It has also been translated into more than seventy languages and is the number one most popular website in existence today in terms of page views and unique visitors. It allows users to connect with one another through the

contributions and posting in status updates. Users interact with friends of their choice and participate in groups with other users. They can as well post status updates, links, photos, and multimedia such as videos.

## INFORMAL LEARNING

Marsick and Watkins cited in Dolan (2013), define informal learning “as that which is predominantly experiential and non- institutional”. It requires a lesser amount of control by the learner and takes outside of formal setting. With regards to its relationship to social media sites informal learning can be seen as an important part to new learning environment. Hence, it is not possible to clearly state the limitations of learning with regards to informal learning.

According to Mary (2016), “informal learning is not organized or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support. It is mostly unintentional from the learners’ perspective”. Therefore, it is self-determining learning or learning from experience. It has no set objectives in terms of learning outcomes and is never intentional from the learners’ side. Thus, informal learning is penetrating unending phenomenon of learning through participation or learning by means of knowledge creation unlike the traditional view of teacher-centered learning through knowledge acquisition.

### **Characteristics of informal learning**

Informal learning may have some of the following features as stated by Names (2013), Latchem 2014, and Wikipedia:

It takes place usually outside educational establishment.

It does not have a specified curriculum and is not often professionally organized but originates accidentally, at irregular intervals, in association with certain occasions.

It is experienced directly in its natural function of everyday life.

The teacher is someone who cares and who has more experience than the learner (example: mother/child).

It is usually impulsive and creative, and the world is the classroom.

It is essential to an adults’ lifelong learning.

It is not necessarily planned educationally, systematically according to fixed subjects, test and qualification-oriental, but either unconsciously incidental or consciously intended intuition, holistically problem-related, and related to actual situations and fitness for life.

However, Eraut (2000) proposed that there are three forms of informal learning: incidental and implicit, in which new facts, ideas, and behaviours are learned without any conscious attempts or explicit knowledge of what is being learned. Secondly, reactive; in which learning is explicit but virtually natural. Lastly, deliberate; where in there is clear intention to acquire new knowledge or skills. These three forms of learning are so much part of everyday life that they are rarely recognized as learning, but they form the basis for the critically important enduring attitude; the desire to learn and go on learning.

## **FACEBOOK SOCIAL MEDIA AND INFORMAL LEARNING IN NIGERIA**

Nigerians are currently exposed to external experiences through Facebook interactions online, which have no doubt affects their perspectives in life. The knowledge and practices that are important to the community are generally passed down through the sharing of memories and participation in cultural activities; this form of transfer in Nigeria is mostly done via facebook media presently. Facebook promotes informal learning as a lifelong process whereby individuals acquire attitudes, values, skills and knowledge from daily experiences and resources in their environments, from family, friends, neighbours, work place, market place, mass media and play.

Studies on informal learning, especially those asking about adults' self-directed learning projects according to Merriam et al (2007) cited in names (2013) reveals that over 90 per cent of adults are engaged in hundreds of hours of informal learning. And such learning takes place over the telephone or through internet, as well as in person. The rate at which Nigerians use Facebook proves the above assertion. Facebook is presently the commonest, easiest and fastest medium through which Nigerians communicate their ideas, knowledge, experiences, feelings, culture, beliefs etc to their family, friends, relatives colleagues, community and even the nation at large.

This form of learning via Facebook by Nigerians is considered informal because it almost has all the features of an informal learning. In the sense that subject matters are discuss randomly, a Facebook user who happens to be Facebook friend or group member can possibly be the teacher or learner, there is no specific time frame for the learning process and participation is self-determined.

### **THE ROLES OF FACEBOOK MEDIA IN PROMOTING INFORMAL LEARNING IN NIGERIA**

Informal learning intentionally and unintentionally takes place on Facebook platform among Nigerians, some of this learning situation occur as the result of reading posts from Facebook users and comments of respondents. Facebook facilitates informal learning in Nigeria by the following;

Facebook serves as an avenue for people to form groups through which ideas are shared on different subject matters. The group members share experiences sometimes through question and answers. Hence a great deal of learning takes place. Facebook users assist one another in solving problems ranging from emotional, psychological, educational, and even financial. Users learn from the group members' experiences and advice and thereby apply them in similar situations.

Platforms are created on Facebook for skill acquisition among Nigerians. A number of online business trainings are rendered through Facebook as a result Nigerians learn how to initiate and enhance businesses. For instance, culinary tutorials are organized to teach people on how to cook.

Communicative and informative roles of Facebook promote awareness among Nigerians. Useful information easily circulate through Facebook in Nigeria for instance security alert on Facebook enable individuals to be security conscious, thus, protect themselves against violent or criminal attacks.

Facebook promotes unity and peaceful co-existence among Nigerians in the sense that people from different socio-cultural and geographical background relate amicably and appreciate one another with mutual understanding. Therefore social relationships are encouraged, greetings are exchanged. It fosters awareness on cultural and traditional norms and values of different ethnic groups among Nigerian users. Updates enable users to understand the culture, norms, values and belief of other Nigerians.

It is used to propagate political views of individuals thereby persuade people with common interest to unite and manifest their political agenda which result to creation of leaderships or government. Yet, it is a means through which followers are updated about progress or otherwise. Hence, users learn politics by participation.

### CONCLUSION

The paper briefly explained Facebook social media as means of learning informally among Nigerian users. Facebook has greatly contributed to the development of informal learning in Nigeria. Prior to the use of Facebook in Nigeria people learn informally by physical contact or experience. But now Facebook makes transfer of experiences easier among millions of Nigerians. Knowledge, ideas, opinions, skills etc. are shared on Facebook media and a number of Nigerians learn from it. A single post by a user may spread and benefit millions of Nigerians within a very short time. The nature of how Facebook users communicate and interact makes the learning informal. Users log in at any time to share their experiences or views to people on any subject matter. Hence, the paper only discussed the positive impacts of Facebook on informal learning. However, this does not imply that there are no negative impacts.

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