ASSESMENT OF BABCOCK UNIVERSITY UNDERGRADUATES' DEPENDENCE ON TWITTER RETWEETS, FOLLOWERS AND LIKES FOR SOCIAL VALIDATION

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ABSTRACT

In their social formative process, a lot of young people depend on the social media for social recognition and validation. Twitter as a social media platform has evolved by creating a new outlook on life for the youths since its inception in 2006. Premised on this observation, the study examined the way(s) in which Twitter's "retweets, followers and likes" affect students' confidence and affirmation of social validation. Hinged on the two-step flow, uses and gratification and the dependency media theories, the study adopted analytical survey using the questionnaire as research instrument. The study revealed a correlation between retweets, followers, likes and students' image in their social environment as it influences their increased online presence, gratifies their social consciousness, popularity or status as an opinion leader. on the strength of these findings that social media and Twitter in particular play significant role in the social perception of young people, the study suggest a more realistic approach wherein youths are made to understand the sometimes unrealistic nature of online contents which mostly are reflections of the persona

*its users want others to see and how it can induce susceptibility to unrealistic
social media prescribed standards.*

Key words: Retweets, Followers, Likes, Social Validation, Confidence.

Introduction

The new media is evolutionary, with the changes it has brought to the global
media space. Driven by the internet, it adopts attributes of the print and
broadcast media in a computerized manner and has given birth to the
phenomenon that is today known as 'social media'. Social media are online
communities which allow its users to network and communicate on a large
scale, through social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter and
Instagram, blogs, wikis, status update services and many more. According to
Ijeoma & Burke (2013), social media are web-based activities which give
access to individuals to build unrestricted or semi-public profiles in a confined
system…, social media can also be thought of as belonging to a group of
internet-based activities built around an ideological and technological basis of
web 2.0 platforms, which enable the construction and exchange of consumer
generated content." This allows every user to build their own desired persona
online and interact with others.

Communication which is the root of all development cannot be ignored as
human existence cannot be independent of it. According to Wright (1986), as a
social process, communication is essential to society and to human survival.
Every human society –so-called primitive or modern –depends on
communication to enable its members to live together, to maintain, and to cope
with the environment. Participation in the communication process establishes a
person as a social being and as a functioning member of society.

Social networks give communication a modern edge which allows a person to
coexist, maintain, relate and to cope not just with his/her immediate
environment, but the world at large. According to Sampasa-Kanyiga & Lewis
(2015), social networking sites are web-based platforms that allow individuals

create their own personal profile and build a network of connection with other users. Stefanon, Lackaff, & Rosen (2011) avvered that, an evolving culture of transparency and disclosure has been noted and often lamented by scholars of traditional mass media, yet the use of online platforms for intimate self-expression has become a key component of the overall social environment for many. This creates the drive for people especially the youth, to want to participate actively in this new communication process in order to be recognized as a functioning social being and a member of society.

According to Statista (2016), Twitter is a social networking and micro blogging service, enabling registered users to read and post short messages, so-called tweets. Twitter messages are limited to 140 characters and users are also able to upload photos or short videos. It is a social networking platform that allows people to connect with friends; old and new as well as corporate business and celebrities just by clicking the 'follow' button, Twitter began as an idea that Twitter co-founder Jack Dorsey (@Jack) had in 2006. It is a platform where group of friends could keep tabs on what each other based on their status updates. Limited to 140 characters per tweet and limited tweets per day, what started out as one tweet by Jack Dorsey on March 21, 2006, 9:50pm *, has now become a way of life the new generation, producing millions of tweets by billions of users daily(Twitter. About 2016).*

Using the followers, retweets, likes and trending topics concepts, billions of individuals, initiatives and corporate business can share information, opinions, educate on a whole other level that can be seen as extraordinary, if compared to physical face to face communication or even SMS messaging and phone calls. Twitter allows users network beyond continents, thereby expanding their reach. Through retweets and likes individuals have the opportunity to create influence through their Twitter posts. The direct influence an individual has on Twitter is tied to the number of followers he or she has. Therefore, the more followers an individual has, the more directly influential an individual is. Retweet is a repost an already shared post of an individual –one is, or not following –to one's personal followers, thus creating indirect influence for the individual on the original post. One's indirect influence is then tied to the number of followers

each of his or her followers have, who then have the tendency to view the sharer's tweet on their time line because it has been reposted by someone they follow.

Twitter's interactive nature paves way for addiction in the lives of its users especially youths, who are the main digital natives. This addiction is tied to the constant activeness on Twitter in order to garner more retweets, followers and likes. Attesting to the avid usage, Statista (2016), states that as of the second quarter of 2016, the micro blogging service averaged at 313 million monthly active users. Twitter at first seems complicated but with time users begin to understand what is called the Twitter lingo.

The evolution of mobile phones also contributed greatly to the active use of Twitter. Over time, mobile phones have been able to function like computers. With data subscription, individuals can access the internet wherever they go. That way, users are opportune to download the Twitter application and have Twitter on the go 24/7 if they so desire.

Ijeoma & Burke (2013) averred that, through social networks such as Twitter, room has been created for opinion leaders among the youths. According to Grimsley (2015), an opinion leader is a well-known individual or organization that has the ability to influence public opinion on the subject matter for which the opinion leader is known. Opinion leaders may include politicians, business or community leaders, journalists, educators, celebrities, sports stars and in the case of Twitter popular and sociable individuals in social groups. Opinion leaders also known as arrow heads, set the trend for opinions adopted by users on social media. By popular belief, the youth refer to them as 'Twitter Celebrities'. Twitter celebrities are infamously famous individuals within peer or social groups who have garnered a lot of followers due to the nature of their online persona and posts. These people have the power to influence others more than the average Twitter user with a few followers. They set the trends and mindsets online through their generated content which individuals feel they must live by, contributing to the idea that one doesn't feel he or she is recognized unless he or she is told. This is called social validation.

According to Writer (2012), social Validation is what compels you to change your behavior, thoughts or style, just to feel among. We subconsciously accept what others are doing even against our better judgment. Being individuals, who are at a stage in their lives where they discover who they really are, the need to make a mark in society leads the youths to social validation. Cialdini (2009) asserts that the principle of social validation concerns social norms and the idea that people often look to the behavior of others to decide how to behave across situations. Being the trend, majority of young people who constitute the digital natives have Twitter accounts as a show of conformity to social norm. Maintaining the status quo via these Twitter accounts becomes another issue. To be accepted and recognized in peer groups, individuals tend to follow the crowd by depending on the number of followers, retweets and likes their online activity generates for assurance that they are desirable in the eyes of those in their social circle.

On Twitter, the retweets signify a show of support, something like a seconding of one's motion or opinion hence the more the retweets, the more the believe in the support of the motion or opinion proposed. This ability to develop a clan of thoughts disciples gives a sort of social satisfaction to the avid user of Twitter. This fuels the feeling of social relevance and acceptance among most young users of this medium.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In a decade where belonging to the virtual community has become a whole new life for youth, Twitter's addictive nature has not just drawn students deeper into the virtual realm; it has also influenced their partterns of behavior and choices. Birthing opinion leaders, Twitter allow students follow online content generated by other individuals to know and abide by the standards they believe they are supposed to live by, thus driving them to seek social validation by any means through their online persona, by creating who they feel their peers and immediate public wish to recognize as an active and accepted member of society. Students by any means possible, moral, immoral, normal or abnormal, conventional or unconventional to society, attempt and sometimes succeed in

gaining more followers, retweet and likes on their profile, in order to be noticed by their peers and immediate public. Quite a number of youth have become dependent on the concepts of Twitter activities to validate themselves in real life social groups. This often times lead to deviation from the acceptable norms. Premised on the identified problems, the study assessed Babcock University undergraduates' dependence on Twitter retweets, followers and likes examining how personal follower, retweets and like gratifies their social validation quest.

Review of literature

An individual is associated with social classes or demographics which can be age group, gender, culture, tribe, location and many more. Within these social subsets, there are still more subsets which may include social status. When grouped socially an individual strives to be recognized within and beyond the group as one is faceless without an identity. Communication is a key part of man's existence hence he needs to communicate in order to be recognized as active member of society. When people communicate but do not feel noticed or recognized, a problem stems within that individual. He begins to look for reasons why he has not or may not be recognized in society. He begins to live up to the standards society has set and seeking others' opinions to support his actions, this is called social validation**.**

According to Cialdini (2009), the principle of social validation concerns social norms and the idea that people often look to the behavior of others to decide how to behave across situations, especially ambiguous contexts. Writer (2012), asserts that we seek approval from our peers, greatly desire to be appreciated and loved. We all have an innate desire to belong to a social group and it is because of this desire to belong, that many of us do things we normally, wouldn't do. Social validation is simply what compels individuals, to think, act, speak and generally behave the way they do, in order to be identified or accepted as a part of the group, even though ideas supported are in contrast to the individual's belief. To satisfy this need, individuals base their self-worth concept on external opinion and rank themselves using standards set by opinion leaders, who spread ideas through social groups. Inability to obtain social

validation causes individuals to develop low self-esteem and depression which sometimes, can make them susceptible to any idea possible. According to Clippinger cited by Guadagno, Muscanell, Rice, & Roberts (2013), human beings have always appeared in social classes and always have highly cultured social signaling and administrative mechanisms which enforce difficult forms of supportive behaviours. The concept of social validation suggests that human beings as social creatures tend to follow the crowd; nobody makes a move unless someone else takes the lead, because they don't feel they are in the position to do otherwise when the crowd is not.

In the past social validation was obtainable only in physical social groups however, with the advent of social media, individuals have the opportunity to not just be recognized by their immediate environment but the world at large. With the use of online profiles, individuals create who they feel the public will desire to interact with in order to be recognized. Popularity is easily gained on the internet by having numerous followers, likes and retweets/reposts. This is because the youth today spend hours on the internet, when an individual's content is constantly seen and liked by numerous users, the identity of the individual is retained in the memory of the viewing public.

Psychology Today (2016) avvered that, "there is something a bit unsettling about the way social media networks areas constantly trying to rate their users. How many people "liked" your post today?" Ranking or rating users on social networks, give them the idea that their sole purpose on social media is to gain likes, followers and retweets…., "Pressure to be socially accepted and celebrated can be too much to handle, and can adversely affect the self-esteem of many social media users." When individuals post content online and they do not get their desired level of reaction they feel disheartened and unappreciated, causing them to look for alternative ways to be noticed online.

On social media, individuals with low self-esteems and the desire to be popularly known and accepted, follow standards set by online opinion leaders by emulating and imitating the content of those who they feel meet up or surpass these social expectations. In executing this task posted content range from photos depicting a glamorous celebrity, life of the party lifestyle, one is a

fashion icon, photos and videos containing nudity or controversial status updates that have the ability to spark discussion or stimulate response. Engaging in the afore mentioned activities in turn help individuals gain more followers, likes comments and retweets. According to Daly (2014), experts say that waiting for the 'likes' to roll in can seriously mess with your psyche. As observed during social interactions, when an individual posts something that he or she expects to spark reactions, paranoia sets in, making the individual to constantly check their social media page to see the progress their post has made. This act is more common with pictures. Postmes et al. (1998) found that when de-individuation occurs online, individuals tend to rely less on their individual standards of behavior and instead identify more with group norms. The concept of de-individuation is centered on the idea that under conditions of anonymity, individuals depend on a group more often in order to make decisions rather than following their own internal standards. Anonymity on social media makes it easier for individuals to seek social validation online through de-individuation. The problem with social validation through social media is not the idea of being recognized or not, but the lengths to which individuals go to get it.

This study was hinged on the two-step flow, uses and gratification and the dependency media theories.the Two Step Flow Theory helped the researchers in observing the trends set by Twitter celebrities influence other members of social groups' behavior and serve them as standards to which they must attain to be socially validated. Uses and Gratification Theory satisfies the objective of determining the needs and how Twitter satisfies the information needs of the users. Media Dependency Theory highlights human information needs and his reliance on the media to this end. This in this study satisfies the objective of determining the needs and youths reliance on Twitter to fill this need.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The analytical survey research design was adopted From a population of registered 6,371 undergraduate students (March 2020), fully registered undergraduates in Babcock University,

A sample size of 396 undergraduates who operate active Twitter accounts were purposively selected using Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) formula. The research instrument was questionnaire which consisted of close ended questions, using a Likert scale to enable easy interpretation and analysis. The study made use of SPSS method (Statistical Package and Service Solutions), analyzing data using simple frequency tables and percentage.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Respondents for the study were selected across economics (18.7%), Mass Communication, 23(6.2%), Anatomy, 23(6.2%) ILD 46(12.5%) Business Administration 23(6.2%) Political Science, 23(6.2%) Medicine, 23(6.2%) theology, 23(6.2%) Accounting departments of Babcock University. 231(62.6%) of the respondents were males, while 138(37.4%) were females. 246 (66.7%) of the respondents were between the ages of 16-20, 110 (29.8%) were between the ages of 21-25 and 13 (3.5%) of the respondents were between the ages of 26-30

Table 1: Respondents Distribution by Level of Study

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
100level	23	6.2	6.2
200level	92	24.9	31.2
300level	184	49.9	81.0
400level	70	19.0	100.0
Total	369	100.0	

Table 1 shows that 23(6.2%) were in 100level, 92(24.9^) were in 200level, 184(49.9%) were in 300level, while 70(19%) were in 400level.

Table 2: Number of Twitter Followers

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
50-300	139	37.7	37.7
301-500	92	24.9	62.6

501-750	69	18.7	81.3
751-1000	46	12.5	93.8
1001 and above	23	6.2	100.0
Total	369	100.0	

Table 2 revealed the respondents number of Twitter followers they have. From this result it shows that 139(37.7%) of the respondents have 50-300 followers, 92(24.9%) have 301-500 followers, 69(18.7%) have 501-750 followers, 46(12.5%) have 751-1000 followers, while 23(6.2%) have 1001 and above followers.

Table3 : frequency of user's access to Twitter account?

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	254	68.8	68.8
No	115	31.2	100.0
Total	369	100.0	

Table 3 shows that 254(68.8%) of the respondents have frequent access to Twitter account while 115(31.2%) do not have frequent access to their Twitter account.

Table 4: Way(s) Twitter retweets, followers and likes affect Babcock University undergraduates socially.

Key: SA – Strongly Agree, A – Agree, U- Undecided, D- Disagree, SD – Strongly Disagree.

S/N		SA	A	U	D	SD
1.	Having numerous retweets, followers and like affect your social life.	46(12.5)	139(37.7)	92(24.9)	46(12.5)	46(12.5)
2.	Having numerous retweets, followers	69(18.7)	185(50.1)	92(24.9)	23(6.2)	

S/N		SA	A	U	D	SD
	and likes to have a lot of friends					
3.	Having numerous retweets, followers and likes helps to endorse yourself/image.	69(18.7)	231(62.6)	23(6.2)	23(6.2)	23(6.2)
4.	Having numerous retweets, followers and likes determines the social circle you belong to.	46(12.5)	185(50.1)	46(12.5)	69(18.7)	23(6.2)

Table 4 revealed Babcock undergraduates' view on the ways Twitter has affected them socially. These results indicated agreement that having numerous retweets, followers and like affect your social life, having numerous retweets, followers and likes to have a lot of friends, having numerous retweets, followers and likes helps to endorse your self-image

Table 5: Babcock University undergraduates need to have numerous retweets, followers and likes on Twitter.

S/N		SA	A	U	D	SD
1.	You need numerous retweets, followers and likes to know if people like you.	138(37.4)	69(18.7)	116(31.4)	23(6.2)	23(6.2)
2.	You need numerous retweets, followers and likes to be accepted in your desired social circle.	46(12.5)	138(37.4)	23(6.2)	116(31.4)	46(12.5)
3.	Your number of retweets followers and likes determine your social status.	46(12.5)	115(31.2)	115(31.2)	70(19)	23(6.2)

S/N		SA	A	U	D	SD
4.	Having numerous retweets, followers and likes on Twitter is an assurance that people like your content.	69(18.7)	185(50.1)	46(12.5)	69(18.7)	
5.	Having numerous retweets, followers and likes makes you feel important and among.		93(25.2)	115(31.2)	115(31.2)	46(12.5)
6.	Having numerous retweets, followers and likes is an affirmation of popularity.	92(24.9)	162(43.9)	69(18.7)		46(12.5)

Table 5 revealed the respondents view on the need for numerous retweets, followers on Twitter. From the data presented above, it can be deduced that students were of the view that there is need to numerous retweets, followers and likes because it enables them know if they are liked. You also need numerous retweets, followers and likes to be accepted in your desired social circle, your number of retweets followers and likes determine your social status. Having numerous retweets, followers and likes on Twitter is an assurance that people like your content. The respondents however, disagreed that Having numerous retweets, followers and likes makes you feel important and among but having numerous retweets, followers and likes is an affirmation of popularity.

Table 6: Effect/influence Twitter retweets, followers and likes have on the online presence of Babcock University undergraduates.

S/N		SA	A	U	D	SD
1.	Retweets, followers and likes influence your online presence.	93(25.2)	230(62.3)	23(6.2)	23(6.2)	
2	When you get retweets, followers and likes, your online presence is felt by others	69(18.7)	185(50.1)	92(24.9)		23(6.2)

S/N		SA	A	U	D	SD
3	Having more Twitter retweets, followers and likes makes you more active on Twitter.	46(12.5)	139(37.7)	115(31.2)	69(18.7)	
4	Being more active on Twitter ensures you more retweets, followers and likes means	46(12.5)	138(37.4)	116(31.4)	23(6.2)	46(12.6)

Table 6 shows the respondents view on the effect/influence Twitter retweets, followers and likes have on the online presence of Babcock University undergraduates. From the table it is revealed that most of the respondents agreed that Retweets, followers and likes influence their online presence, when you get retweets, followers and likes, your online presence is felt by others, having more Twitter retweets, followers and likes makes you more active on Twitter, and being more active on Twitter ensures you more retweets, followers and likes means

Table 7: How Twitter retweets, followers and likes aid Babcock University students to obtain social validation.

S/N		SA	A	U	D	SD
1.	Having numerous retweets, followers and likes means you're popular.	46(12.5)	138(37.4)	116(31.4)	23(6.2)	46(12.5)
2.	The number of retweets, followers and likes you have describe the number of people who know you.	23(6.2)	185(50.1)	92(24.9)	46(12.5)	23(6.2)
3.	You can determine how well known you		162(43.9)	161(43.6)	23(6.2)	23(6.2)

	are using the number of retweets, followers and likes you obtain.				
4.	Having numerous retweets, followers and likes makes you a Twitter celebrity/ opinion leader.		208(56.4)	69(18.7)	46(12.5)	46(12.5)

Table 7 revealed the respondents view on how Twitter retweets, followers and likes aid Babcock University students to obtain social validation. From the result it is revealed that majority of the respondents are of the view that having numerous retweets, followers and likes means you're popular. They also agreed that the number of retweets, followers and likes you have describe the number of people who know you, You can determine how well known you are using the number of retweets, followers and likes you obtain and having numerous retweets, followers and likes makes you a Twitter celebrity/ opinion leader.

Students feel need to garner numerous retweets, followers and likes because it aids them in knowing whether or not they are liked by other members of society. Though Twitter concepts could either or not grant one acceptance in their desired social circle, is not needed to determine one's social status and does not make one feel important or among, students are however, dependent on retweets, followers and likes to affirm their

In order to be socially validated, students use retweets, followers and likes to describe the number of people who know they are. Students also, rely on retweets followers and like to validate whether or not one is or has attained the 'Twitter celebrity/opinion popularity and provide assurance that their online content is liked by their audience. Retweets, follows and likes have managed to

influence/affect the online presence of Babcock University undergraduates in the sense that it could either make them more or less active online.

Conclusively Babcock University undergraduates are dependent on Twitter retweets followers and likes because it satisfies most of the students' needs, affects their lives socially in more ways than one and also affirms their stance and place in society which is the desire of man. This has enabled students socially validate themselves based on online standards set by their influential peers or online authorities.

Acknowledging the efficacy of the social media and Twiter in particular, the researchers advised that youths should be made to understand that the online community is not real, hence they should guide against susceptibility to standards of living set by peer groups, which is mostly a reflection of the persona its users want others to see and unrealistic. Face-to-face interactions should be heavily encouraged so as to get individuals place less of their personal lives on the World Wide Web, which is the most public space there is. This will can help youths to avoid addiction, improve their public relations skills, and boost their self-confidence and above all, verification of the real world.

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