# THE EFFECT OF E-PORTAL SYSTEM ON CORPORATE IMAGE OF UNIVERSITIES

By

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*ABSTRACT*

*Internet connectivity in tertiary institutions in Africa has been summarized in three characteristics - too little, too expensive and poorly managed (African Tertiary Institutions Connectivity Survey (ATICS), 2006 report). The Internet portal system offers educational organizations the ability to track students' needs and promote their programs and plans. This paper examines the effect of portal systems in promoting the corporate images of Universities, whereby Six Universities in Nigeria were used as an example. Survey was adopted as the method and six hundred respondents were randomly selected for this study. Three hypotheses were tested and analyzed using t-test and correlation analysis. The paper recommended that there was a dire need for universities to engage the services of expert web-designers with regard to effective projection of their corporate image through graphics, colour lettering etc.*

*Keywords: Internet, Portal System, Corporate Image and Universities.*

## INTRODUCTION

The Internet can be conceived as a rich, multi-layered, complex, ever-changing textual environment. The Internet provides several opportunities for the academia across the globe. It is a mechanism for information dissemination and a medium for collaborative interaction between individuals and their computers without regard for geographic limitation of space (Johnson & Kaye, 2002). Content created on the Internet ranges from simple e-mail messages to sophisticated 'documents' (sites) incorporating sounds, images and words (Evans, 1996). The Internet is a 'live', constantly 'moving', theoretically borderless, potentially infinite space for the production and circulation of information. The Internet is arguably one of the most significant technological developments of the late 20th century.

The E-Portal is an incredible information resource and a powerful communication tool on the internet. E-Portal helps schools and educational authorities manage the educational process on national, district, school, administration, teacher, parent, and student levels. E-Portal provides educational organizations with new ways to increase involvement, opportunities, and resources in children's education and the classroom learning experience (Sakhr, 2010).

Importantly, educationists and communication experts have also argued that the use of E-Portal can contribute to the overall corporate image of the Universities across the globe (Oyedepo & Okorie, 2011). Studies also have suggested that corporate image is determined mostly by the organization and is presented to employees in visual and verbal form (Kiriakidou & Millward, 2000). A company's "Corporate Image" can be defined as how an organization is currently perceived—but not necessarily how it wants to be perceived. Though the most visible aspects of a Corporate Image are the company name and logo, the Corporate Image is actually a sum of tangibles and intangibles that a customer or employee may have seen, read, heard, or thought about an enterprise.

Corporate Image has been recognized as the result of a dual process of corporate image production by the organization and audience consumption by the populations and publics that relate to the organization (O'Neill, 1984; Olins, 1991). This paper presents the idea of the E-Portal as a mass medium. It examines the effect of E-Portal system on the corporate Image of Universities in Nigeria.

## Objectives of the study

- To determine whether students are knowledgeable of the E-Portal in their educational institutions.

- To measure the level of interaction between the Lecturers and students through the E-Portal.

- To determine whether the E-Portal has improved the corporate image of these universities or not.

## Hypotheses

- There is no significant relationship between the supply of information through the internet and corporate image of Lagos and Ogun states universities.

- There is no significant difference in the general perception of public of universities in Lagos and Ogun states for use of internet facilities for corporate image building.

- There is no significant relationship between the level of interaction through the E-Portal and corporate image of Lagos and Ogun states universities.

## Theoretical Framework

This study is hinged on the Uses and Gratification theory. The theory deals with the way in which different individuals use media and the gratification they derive from its use. Folarin (1998, p.22) notes that the theory is basically concerned with questions of who, which media, which content, under which condition and for what reason? Furthermore, the theory is concerned with what media people use, how the media are used, and what gratification learners expect from its usage.

According to West and Turner (2004), this theory is an extension of the need and motivation in Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The satisfaction of one need gives rise to another need. Elihu , Blumler and Gurenvitch (1974) were motivated by Maslow's theory(1954) to study how people consume mass communication. Their finding gave birth to the Uses and Gratification theory. In conclusion, West and Turner (2004, p. 396) summarize the assumption of the theory as "providing a framework for understanding when and how individual media consumers become more or less active and the consequences of that increased or decreased involvement". The theory is relevant to this paper to determine how individuals use E-Portal in their

educational activities as well as how it also contributes to the overall corporate image of Universities.

## Method

Survey was used in this study to examine two Universities in Lagos and Ogun State. The use of surveys permit a researcher to study more variables at one time than is typically possible in laboratory or field experiments, whilst data can be collected about real world environments. A key weakness is that it is very difficult to realise insights relating to the causes of or processes involved in the phenomena measured. There are, in addition, several sources of bias such as the possibly self-selecting nature of respondents, the point in time when the survey is conducted and in the researcher him/herself through the design of the survey itself.

The target population for this study comprised students from Nigerian universities from Lagos and Ogun states. There are fourteen [14] universities within Lagos and Ogun States with estimated population of 350, 000 for students and 15, 000 staff. Stratified random sampling technique was adopted for this study. Two states were selected  from south west Nigeria- Ogun state was selected because of the heavy presence of universities and Lagos state was selected because of its high technological development and being an industrialized state among the states in Nigeria. The five universities in Lagos state were divided into three strata:

Federal University- University of Lagos

*State University- Lagos State University*

Private University- CETEP City University, Pan- African University, and Caleb University.

Three universities were randomly selected, one from each stratum. In all, three universities were randomly selected from Lagos State. However, from Ogun state, there are nine universities. They were divided into three strata,

- *Federal University-* University of Agriculture Abeokuta

- *State University-* Olabisi Onabanjo University, Tai Solarin University of Education

- *Private University-* Babcock University, Covenant University, Redeemer University, Bells University of technology, Crawford University and Crescent

University.

Three universities were randomly selected, one from each stratum. In all, three universities were randomly selected from Ogun state. The universities randomly selected in both Ogun and Lagos states include:

- *Federal University-* University of Lagos and University of Agriculture Abeokuta.
- *State University-* Lagos State University and Olabisi Onabanjo University.
- *Private University-* CALEB University and Covenant University.

A sample size of six hundred respondents was randomly selected for this study. However, the copies of questionnaire eventually used for this study were 574 and twenty-six copies were not returned. The returned copies are analysed thus. From the six universities sampled 144 participants were randomly selected from each of the two federal universities, 86 participants were randomly selected from each of the two state universities, 57 participants were randomly selected from each of the two private universities. The questionnaire is divided into two sections with a total of 35 items. Out of the 35, 9 questions were asked on demography data, 14 likert scale and 12 rated from excellent to poor. In addition, the interview protocol was designed on open ended questionnaire format (Table 1).

## Result

Of the 600 surveys, 144 were recovered from university of Lagos and University of Agriculture Abeokuta. Eight six surveys were recovered from Olabisi Onabanjo University and Lagos state. Fifty seven surveys were returned, resulting in a 10% response rate from Covenant university and Caleb university.

Table 2 shows that 70% percent of participants between ages 15-24 was the highest in each of the universities and 25-34 was 20% and 35-44 was 10% respectively.

Table 3 shows that 68% percent of participants were females and 32% were males respectively.

## Hypotheses Testing

- There is no significant relationship between the supply of information through the internet and corporate

| Universities | Freq | % |
|---|---|---|
| University of Lagos | 144 | 25 |
| University of Agriculture Abeokuta | 144 | 25 |
| Olabisi Onabanjo University | 86 | 15 |
| Lagos state University | 86 | 15 |
| Caleb University | 57 | 10 |
| Covenant University | 57 | 10 |

Table 1. Distribution of Universities (N=574)

| Age Range | Freq | % |
|---|---|---|
| 15-24 | 402 | 70 |
| 25-34 | 115 | 20 |
| 35-44 | 57 | 10 |
| 45 & above | - | - |

Table 2. Distribution of Age of Participants (N=574)

| Gender | Freq | % |
|---|---|---|
| Male | 184 | 32 |
| Female | 390 | 68 |

Table 3. Distribution of Gender of Participants (N=574)

image of Lagos and Ogun states universities.

Correlations are used to evaluate the relationship between 2 measured variables or to tell if one variable changes in relationship to the other variable - that change can be in the same or opposite directions. Positive (direct) relationships are seen when the value on one variable gets larger as the value on the other variable gets larger. When calculating a correlation coefficient they range between +1.0 and -1.0. The closer it gets to 1.0, the closer it is to a perfect relationship - either perfectly positive or perfectly negative.

Table 4 represent the summary of correlation coefficient and the first column presented the two variations tested in this hypothesis (supply of information through the E-Portal and corporate image of Lagos and Ogun states universities). In this study however, there is a significant relationship between supply of information through the E-Portal and corporate image of Lagos and Ogun states

| Variation | N | Df | $X^2$ | Sig. Level |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Information through the E- Portal | 574 | 573 | 0.72* | .05 |
| Corporate image | 574 | | | |

* Significant

Table 4. Correlation Coefficient summary of the supply of information through the E-Portal and corporate image of Lagos and Ogun states universities

universities at r observed =0.76, 573 degree of freedom at 0.05 significant level. This implies that hypothesis one is rejected. Therefore, there is significant relationship between supply of information through the E-Portal and corporate image of Lagos and Ogun states universities.

*H2:* There is no significant difference in the general perception of public of universities in Lagos and Ogun states for use of E-Portal facilities for corporate image building.

Table 5 shows the summary of t-test. The first column presented the two variations tested in this hypothesis (the general perception of the public on the universities in Lagos and Ogun states for use of E-Portal facilities for corporate image building). In this study however, there is no significant difference in the general perception of the public on the universities in Lagos and Ogun states for use of E-Portal facilities for corporate image building at 't' observed =1.18, 574 degree of freedom and 0.05 significant level. However, there is no significant difference in the general perception of the public on the universities in Lagos and Ogun state for use of E-Portal facilities for corporate image building. This implies that hypothesis two is accepted.

*H3:* There is no significant relationship between the level of interaction through the E-Portal system and corporate image of Lagos and Ogun states universities.

Table 6 represent the summary of correlation coefficient. The first column presented the two variations tested in this hypothesis (the level of interaction through the internet and the university corporate image). In this study however, there is a significant relationship between the level of interaction

| Variation | N | Df | Mean | sd | T | Sig. Level |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Participants from Universities. in Lagos states | 287 | 572 | 13.48 | 0.44 | 1.18** | .05 |
| Participants from Universities. in Ogun states universities | 287 | | 14.68 | 1.33 | | |

\*\*not significant

Table 5. t-test summary of the general perception of the public on the universities in Lagos and Ogun states for use of E-Portal facilities for corporate image building

| Variation | N | Df | R | Sig. level |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| The level of interaction through the  E-Portal | 574 | 573 | 0.68 | 05 |
| University corporate. Image | 574 | | | |

\*significant

Table 6. t-test summary of interaction through the E-Portal system and the university corporate image

through the internet and the university corporate image at r observed =0.68, 573 degree of freedom and 0.05 significant level. This implies that hypothesis three is rejected. Therefore, there is significant relationship between the level of interaction through the internet and the universities corporate image.

## Discussion

Examining the three hypotheses tested critically, the finding of the first hypothesis indicated a significant relationship between the supply of information through the E-Portal system and the university corporate image. This finding reinforced the finding of the earlier study. The earlier study stated that apart from offering a multilingual, colorful and attractive website and product catalog, internet can also offer a few interesting interactive features. Another finding indicated that E-Portal system can help a company communicate its corporate message and the core values of its brand effectively through the right use of graphics, design and tone of voice (Papadopoulos, 2004).

The second hypothesis finding indicated that there is no significant difference in the general perception of the public on the universities sampled within Lagos and Ogun states for use of E-Portal facilities for corporate image building.

The finding of the third hypothesis indicated a significant relationship between the level of interaction through the E-Portal and the university corporate image. This finding supported earlier finding on corporate image building and internet presence. The finding revealed that the E-Portal has provided those within the public with straightforward access to corporate information and has increased the capability for the consumer to become involved in corporate issues within any sector (McGivern, 2003). The findings indicated that the organizations that are easily visible can become successful and those that are buried never had a chance.

## Conclusion

The convergence of information and communication technologies as embodied in the Internet has transformed the present day society into a knowledge society. Earlier, information and knowledge were passed by word of mouth or through manuscripts, and communication was a slow

process. Today it is passed from one individual to an infinite number of other users through a number of media and formats which makes rapid and widespread dissemination of information possible. New technologies bring us an unparalleled flood of information. Along with word processing, the Internet is considered to be the most valuable of the many computer technologies available to the society today. The field of public relations and their activities such as corporate image building should benefit from it.

The universities in Nigeria have adapted to this age of information technology. The findings of this study show that the university management agreed with the fact that E-Portal is an internet tool to reach out to people as well as to promote corporate image. The findings of this study also revealed that only website and portal system were available internet facilities as well as used by the sampled universities in relation with their public.

## Recommendations

For the purpose of theory and practice based on the findings carried out in this study, the following recommendations have been proposed and presented. Moreover, this study has raised some issues that warrant attention by those responsible for corporate image building.

- There is a need for university to engage the services of expert web-designers with regard to effective projection of their corporate image through graphics, colour lettering… etc.

- The universities management staff should allow these knowledgeable website designers and programmers to train monitor and evaluate corporate affairs public relations unit on regular basis. This becomes necessary because the public relation unit remains the university's image maker.

- Staff of the corporate affairs or public relation department should also be trained in internet management so as to aid effective projection of university's image

- The universities should learn how to supply other kind of information on their E-Portal such as findings of

research work, thesis …etc, for public consumption.

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