

University Students' Knowledge and Attitude towards Internet Safety: A Preliminary Study

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Abstract

The Internet penetrated into the country (Nigeria) very fast and people both youths and adults were not educated on how to protect themselves online. Consequently, they face the risk of exposure to material that is pornographic, sexually explicit or offensive, hateful or violent or that encourages activities that are dangerous or illegal. The rate at which youths fall victims of 'yahooboy' (individuals that used Internet in a destructive and antisocial manner) is very high due to their ignorance about Internet safety. This research attempts to examine university students' knowledge about Internet safety and their attitude toward Internet safety. The data were gathered from 620 sampled undergraduates in a descriptive survey using researcher-developed attitude scale and True-False statement test items. The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistics. The results of the study reveal that (a) university students were not knowledgeable about Internet safety (b) they have a positive disposition towards Internet safety (c) the most common place undergraduates' source for information about Internet safety was their friend, followed by online, cybercafé attendants, e-books and television programme. These findings provide information that might be useful for students and parents in the following ways: (1) motivate undergraduates to learn more about online dangers and sensible precautions to be taken to avoid falling victim of cyberspace dangers. (2) assist parents in educating and empowering their children to make the right choice online. Based on the findings of this study recommendations were also made.

Keywords: university students, internet safety, cybercrime, online safety education, student, cyberspace dangers

INTRODUCTION

Computer and the Internet have opened new vistas of knowledge and brought the entire education system closer to the students in the higher institutions. Research is easily conducted with easy access to the World Wide Web, and even beginning researchers (i.e., undergraduates) can use the medium to obtain relevant information needed for projects as well as for regular academic works. Classroom exercises and take-home assessment tasks, where students are required to compare and contrast website content, are ideal for alerting students to the requirements of writing for different audiences, the purpose of particular content, identifying bias and judging accuracy and reliability. In addition, through email, chat rooms and discussion groups, students learn the basic principles of communication in the written form. Despite the educational and social benefits of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), there are risks associated with their use, particularly for students in both secondary and tertiary institutions. For instance, students face the risks of exposure to material that is pornographic, sexually explicit or offensive, hateful or violent, or that encourages activities that are dangerous or

illegal; such materials can be accessed via the World Wide Web or newsgroups, or sent via e-mail or instant messaging services. In fact, the rapid growth of the information highway has responsible for the emergence of cybercrime.

Cybercrime has been used to describe a wide range of offences, including offenses against computer data and systems (such as 'hacking'), computer-related forgery and fraud (such as 'phishing'), content offences (such as disseminating child pornography) and copyright offences (such as the disseminating of pirated content). Based on the study carried out by Adeniran (2011), the overwhelming majority of the cybercrimes in Nigeria are committed by the 'yahooboy'. According to him, the 'yahooboy' criminal applications of Internet in Nigeria can be attributed to the failure of the government to create jobs for the youths. Several local and international organizations, have offered expert advice regarding Internet safety, but an evidence-based approach to educate youths about dangers of being online does not currently exist (American Academy of Pediatrics (APA), 2013). The increase rate at which youths fall victims of 'yahooboy' activities has been attributed

to the ignorance of youths about Internet safety and non inclusion of online safety education in the schools' curriculum in developing countries.

With this prevailing situation, it is easier to lure students with false promises, misinformation and lucrative offers because they are not really aware of the presence of "bad people" online. When students are not given or provided with the useful, recent and adequate information about Internet safety, it places them at risk of exposure to dangerous online materials and interactions. According to Fleming *et al.* (2006) middle school students and other young teens are most vulnerable to online dangers because they have greater access to the Internet than university students, are often less closely supervised, and are more willing to participate in discussions about emotions and relationships.

If the purpose of educating youths about Internet safety is to be achieved at all, students must have a positive disposition towards Internet safety. Although, there exist numerous definitions of attitude in the literature, all of them agree that an attitude is the tendency to think, feel, or act positively or negatively towards objects in our environment (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Petty, 1995). By the term "attitudes towards Internet safety" we refer to positive or negative set of beliefs about Internet safety and issues related to Internet safety. In addition to determination of the extent of undergraduates' knowledge acquisition in Internet safety, we intend to investigate their attitudes regarding: (1) the importance of Internet safety in their life and (2) the interest of Internet safety contents.

Exploring ICT utilization for teaching and learning purposes in higher institution constituted an aspect of several research studies (e.g., Keong, Horani & Daniel, 2005; Lau & Sim, 2008) in education. Also, a vast majority of other studies have focused on students' perceptions on incorporating e-learning into teaching (Tagoe, 2012). Furthermore, numerous studies (e.g. Jung, Loria, Mostaghel & Saha, 2008; Macharia & Nyakwende, 2010) have focus on students' acceptance of Internet based learning. Surprisingly, less attention has been devoted by the researchers to students' knowledge and their attitude toward Internet safety. The interest of earlier studies has been focused on students' attitudes towards e-learning. Taking into consideration all the above, we decided to investigate undergraduates' knowledge and attitudes toward Internet safety. In order to achieve the main objective of the study, the following research questions were formulated to guide the study.

1. What is the extent of undergraduates' knowledge acquisition on Internet safety?
2. Where do undergraduates obtain accurate information about Internet safety?

3. What is the nature of undergraduates' attitude towards Internet safety?

METHODOLOGY

Research Type

The study was a descriptive survey. In researchers' view, this design is appropriate for this study because the data for the study were collected from a sample of Nigerian undergraduates in order to document undergraduate students' knowledge and attitudes towards Internet safety.

Sample Selection

The research was conducted during the 2014/2015 rain semester with 620 undergraduates from four campuses of the university. Four campuses out of six were randomly selected for the study. To ensure that the selected campuses represented all the levels of study, a stratified random sampling technique was employed. From 100, 200, 300 and 400 levels, a total of 250, 150, 100 and 120 undergraduates were respectively selected for the study.

Instrument

To achieve the research objective, the researchers used survey questionnaire tagged as Knowledge and Attitude Towards Internet Safety Questionnaire (KATISQ) to capture data for the study. This instrument was developed by the researchers. The survey questionnaire has four sections: demographic variables (Section A), source of information (Section B), knowledge about Internet safety (Section C) and attitude towards Internet safety (Section D). Information sought in section A (e.g., gender, study level, study specialization) were used to gather and organize data to resolve Research Question 1 (which attempts to find out the extent of undergraduate students' knowledge acquisition on Internet safety). Section B of the survey questionnaire was intended to collect data to resolve Research Question 2. Research Question 2 sought to find out where undergraduate students obtain accurate information about Internet safety. To obtain data for this research question, students, were asked to use a scale of 1 to 5 to respond to where they source for accurate information about Internet safety. The scale used is interpreted as 1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = frequently, and 5 = always. Section C of the questionnaire (see Appendix) was aimed to generate data to respond to Research Question 1 (to determine the amount of knowledge undergraduate students have about Internet safety). This section has self-developed True-False statements related to Internet safety. The respondents were asked to circle the correct answer. This information was collected to show the actual knowledge of the respondents with regards to Internet safety. Finally, section D of the questionnaire (see Appendix) was designed to elicit information to resolve Research Question 3 (which attempts to determine the nature of undergraduate

students' attitudes towards Internet safety). This section consists of 15 items (statements) which were attached to a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" to strongly disagree" with "do not know" (neither disagree or agree) as pivotal point of the scale. Moving from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree", positive items were scored from 1 to 5, respectively, while negative items were scored in the reverse order.

Reliability and Validity

Following the development of the research instrument, a group of experts comprising two university lecturers specializing in Educational Technology and Computer Science, and a computer operator in a functional cybercafé were tasked to carefully scrutinize and assess the instrument for their relevance, content, face and construct validity. The feedback from the experts, recommended that some of the items in section C and D needed to be removed, whereas others were to be included in the instrument. In the end, 35 items (in Section C) were reduced to 31, which were further reduced by reliability test to 27 items, suggesting a very good sign of data reduction and consistency. Regarding section D, the initial 20 items were finally reduced to 15 items on experts' recommendations.

Following that, a pilot study involving 150 undergraduates from a neighboring university provided data for further validation and reliability determination of the instrument. The pilot test was also aimed to see whether the instruments were feasible to obtain the relevant data needed. The results of the pilot study revealed that the instrument is readable; and it yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.87 through the split-half method after the application of spearman-Brown correlation.

Data Collection

Data for the study were collected within the middle weeks of the 2014/2015 harmattan semester. The questionnaire was distributed to the undergraduates in

four campuses of the university. The service of two research assistance was requested to support in the distribution of the questionnaires. A cover letter was attached to the questionnaire explaining the purpose of the study. The distributed questionnaires were collected from the respondents as soon as they finished with their responses.

Data Analysis

Mean and item-by-item analysis were employed in order to resolve research questions addressed in this study. Item-by-item analysis of responses of respondents to the items contained in sections C and D of the questionnaire was carried out. To resolve Research Question 2, mean and ranking were used.

RESULTS

For clarity, the result section is organized in accordance with the research questions that frame this study and data that were relevant in responding to the research questions are presented in tables.

RESPONSES TO THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Research Question 1: What is the extent of undergraduate students' knowledge acquisition on Internet safety?

In order to resolve research question 1, researcher-developed True-False statements related to Internet safety was used to find out the subjects' level of knowledge about Internet safety. The 27 True-False statements have a maximum score of 27. Scores within the range of 0 to 9 were considered as little knowledge; scores within the range of 10 to 18 were taken as moderate knowledge; and scores within the range of 19 to 27 were considered as adequate knowledge. Table 1 provides a summary of the undergraduate students' level of knowledge about Internet safety on the basis of study subjects' background variables.

Table 1 : Level of knowledge of study sample about Internet safety

Variable	Category	Limited knowledge		Moderate knowledge		Adequate knowledge	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Gender	Male (N=385)	264	68.6	67	17.4	54	14.0
	Female (N=235)	170	72.3	40	17.1	25	10.6
	Total (620)	434	70.0	107	17.3	79	12.7
Level of study	100 (N=250)	173	69.2	41	16.4	36	14.4
	200 (N=150)	103	68.7	27	18.0	20	13.3
	300 (N=100)	75	75.0	15	15.0	10	10.0
	400 (N=120)	83	69.2	24	20.0	13	10.8
	Total (620)	434	70.0	107	17.3	79	12.7
Study specialization	Social sciences (N=236)	175	74.2	34	14.4	27	11.4
	Science, Engineering & Technology (N=167)	102	61.1	35	20.9	30	18.0
	Education (N=80)	50	62.5	20	25.0	10	12.5
	Humanities (N=137)	107	78.1	18	13.1	12	8.8
	Total (620)	434	70.0	107	17.3	79	12.7

It is inferred from table1 that 68.6% of the male undergraduates have little, 17.4% of them have moderate and 14.0% of them have adequate knowledge about Internet safety. On the other hand, 72.3% of the female undergraduates have little, 17.1% of them have moderate and 10.6% of them have adequate knowledge about Internet safety.

As seen in table 1, 69.2% of the 100 level students have little, 16.4% of them have moderate and 14.4% of them have adequate knowledge about Internet safety. 68.7% of the 200 level students have little, 18.0% of them have moderate and 13.3% of them have adequate knowledge about Internet safety. 75.0% of the 300 level students have little, 15.0% of them have moderate and 10.0% of them have adequate knowledge about Internet safety. 69.2% of the 400 level students have little, 20.0% of them have moderate and 10.8% of them have adequate knowledge about Internet safety

As could be seen from table 1, 74.2% of students from college of social sciences have little, 14.4% of them have moderate, and 11.4% of them have adequate knowledge about Internet safety. 61.1% of students from college of Science, Engineering and Technology have little, 20.9% of them have moderate

and 18.0% of them have adequate knowledge about Internet safety. 62.5% of students from College of Education have little, 25.0% of them have moderate and 12.5% of them have adequate knowledge about Internet safety. 78.1% of students from the College of Humanities have little, 13.1% of them have moderate, and 8.8% of them have adequate knowledge about Internet safety.

The poor performance of the undergraduates on True-False statements which were used to measure their knowledge acquisition about Internet safety gives a clear indication of possession limited knowledge. As could be seen from table 2, 70.0% of the study sample has limited knowledge about Internet safety. Item-by-item analysis of the responses of the respondents revealed that the most frequently incorrectly answered question was item 12, “it is a bad practice to delete spam without opening it”, which 85.3% of respondents answered incorrectly”. Another frequently incorrect answer was given to item 6, “people are who they say they are on Internet”, which 79.8% of respondents answered incorrectly. Table 2 provides a sample list of True-False Internet safety statements most frequently answered incorrectly by the undergraduates.

Table 2: True-False Internet safety statements most frequently answered incorrectly

Statement Number	Statement	Frequency	percentage
12	It is a bad practice to delete spam without opening it.	529	85.3
6	People are who they say they are on Internet	495	79.8
1	Chat rooms have an element of anonymity	490	79.0
4	Online terms and conditions during registration on social website are time wasting	477	76.9
10	Personal photos cannot be easily misused or altered when posted on the Internet	465	75.0
9	Transactional website that ask for credit card details should be embraced	462	74.5
23	Online friends are more dependable than face to face friends	453	73.1
22	Content uploaded online cannot be permanently deleted	398	64.2

Research Question 2: Where do undergraduates obtain accurate information about Internet safety?

Section B of the survey focused on where the undergraduates source for accurate information about Internet safety. Overall, the most common place an undergraduate would go for information is to their friends which had a mean score of 3.93. Other sources which ranked the highest for where

respondents would go for information were online (3.82), cybercafé attendants/computer operators (3.64), e-books (3.48) and television programmes/movies (2.65) (Table 3). The least common place an undergraduate would source for information was their parents which had a mean of 1.12. Other places which scored lower means were newspaper/magazines, computer science lecturers, and student affairs office (counseling unit), (Table 3)

Table 3: Ranking of information sources based on the responses of study sample

Rank	Source	Mean
1.	Friends	3.93
2.	Online (through browsing)	3.82
3.	Cybercafé attendants/computer operators	3.64
4.	e-Books	3.48
5.	Television programme/movies	2.65
6.	Newspapers/magazines	1.82
7.	Computer science lecturers	1.41
8.	Student affairs office (counseling unit)	1.15
9.	Parents	1.12

Research Question 3: What is the nature of undergraduate students’ attitudes towards Internet safety?

For the resolution of research question 3, an item-by-item analysis of the responses of the subjects of the study to the items of attitudinal scale was carried out. This was with a view to finding out the nature of

undergraduate students’ attitudes toward Internet safety. For ease of interpretation, the results of item analysis are provided in Table 4 under two broad categories of the ‘likes of Internet safety and the ‘dislike of Internet Safety’ as isolated by factor loadings.

Table 4: Responses of the study sample to the Internet Safety Attitudinal Scale (ISAS) statement (N=620)

Themes	Statement Number	Agreement f (%)	Neutrality f (%)	Disagreement f (%)	Missing Cases f (%)
Likes (7 items)	1	480(77.4)	7 (1.1)	128 (20.6)	5 (0.8)
	4	602 (97.1)	4 (0.6)	12(1.9)	0 (0.0)
	5	573 (92.4)	8 (1.3)	39 (6.3)	0 (0.0)
	8	430 (69.4)	2 (0.3)	188 (30.3)	0 (0.0)
	10	515(83.1)	12 (1.9)	89 (14.4)	4 (0.6)
	11	445(71.7)	37 (6.0)	135 (21.8)	3 (0.5)
	15	527 (85.0)	32 (5.2)	52 (8.4)	9 (1.4)
Dislikes (8 items)	2	187 (30.1)	40 (6.5)	388 (62.6)	5 (0.8)
	3	40 (6.5)	25 (4.0)	551 (88.9)	4 (0.6)
	6	125 (20.2)	10 (1.6)	482 (77.7)	3 (0.5)
	7	119 (19.1)	102 (16.5)	393 (63.4)	6 (1.0)
	9	427 (8.9)	11 (1.8)	175 (28.2)	7 (1.1)
	12	148 (23.9)	105 (16.9)	360 (58.1)	7 (1.1)
	13	415 (66.9)	40 (6.5)	163 (26.3)	2 (0.3)
	14	200 (32.3)	136 (21.9)	279 (45.0)	5 (0.8)

As could be seen from the table 4, with the exception of items 9, 13 and 14, over 50 % of the subjects of the study demonstrated positive attitude towards Internet safety. The responses of the subjects to the 7 ‘likes-of-Internet safety’ items were significantly important. There is overwhelming evidence from the above to indicate that the study subjects have positive attitude towards Internet safety. This position is reinforced by the results of the analysis of the respondents’ responses according to a Likert-type format. Using the Likert-type five-point scale analysis technique, the respondent had a mean score of 68.4 % on the attitudinal scale. This goes to confirm the positivism of the nature of the study subjects’ attitude towards Internet safety. This result underscores the fact that undergraduate students have a positive disposition towards Internet safety; and hence the resolution of research question.

DISCUSSION

This research contributes to the enrichment of literature on promotion of safe Internet use among students as previous studies did. The previous studies (e.g. Jones, 2009) indicated that parental involvement in monitoring Internet activity and educating middle and high school students is very low. Likewise, in this study, we found that the least common place university students would source for information about online safety was their parents. Furthermore, this report is parallel to the findings of Moreno, Egan, Bare, Young and Cox (2013) who found that only 70.0% of adolescents reported hearing teaching or receiving counsel on Internet safety from their parents. As viewed by Magid (2012) parents should hold the primary responsibility for Internet safety education and efforts should be made to teach their

children the basic rules of online safety, such as: (1) don’t give out personal information (e.g. address or phone number); (2) don’t send pictures of yourself to anyone especially indecent pictures, (3) don’t open emails or attachments from people you don’t know; (4) don’t become online ‘friends’ with people you don’t know; (5) never arrange to meet someone in person who you have met online, and (5) if anything you see or read online worries you, tell someone about it.

This study has confirmed that university students were not knowledgeable about Internet safety based on the fact that reasonable proportion (70.0%) of the respondents had limited knowledge about Internet safety. Fleming, Greentree, Cocotti-Muller, Elias and Morrison (2006) express a similar finding by reporting that middle and high school had little or no knowledge of Internet Safety. Another study by Sharples, Graber, Harrison and Logan (2008) came to a similar conclusion by reporting that only a few students understand Internet safety measures. Providing the Internet safety education to children before dangers can arise is a key strategy to assist youth integrates these lessons into their lives and thus prevents negative consequences.

The participants showed very positive attitudes with respect to developing interest in online safety. This result is parallel to the findings of Fallows (2004) who reported that students show favourable disposition toward online safety. Research has also shown how important learners’ attitudes and beliefs are when it comes to learning about newly introduced curriculum contents (Tobin, Tippins, & Gallard, 1994). Attitudes and beliefs act as filters through

which new knowledge and experiences are screened for meaning. They affect how knowledge and intentions are operationalized in class (Nespor, 1987; Pajares, 1992). Tynes (2007) argue that students will only be protected from online dangers if they themselves are knowledgeable and have positive attitude towards learning online safety.

CONCLUSIONS

Major conclusions which arise from this study are:

1. The university students were not knowledgeable about Internet safety.
2. They have a positive disposition towards Internet safety.
3. The most common place undergraduate's source for information about Internet safety was their friend, followed by online, cybercafé attendants, e-books and television programme.

IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELING

In researchers' view, the results of this study have the following implications for counseling:

1. The university management should create counseling centre for the undergraduates;
2. The university authority should employ professional counselors to man the centre.
3. The university counselors should be organizing group counseling to give enlightenment to students on Internet safety.
4. The counselor should help through the counseling techniques for the students to develop decision making skills on what to search for, the web to visit.
5. The counselor should help the students to develop critical inquiry skills that will help the student to make wise decisions when searching for information online.
6. The counselor should educate the undergraduate on the danger of sharing too much personal information online.
7. The counselor should create public awareness among undergraduates on the dangers of Internet pornography, sexual predators, cyber bullying and other Internet threats.
8. During parents forum the university counselor should be given enlightenment talk to parents on the need to set time to talk to their children on regular interval on the need to respect the privacy of others, by keeping their personal detail, by not identifying people by name in publicly shared content.
9. Counselor should encourage parents to teach their children how to communicate responsibly online. Counselor should also encourage the parents to use technology together as a family, this will be a good way to teach Internet safety to the youth.

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APPENDIX

SECTION B: True – False Statement on Internet safety

The following questions are to test your knowledge about internet safety. Please circle true or false to the best of your knowledge.

- | | | | |
|---|---|----|--|
| T | F | 1 | Accessing the internet using a computer or another enabled device is open to misuse. |
| T | F | 2 | Chat rooms have an element of anonymity. |
| T | F | 3 | Providing personal information online is a good practice. |
| T | F | 4 | Downloading files can lead to viruses which endanger computer |
| T | F | 5 | Spam is the email equivalent of nuisance phone. |
| T | F | 6 | People are who they say they are on internet. |
| T | F | 7 | Internet activities can be dangerous and illegal. |
| T | F | 8 | Sexual and emotional abuse can be propagated through internet. |
| T | F | 9 | Transactional websites that ask for credit card details should be embraced. |
| T | F | 10 | Personal photos cannot be easily misused or altered when posted on the Internet. |
| T | F | 11 | Information provided over the internet can be used for dishonest and legitimate purposes. |
| T | F | 12 | It is a bad practice to delete spam without opening it. |
| T | F | 13 | Sexual predators deceive students by pretending to be student themselves. |
| T | F | 14 | Spyware can be used to steal private data like passwords, credit card details and bank account details. |
| T | F | 15 | When children and adolescents access the internet unsupervised for lengthy periods of time every day they can be exposed to online child Pornographers and sexual predators. |
| T | F | 16 | As a female/male it is right for me to send my naked pictures to my online friends in order to make them develop interest more in me. |
| T | F | 17 | Online terms and condition during registration on a social website are time wasting. |
| T | F | 18 | Downloading of various files from the Internet can infect the computer or mobile device with virus. |
| T | F | 19 | Using a computer system that is not protected by anti-virus can disturb access to the internet. |
| T | F | 20 | Browsing with a computer system via hotspot connection without Password is prone to internet access misuse. |
| T | F | 21 | Using the same password across all social networks which you sign up for can result to easy hacking. |
| T | F | 22 | Content uploaded online cannot be permanently deleted |
| T | F | 23 | Online friends are more dependable than face to face friends |
| T | F | 24 | The more information you make available online, the greater the risk of identity theft |
| T | F | 25 | The act of attempting to acquire sensitive information such as usernames, passwords, and credit card details is termed hacking. |
| T | F | 26 | If someone steals you and your parent's identity they can commit crimes that could put you or your parents in danger. |
| T | F | 27 | Personal information posted on online can lead to abductions and sexual exploitation of underage adolescents. |

SECTION C Attitude Scale on Internet Safety

This is not a test. The information you give will be treated as confidential and would not be discussed to anyone without your permission. Respond by a tick () where appropriate. Please complete the whole questionnaire. The same key scale applies here.

SA= Strongly Agree, A = Agree; DK = Do not Know D = Disagree SD = Strongly Disagree.

S/N	Statements	SA	A	DK	D	SD
1	I like reading internet safety article than any other online articles					
2	Internet security verifications are so annoying to me.					
3	I see internet safety as an enemy of online freedom.					
4	Having sound knowledge of internet safety is good to protect our daily use of internet.					
5	I enjoy studying various ways of securing my activities on the internet.					
6	Certain requirements that restrict my surfing of internet really discourage me.					
7	I passionately dislike coming across terms and condition when I am registering on a website.					
8	I will appreciate any invitation for Internet Safety seminar to be more protected.					
9	I feel indifferent when I read about certain website warning and danger alert.					
10	I will love to become an Internet Safety Agent (I.S.A) in a future date.					
11	The knowledge of Internet safety activates more security consciousness in me.					
12	I don't care who is going to use my pictures or details on the internet even without my permission.					
13	I don't ever want to be lectured about Internet safety because it's so annoying.					
14	I hate nonprofit groups that embark on promotion of internet safety					
15	Provision of users' online privacy protection act is necessary to guide online activities.					