

# Contemporary Issues and Researches on Adolescents

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I. A. Nwazuke  
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# Contemporary Issues *and* Researches on Adolescents

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# 32 Perception and Use of Internet by Adolescents in Ibadan, Nigeria

A. Abioye

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## Abstract

*The study focused on the perception and use of the Internet by the adolescents in Ibadan, Nigeria. It investigated the types of information sourced from the Internet, the point of access and the constraints to access. The instruments adopted for the study were questionnaire, interview and observation. The study established that the adolescents see the Internet among others as a vital source of information, a window to the world and a source of entertainment. It also established that the cybercafé is the most prominent access point and that access is constrained, among others, by slow connectivity, high cost and server problem. It concluded by proffering solution to the problems of access.*

## Introduction

Information Communication Technology (ICT) has made a great impact on access to information world-wide. The Internet has reduced the world to a global village and it is now possible to have immediate access to information that is located far away from the immediate environment. Access to information is no longer constrained by time and space. The Internet has thus become a gateway to information, communications and commerce (Robins, 2001).

Different classes of people avail themselves of the opportunities offered by the new world information order and seek information for diverse purposes. The adolescents are, by no means, excluded in the quest for information particularly through the use of the Internet. They are in the

transition phase of their life-span, a transition from childhood to adulthood. The developmental process both psychologically and psycho-socially requires seeking information in one form or the other. The Internet, a product of ICT, offers tremendous opportunities to all classes of users including the adolescents.

The focus of the study, therefore, is to examine the adolescents' use and impression of the Internet. The specific objectives are to determine the types of information sourced from the Internet, the point of access and the constraints to the use of the Internet by the adolescents in Ibadan, Nigeria.

### **Adolescence**

The word 'adolescence' according to Steinberg (1996) is derived from a Latin verb 'adolescence' meaning, "to grow into adulthood". The New Webster's Dictionary of the English Language International Edition defines adolescence as "that period of life in which the child changes into the adult". In the same dictionary, adolescent is defined as "a person who is no longer a child but is not fully adult". Adolescence is, therefore, a transition period, biologically, psychologically and psychosocially. It is the second decade of the life span (Steinberg 1996).

Cole and Cole (1993) considered adolescence as "a period of heightened instability and emotional conflict that is brought on by biological maturation". While appreciating that adolescents may seem radical, unnerving and different from adults in their life styles, Santrock (1990) cautioned that adolescence should not be taken "as a time of rebellion, crises, pathology, and deviation" but better as "a time of evaluation, a time of decision-making, a time of commitment as youths carve out their place in the world".

Steinberg (1996) identified three fundamental changes of adolescence, namely: biological transitions, cognitive transitions and social transitions. Robbins (2001) also identified three developmental tasks of adolescence, namely: search for identity, pursuit of social connections and desire for a sense of competence and accomplishment. She regarded adolescence as "a critical period in the self-perceptions of both boys and girls". The implication is that the information needs of the adolescents revolve around these developmental tasks. These needs are better met by turning to the Internet which, today, has made tremendous impact in almost all aspects of human endeavours and through which users can have access to information to meet their diverse and specific needs.

## The Internet

Adomi, Okiy and Ruteyan (2003), acknowledging Paul (2002), traced the beginning of the Internet to the 1960s. According to them, the Internet started as a project of a few researchers and has since developed into "a mass medium that influences most or all domains of life: from education to recreation; from business to medicine; and from academia to politics".

Aina (2002) defined the Internet as "a computer network made up of large number of computer networks throughout the whole world". Agbonlahor (2002), quoting the Internet Society, defined it as a "global network of networks enabling computers of all kinds to directly and transparently communicate and share services throughout much of the world". She further stated that "users of all ages can find ways to extend their thinking and receive assistance from others in pursuing their interests". To Robbins (2001), the Internet is "a system of systems, a catalyst for thinking that enables integrated collaborative yet personalized intellectual activity".

The Internet offers a wide range of facilities and services which include e-mail, browsing, teleconferencing and telecommuting. Tiamiyu (1999) identified two major modes of communicating on the Internet, namely: electronic mailing and Internet, browsing. He submitted that "virtually all the other more specific types of Internet communication and information searching on the Internet are based on either or both of these two modes".

Developing countries, particularly those on the continent of Africa, are waking up to the use of the Internet facilities and services. Most urban areas in Africa have recorded relatively rapid growth in Internet use. In Nigeria, the situation has improved considerably from the infantile state recorded by Tiamiyu in 1999. Today, "every city and major town in Nigeria has Internet public access services" (Adomi, Okiy and Ruteyan 2003). This, however, is not to say that all the major constraints such as inadequate and high cost of telecommunication infrastructure have disappeared. The point is that more and more people now have access to the Internet and the digital divide between the developed and developing nations seems to be closing up, no matter how negligible the improvement is.

## Statement of the Problem

The Internet offers limitless opportunities and challenges. Yet accessibility is a major constraint, particularly in developing countries of Africa. Worst still is that accessibility by adolescents is not actively encouraged for the fear that the young minds might be exposed to immoral sites or that the Internet might be used for commission of crimes. The adolescents, being a class in transition, are therefore considered to be vulnerable.

## Methodology

The study population consisted of adolescents whose ages range from thirteen to nineteen. The instruments used for data collection were questionnaire, personal observation and interview.

A questionnaire was designed, three hundred copies of which were personally administered in ten randomly selected cyber-café's and two libraries with the Internet facilities in Ibadan. Majority of the cyber-café's were located around the University of Ibadan, inhabited by people of high literacy level. Interviews were also conducted with cyber café operators and some adolescent patrons to obtain additional information in line with the suggestion of Santrock (1990) that interviews can be used to find out the experiences and attitudes of the adolescents, while being sensitive to the way they respond to questions. Personal observation particularly in cybercafes, was also employed for data collection.

Of the three hundred copies of the questionnaire distributed, a total of two hundred and sixty two copies were returned, out of which forty-three were voided for reasons of being completed by respondents outside the age bracket selected for this study. The researcher was, therefore, left with two hundred and nineteen copies for analysis, which was a return rate of seventy-three percent.

## Findings and Discussion

Data collected through questionnaire were analysed using frequency and percentage. The level of education of the respondents ranges from Junior Secondary School class to undergraduate with the undergraduate, students having the highest percentage as shown in table 1. This shows that undergraduate adolescents are most conscious of the importance and benefits of the Internet.

**Table 1: Level of Education**

Level	Frequency	Percentage
Junior Secondary School class	9	4.1
Senior Secondary School Class	72	32.9
Undergraduate	114	52.1
Others	24	10.9

Table 2 shows how the respondents became aware of the Internet. The majority of the respondents were introduced to the use of the Internet by friends/peers. This result confirms the strong influence that friends/peers wield over the adolescents at this stage of their life.

**Table 2: Introduction to the Internet**

	Frequency	Percentage
Through Parents	21	9.6
Through friends/peers	126	57.5
Through learning at school	45	20.5
Through reading	21	9.6
No response	6	2.7

Table 3 shows the respondents' perception of the Internet with the highest percentage (43.8%) seeing it as a source of information. Other respondents saw it as a window to the world (24.6%), a link with people and events (24.6%), a learning resource (23.3%) and a source of entertainment (10.9%).

**Table 3: Respondents' perception of the Internet**

Perception	Frequency	Percentage
Window to the world	54	24.6
Source of information	96	43.8
Source of entertainment	24	10.9
Learning resource	51	23.3
Link with people and events	54	24.6

Table 4 shows that the most important point of access to the Internet by the respondents was cybercafe (79.4%). This is followed by school (13.7%), home (10.9%), public or institutional library (6.8%), public office (4.1%) and club house (2.7%). This result shows that most of the respondents rely heavily on cybercafe for the use of the Internet. It is worthy of note that most of the respondents that indicated school as their point of access were undergraduate students, as there are very few public secondary schools with Internet connectivity in Ibadan. Besides, the fact that only 10.9% and 4.1% of the respondents connected the Internet from home and public office respectively also shows that only few homes and public offices in Ibadan are connected to the Internet.

**Table 4: Point of Access**

Point of Access	Frequency	Percentage
Home	24	10.9
School	30	13.7
Public Office	9	4.1
Club house	6	2.7
Public/Institutional Library	15	6.8
Cybercafe	174	79.4

Table 5 shows the major use of the Internet by the respondents. Most of the respondents used the Internet for browsing (60.2%). This is closely followed by e-mail (54.8%) and participation in discussion groups (9.6%). Other uses indicated are business transactions and downloading of software (2.7%).

Perception	Frequency	Percentage
Link with people and events	34	15.4
I examine products	31	14.1
I obtain information	25	11.4
I download software	24	11.0
I do business transactions	23	10.5
I participate in discussion groups	22	10.0
I use e-mail	20	9.1
I browse	18	8.2
I do other things	17	7.7
I do not use the Internet	16	7.3

**Table 5: Major Use of the Internet**

Use	Frequency	Percentage
E-mail	120	54.8
Browsing	132	60.2
Participation in discussion groups	21	9.6
Others	21	2.7

Table 6 shows the nature of the information that the respondents sourced from the Internet. Most of the respondents (90.4%) indicated that they sourced for information that would assist their educational programmes. It should be noted that examination bodies in Nigeria such as Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) and National Examinations Council (NECO) now require candidates to check results and register for examinations online (Broadcasting Corporation of Oyo State of Nigeria (BCOS) Radio FM News 8.30p.m. Sunday, 16th May 2004). Other types of information sourced by the respondents include those relating to entertainment, current affairs, shopping, job placement, sports, fashion, making friends in other places and career prospects. It is interesting to note that the least number of respondents, majority of whom are males, sought information about the opposite sex. In answer to a question as to what they disliked about the Internet, majority of the respondents indicated pornographic site. Although some of the cybercafes displayed on the walls instructions forbidding patrons from visiting pornographic sites (an indication that some of them were in the habit of doing so), some cybercafe operators interviewed confirmed that adults were mostly the culprits, as adolescents usually feared being caught visiting such ugly sites.

**Table 6: Types of Information Sourced from the Internet**

Types of Information	Frequency	Percentage
Educational pursuit	198	90.4
Entertainment	150	68.5
Current affairs	153	69.7
Shopping	66	30.1
Opposite sex	33	15.1
Job placement	90	41.1
Events in other countries	153	69.9
Sports	132	60.2
Fashion	69	31.5
Career Prospects	144	65.7
Living, arts and culture	96	43.8
Science and technology	159	72.6
Making friends in other places	147	67.1
Professional groups and associations	117	53.4

Table 7 shows the problems encountered by the respondents in their use of the Internet. The most prominent problem indicated by the respondents was slow connectivity (78.1%). This is followed by server problem, (60.2%), high cost of access to Internet facilities (32.8%) and distance from place of abode to cybercafe or nearest access point (21.9%). Other problems identified by the respondents were long queue of users (17.8%), lack of guidance on use particularly for non-expert users (16.4%) and restrictions by cybercafe operators (16.4%).



**Table 7: Problems encountered by respondents in the use of the Internet**

Problem	Frequency	Percentage
Server problem	132	60.2
Slow connectivity	171	78.1
Long queue of users	39	17.8
Lack of guidance on use	36	16.4
High cost	72	32.8
Restriction by cybercafe operators	36	16.4
Distance from place of abode to cybercafe or nearest access point	48	21.9

Observation in some of the cybercafes visited indicated a long queue of patrons many of whom were adolescents waiting to use the available facilities to access the Internet. There were inadequate computers with Internet access. Some of the patrons sometimes waited for upward of thirty to forty minutes to take their turn particularly at the peak period. Some of the adolescent patrons interviewed complained bitterly about the inordinate delay in having access to Internet facilities. They also mentioned some other constraints already reflected in the questionnaire administered. The problems notwithstanding, they saw the Internet as having the potentials of building a good personality and of developing individuals socially and educationally.

### Conclusion

The Internet offers tremendous opportunities for the adolescent users in Ibadan, Nigeria as it does for other categories of users. Most adolescent users were introduced to the use of the Internet through peer influence, learning at school, general reading and parental influence. The types of information sourced from the Internet range from those required for educational development, entertainment, career prospects and current awareness to those on living, arts and culture as well as science and technology. The cybercafe remains the most popular access point used by the adolescents in Ibadan.

The constraints to the use of the Internet by the adolescents in the area of study are overwhelming. The problem of slow connectivity, high cost and inadequate infrastructure noted must be squarely addressed. There must be an ICT policy that will guarantee and sustain Internet connectivity in both the private and public sectors. ICT programmes must be introduced and emphasized in the school curriculum and the adolescents encouraged to tap the best offered by the Internet, while avoiding those aspects that can promote corruption, indecency, crime and immorality.

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