

# Internet Access and Use among Young People in Botswana

Tshepo Batane

**Abstract**—This study investigated internet use by young people in Botswana. The study intended to find out how much access do young people have to the internet and what they mainly used it for. A total of 117 from different colleges in the country participated in the study and the instrument used to collect data was a questionnaire containing both quantitative and qualitative questions. The findings of the study revealed that internet access among young people in Botswana was very low with majority of this access taking place at college campuses. There were also disparities in internet access between the institutions themselves. The study also showed that entertainment and communication comprised about 75% of young people's internet time. This presents a challenge to the government and other stakeholders to find ways to effectively utilize the internet to improve different aspects of young people's lives.

**Index Terms**—Internet access, internet use, entertainment, communication, social networks.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The internet has penetrated many aspects of today's living. Young people (18-24 years old) are said to be the most connected age group, followed by slightly older adults and teenagers, [1] Smith, Raine and Zickuhr (2011) and this has been mainly attributed to the growth of the Web as an entertainment venue for young people. The internet offers a medium popular within youth culture. The internet provides faster access to volumes of information to users and also improve communication and networking among people and institutions. The internet also provides up to date information on various issues of young people's interest such that they do not need to rely on other people for such information. The internet has the capability to network people with different stakeholders around the globe to share skills and information. For the developing world, access to the internet has been a challenge as countries often suffer from low bandwidth leading to slow internet connections. However, in recent years there has been a great increase in internet access to most people in the developing countries, [2] Halewood and Kenny (2008).

In Botswana, the government is committed to improving the lives of the people through technology as enshrined in the country's vision of 2016, [3] Long term vision for Botswana (1997). The development of technology in African countries has taken centre stage with countries working to broaden access to the internet and improving technical performance. Recent years have seen a great increase in technology access

to most people in Africa; this is mainly due to reduced prices of ICT tools such as computers and provision of refurbished computers in from the western world. As a result of this, many schools and offices have been equipped with computers. The government of Botswana is committed to providing technology infrastructure to different departments and communities in the country so as to increase access to technology by different sectors of the population. The country through the Ministry of Communication Science and Technology has developed an Information and Communication Technology Policy which provides a roadmap that drives technology implementation in the country.

Investing in the lives of young people is an important development priority for any nation, hence famous slogans such as "no child left behind". Governments are forever looking for ways to improve the lives of young people, be it in education, health, promoting good social behavior and many other aspects of life. The internet is an increasingly powerful tool in participating in global markets, enhancing the quality of education and improving basic services. Therefore, it has become important for countries to harness the potential of this tool in assisting improve the lives of young people.

## II. PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

With the advent of the internet, it has become imperative to find ways to utilize this tool to improve the lives of young people. However, in order to achieve this, it is important to first establish how much access do young people actually have to the internet and what exactly do they like using it for. The purpose of this study therefore, was to investigate the use of the internet by young people Botswana; how much access do they have to internet, and what do they mostly use if for when they have the access. The findings of this study are intended to assist in providing evidence-based ideas and strategies that would help employ the internet in ways that make a positive difference in young people's lives. The internet is now used in schools as an effort to improve learning, in the health system and many other sectors of the society to enhance performance. Results from a study such as this one would assist stakeholders identify best ways to utilize the internet in working with young people.

## III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Participants in this study were students from four colleges in and around the capital city. One of the schools was a degree offering university and the other three were diploma offering institutions. A total of 117 students participated with about 20 students randomly picked from the colleges.

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The main data collection instrument used was a questionnaire which contained both qualitative and quantitative questions. The quantitative data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS). Cross tabulated results from the selected variables reported. Descriptive statistics and correlations were also used. Content analysis was used to analyze qualitative data.

IV. FINDINGS

This section first presents the biographical information of the participants, then findings from the research questions.

A. Demographic Data

Table I below is shows the biographical information of the participants

TABLE I: GENDER-AGE CROSS TABULATION

		Age						Total 32
		18-20	21-23	24-26	27-29	30-32	Over	
Gender	Male	13	16	16	7	2	1	55
	Female	24	10	9	11	7	1	62
Total		37	26	25	19	9	2	117

There were a slightly higher number of females in this study compared to males and the majority of participants were between the ages of 18-26 years.

B. Internet Access

Most students reported that in general, they had internet access of less than five hours a week, see table 2 below, 28.2% of the students reported an internet access of five to 10 hours in a week and 15% had access of over 10 hours in a week.

TABLE II: INTERNET ACCESS

Time	Frequency %	Percent
Over 10 hours	17	14.5
5-10 hours	33	28.2
Less than 5 hours	67	57.2
Total		100

Majority of participants reported that they mostly accessed the internet in their respective schools through the library and computer labs. Only 2% had access at their homes. Participant reported they rarely visited other places such as internet cafes for access, and they only did that when schools were closed. 30% indicated they accessed internet through their mobile phones.

C. Internet Use

The internet usage for the participants is represented in Fig. 1 below:

Communication included; social networking, messaging, e-mailing, chatting. Entertainment included; games, music,

video. The study revealed that more females than males used the internet for communication such as facebook and more males used the internet for entertainment.

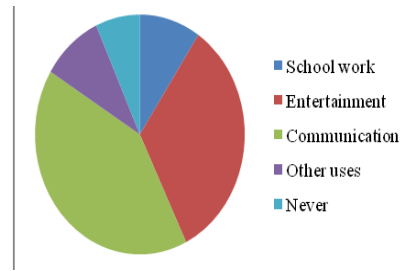


Fig. 1. Internet usage by participants.

D. Access Disparities

An unintended outcome of this study was the discovery of disparities between institutions in terms of internet access. Participants belonging to the university reported higher access to the internet, while the other institutions reported minimal access with some having no access at all. However, there was equitable access to the internet among females and males

V. DISCUSSIONS

This study revealed that internet access among young people in Botswana is relatively low compared to other places in the world. Majority of participants indicated that they had internet access of less than five hours a week which is what most young people in developing countries would have in a day. In this study college campuses were the main source of internet access. The internet had not yet penetrated most homes. However, the country has recently launched the West African Cable System (WACS), which is expected to bring faster and cheaper internet connection to most people, [4] Subsea world news (2012). Mobile internet access is also gaining a lot of popularity especially among young people. Therefore, the internet landscape in the country is expected to change drastically in the next few years.

This study revealed that entertainment and communication comprised about 75% of young people’s internet time. This finding is consistent with reports from similar studies which indicated that young people mostly used the internet for entertainment and communication [5] Dunne, Lawlor and Rowley (2010), [6] Shanahan and Elliott (2009). This presents an opportunity for educators and other decision makers to find ways to utilize these avenues to improve the lives of young people. Reference [7] Bouman (1998), says that entertainment media can play a great role in educating people on different issues, however, that potential has not been fully tapped. According to [8] Singhal, Rogers and Brown (1993), embedding educational messages with entertainment assist to increase knowledge about the issue, create favorable attitudes and change overt behavior concerning the educational issue or topic. The internet has become a very important source of information and provides virtual answers to almost all the questions that people and young people can access it to find answers to certain questions that they may not be comfortable to ask in face to

face interactions. As [9] Forman (2004) puts it "ICT offers a freedom of informational access and expression that may exceed permissible social, political and legal boundaries." The internet, e-mail, discussion groups and chat rooms offer free expression and communication on topics that are otherwise taboo to people who are otherwise silenced" (p194). Forman further reports that in a study conducted among some African countries it was found out that schoolgirls used the internet to search for information on issues that are a taboo in their culture. Therefore the internet has provided an opportunity for one to educate themselves and address issues that are important for their livelihood but are not openly discussed in their society due to many reasons. In his famous quote "the medium is the message" McLuhan suggested that using technology to disseminate information could lead to social change, and the medium itself, which is the technology is force unto itself capable of pushing through social change irrespective of the content, reference [9]. Therefore, it is important to find out what young people like to use the internet for so as to channel these messages through those activities. There is no monopoly over information in the internet as this tool offers great access to information. The information has unlimited sources which can be accessed by anybody with connection.

The internet can also promote young people's participation in civic activities through enhancing the engagement of those who are already likely to be engaged. Reference [10] Sopher (2011), says that young people who participate in social networking activities are more likely to engage in civic duties than those who do not use social networks. In a study conducted by CIRCLE called "Millennials Talk Politics", it was revealed that 91% of millennials who used social networking sites had participated in at least one civic activity, compared to 64% of millennials who did not use social networks regularly. Online communication is also credited for offering online therapy to young people. The communication platforms can help to build online communities of practice that can provide support networks for young people. [11] Technology and young people (nd). This can be a useful tool for providing support on sensitive issues that young people deal with in their lives.

Developing countries are often characterized by internal digital divides as there are often big disparities in technology access between urban and rural areas as technology is often heavily concentrated in urban areas as opposed to remote and rural areas. These disparities continue to grow with each new invention in the technology world. This study revealed disparities between institutions situated within the same area. It was revealed that the university had more resources than the small colleges. Therefore it is upon governments to address this issue as a step towards societal homogeneity. One main advantage in Botswana is that, unlike in many other developing nations, there is relative equity in access to ICT among males and females. While males would naturally opt for technical education than females, it is more an issue of choice than coercion.

## VI. CONCLUSION

This study provided an insight into online behaviour of

young people in Botswana. There is great need to develop new models of disseminating information to young people by adding an entertainment element to the process. The internet is proving to be crucial in providing a platform to do so. The internet increases the rate at which communication happens. It is upon governments and other stakeholders to utilize the internet for promoting productive practices among young people.

It is also important to widen access and increase internet speed so that more young people can participate in online activities. Botswana like many developing countries suffers from low -bandwidth problems which lead to very slow internet connections. It is crucial for the country to address this problem if it wants to move towards closing the digital gap. Developed countries are far ahead in providing fast internet access with Finland declaring fast internet access as legal rights in the country companies were required to provide connections that run at speeds of atleast 1 megabit per second.

The limitations of this study was that it only focused on college going youth, and studies show that internet use among young people is heavily determined by whether or not they attend school or college, [12] A nation online: How Americans are expanding their use of the internet (2002).

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