



THE APPLICATION OF USES AND GRATIFICATION THEORY AND PATHGOAL THEORY AS FRAMEWORKS FOR EXAMINING THE INFLUENCE OF ACADEMIC SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES ON LECTURERS' RESEARCH PRODUCTIVITY

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Abstract

Research productivity is crucial for educational quality and career progression in higher education institutions. In Nigeria, low research productivity among academic staff negatively affects their career advancement. The study explain research productivity measures teaching quality and career growth in tertiary institutions. Academic social networking sites facilitate profile creation and peer interaction. The Uses and Gratification theory and the Path-goal theory are used to examine the influence of academic social networking sites and management policy on lecturers' research productivity. The Uses and Gratification theory posits that media consumers base their consumption decisions on personal considerations and cognitive, affective, and social needs. The Path-goal theory suggests that management policy or leaders' behavior and leadership style influence their subordinates' characteristics, such as satisfaction, motivation, and performance. The study concluded that Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) and the Path-Goal Theory (PGT) differ in their perspectives on the impact of academic social networking sites and management policy on lecturers' research productivity. UGT focuses on lecturers' use of social media for information seeking, social interaction, and entertainment, while PGT emphasizes management policy's role in motivating lecturers.

Introduction

It is obvious that research productivity is germane to prestige and career progression of academic staff in tertiary institutions. One of the most crucial indicators of educational quality, according to the majority of higher education institutions striving for the top institutional ranking and prestige among peers, is research productivity. In higher education institutions, the establishment of a

ranking and rating system depends heavily on research productivity. Measuring research productivity has thus come to be seen as essential to encouraging and elevating scholars to produce their best work and also disseminate them in many means which among them include the use of social media.

Academic social networking sites, such as ResearchGate, Google Scholar, and Academia.edu, can improve lecturers' research and teaching experiences, even though general social media is less suitable for them. Although lecturers are not the only ones who can use these, sharing materials can help to start conversations. The Academic social networking sites provide features for information sharing, collaborative tools and function as discussion forums. Some of the Academic Social Networking Sites qualities Add accessibility, security, integration, and focus. The visibility of lecturers' and their affiliated institutions' research will be further increased by keeping up a profile on academic social networking sites. This presence on the Web in recent times is one of the goals that management of academic institution seek to achieve.

In spite of the relevance of research productivity, it is observed that the level of research productivity of academic staff in Nigeria, including academic staff of federal universities in Nigeria is abysmally low (Babalola 2015). This undesirable situation has been observed with great concern by the researcher and this assertion was corroborated by Simisaye and Popoola (2022); (Simisaye, 2019) and Haruna *et al.* (2023) they observed that low research productivity level, no doubt would affect the career advancement of academic staff in tertiary institutions negatively.

Research Productivity

Research productivity are work that has been researched upon and published in journals, book chapters, monographs, articles, technical reports, bulletin, conference papers, working papers, short communication papers, patents and standards. According to Altbach and Yudkevich (2016) research productivity is the ability of the researcher to use his intelligent quotient to collect, modify and critically analyse information and come out with authentic results that could help in the advancement of knowledge. On the other hand, research productivity is determined through time frame in which it is required that an individual indulging in research must finish. This is more visible with lecturers in which it is required by policy that a teaching staff will publish certain amount of literature as their promotion is tied to it.



Productivity and research results are outcomes of research activities that can be presented in the form of papers, books, or reports or in some other way that can influence the research or information of others (Tauhed *et al.*, 2019). Depending on the purpose, different tools and indicators can be used to measure and evaluate research productivity (Tekneci, 2014). Studies, such as Simisaye (2019) had revealed that lecturers research productivity is influenced by individual factors (self-efficacy, affiliation, motivation, commitment, orientation skills, research skills, achievement motivation, community contribution, sense of responsibility, scientific pursuit, autonomy and flexibility, satisfying interest and curiosity). Lecturers in tertiary institutions of learning engage in research activities to transfer knowledge and to keep abreast with current trends as they teach. The total volume of research production from the lecturers on an individual level determines how productive they are. The idea behind the productivity of researchers is that it is directed towards knowing and measuring the quality of teaching in the institution. Furthermore, research is an important criterion in determining the career growth of a lecture in tertiary institutions published in notable databases. In a more recent study by Ladipo *et.al*, (2022) the scholars were of the view that the use of channel of publication is crucial in determining the productivity of lecturers with great emphasis on visibility of the lecturers. It is commonly accepted that the measure of research productivity is by number of publications in terms of volume by researchers.

Academic Social Networking Sites (ASNSs)

Academic social networking sites (ASNSs) are increasingly being utilised by academics for a variety of purposes, including the creation of academic profiles, the sharing of research articles, and peer interaction. Online groups, among the different social characteristics of ASNS, according to Wiechetek *et al.* (2020), play a particularly significant role in tying individuals to one another and to academic resources. Jeng *et al.* (2015) argued further that from the viewpoint of user interface, a group page in an ASNS may be seen as a platform on which users can cooperate with their peers by exchanging scholarly publications and having research conversations. For instance, Research Gate's "Project" group feature enables users to launch a workspace with several "benches." Participants can share ideas, papers, and research information at each bench. Both Mendeley and Zotero include similar group features for presenting and debating current research ideas. The capabilities and advantages offered to users by the Academic Social Networking Sites (ASNS) are generally comparable. These websites enable peer following and the submission of published files.

On the other hand, some websites offer specialised services not offered by others. Users can access non-academic social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter through sites like ResearchGate and Academia.edu. ResearchGate offers a score for assessing academics based on publication downloads citation counts, involvement in discussion boards, and the number of views, in addition to the provision of job-hunting services (Alheyasat, 2015). According to Anyim (2021), the social integration and communication changes brought about by the digital revolution have had an impact on learning and research activities in addition to corporate operations and socio-cultural interactions. With the advent of the digital revolution in academia, research output is no longer being swept behind a shelf with little visibility and accessibility to lecturers and other academics engaged in research and learning.

Opesanwo and Mabawokun (2016) emphasised the expanding usage of academic social media in nearly every aspect of life, including academic parlance. As a result, lecturers and researchers are starting to rely on and integrate them for simple access to current scholarly publications, current news, current information, up-to-date sources, efficacy and efficiency as well as for cooperation. Academic social networking sites (ASNs) have emerged as one of the most significant platforms in the contemporary information and education sectors. It will undoubtedly become a crucial tool for the academic community's communication, connection, and collaboration (Mohammed *et al.*, 2018).

Management Policy

There are three approaches that can be applied to investigate the influential factors on the research performance of lecturers, namely, individual, institutional, and a mix of both. According to Salinas-Avila *et al.* (2020), institutional factors play an important role in developing a research culture to promote greater interaction and transfer of knowledge to society. Some factors that are related to university governance have been found in prior studies that considered institutional factors. However, it seems that there has been very little discussion about the impact of management policy in particular (i.e., not institutional factors, in general). Therefore, it is worthwhile to empirically investigate the management policy that influences the research output of lecturers, as well as the level of impact of those factors.

In this study, management factors such as research objectives, leadership, decentralization, support for research, policy regimes to motivate lecturer's research activities, resources for research are all related to the process of



planning, organizing, leading and controlling the activities of the members in universities, and also related to using resources of the universities to achieve the set goals. The proposed research model includes 6 factors - 6 latent variables adapted from the study of Nguyen *et al.*, (2022): Organisation's research objectives; Decentralization; Leadership; Support for research; Policy regimes to motivate lecturers' research activities; and Resources.

The lecturers' use of academic social networking sites can enhance the teaching, research and other academic activities of the lecturers. This is because online social networking platforms offer a wealth of benefits to researchers, including increased connectivity, collaboration opportunities, exposure to quality research, and access to research tools and techniques. Management policy of an academic institution is another variable that can further encourage the use of academic social networking sites to support research productivity of lecturers. This is because good management policy always lead to high productivity in any organization.

Hence, this study sought to rely on two theories, which are the Uses and Gratification theory and the Path-goal theory to formulate theoretical framework on the influence of academic social networking sites and management policy on the research productivity of lecturers.

The Uses and Gratifications Theory

The uses and gratifications theory, an outgrowth of leisure-culture and mass-media studies, posits that media consumers are autonomous and active agents who base their consumption media decisions on a range of personal considerations and cognitive, affective, and social needs. The theory offers a contrast to the critical perspective, which sees media consumers as passive agents who are prone to media manipulations and influences (Rubin, 2002; Ruggiero, 2000).

The uses and gratifications theory was developed in the 1970s, mainly surrounding research on the use of social media (Dobos, 1992; Eastman, 1979). The uses and gratifications theory identifies five major types of needs to which media respond:

1. Cognitive needs, including consumption of information and knowledge.
2. Affective needs, including excitement, enjoyment and pleasure.
3. Social needs, including creating a sense of group belonging, influencing and contributing to others

4. Individual needs, including the response to personal needs, self-promotion, personal gain, and enhancement of personal confidence.
5. Escapist needs, that is, using the technology to flee from reality and create an alternative virtual and imagined reality.

The uses and gratifications theory assumes that each of these gratifications is measurable and can reveal the leading motivation and its relation to other variables, such as amount and nature of use, and may uncover disparities between expectations and actual gratifications in order to understand states of dissatisfaction with technology. The theory has absorbed abundant criticism over the years, mainly because users' gratifications are identified largely on the basis of self-reportage and because the theory does not easily distinguish between needs/motives and gratifications. Thus, many scholars use it to identify gratifications only (Ruggiero, 2000).

In recent years, however, with the development of social networks and the need to understand the motives for using the Internet generally and social networks particularly, the theory has regained its centrality in identifying the uses and gratifications of those who use these systems (LaRose and Eastin, 2004). Since Internet use is an active process that entails intention on the user's part, the theory is an appropriate framework for analyzing the motives of people who visit Web sites for use and gratification (Ruggiero, 2000; Rubin, 2002).

The studies that invoke the uses and gratifications theory at length investigate consumers' behavior on commercial sites. For example, Ko *et al.* (2013) use the theory to investigate shoppers' motives for buying online as a basis for mapping the motivations in favor of or against using these sites. These authors find that consumers whose motives are strongly informational tend to prefer sites that allow them to interact with the information, whereas those motivated by communication prefer to use the person-person interactions that such sites offer. The uses and gratifications theory also helps to understand the behavior of those who visit user-generated content sites such as YouTube, Wikipedia, and social networks. Research on users' behavior in these environments divides the use of the sites into three types: consumption of information, participation in social interaction, and creation of information (Shao, 2009).

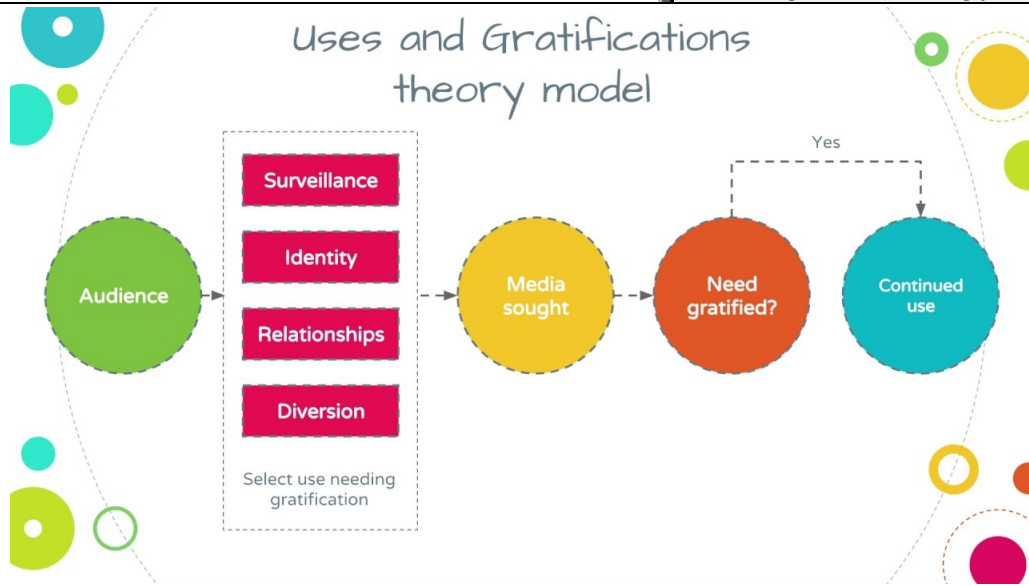
Research reveals a connection between the nature of the use of a site and the motives for its use. According to Shao (2009), users who generate and share information are motivated by the need to express themselves, whereas those who



use the sites' interactive functions are prompted by social needs and motives. Users who consume information, in contrast, are information-motivated. According to Wei *et al.* (2024), the singular characteristic of the gratifications and users that typify recourse to the Internet, as opposed to the use of television and other traditional media, is the centrality and the interactive characteristics of the social gratification. While the main identified gratifications that users of traditional media obtain are based mainly on the content and information that they acquire and the information consumption process, the Internet environment produces meaningful social gratification due to the interactive capabilities of the technology and its ability to let users communicate with each other.

Studies on the uses and gratifications of participants in social networks reinforce this point; they repeatedly stress the centrality of the gratification created by communicating with friends, establishing relations with existing friends, and finding old or new friends (Dunne, Lawlor and Rowley, 2010; Park, Kee and Valenzuela, 2009; Urista, Dong and Day, 2009). Seidman (2013) notes the centrality of the social calculus as a motive for the use of social networks. The social element, according to Seidman (2013), relates more to the need for a sense of belonging than to the need for interaction. Other research, among students who use Facebook groups, in contrast, indicate that one of the gratifications derived from the use of FB is self-promotion and the acquisition of social status (Park *et al.*, 2009; Ellison *et al.*, 2014).

Research focused on academics' uses and gratification from social networks (Dermentzi *et al.*, 2016) found that academics consider using ASNS as way to maintain old contacts rather than just connecting with other academics that they do not know. Another interesting finding of this research is that self-promotion has insignificant effect on attitude towards ASNS. The researchers suggested that self-promotion may be considered as undesirable among academics. The theory relates to this study as it will explain the connection between the way lecturers use ASNS for their research productivity and online visibility, their motives for doing so, and the gratification that they get from this activity. Given the scanty attention that empirical research has devoted to ASNS, this theory will enhance the understanding of the allure of ASN sites and lecturers' motives for using them.



Source: House, R. J. (1971) Path-goal theory

Path-goal theory was first introduced by Robert House in 1971, and later revised in 1996. It states that leaders' behaviour and leadership style influences their subordinates' characteristics – namely their satisfaction, motivation and performance. In the study, we examined the effects of leadership behaviors on the research performance of lecturers in universities in Vietnam through the lens of Path-goal leadership theory. The Path goal leadership theory of House (1971) identified leadership behaviors that depend on situations and impacts on the subordinates' behaviors. It presumed that a leader has functions of reassuring employee's rewards for achieving targets by formulating pathways, clearing barricades, and improving the chances for job satisfaction through considerate and supporting actions for employees. However, the results of studies applying this theory have been mixed (House, 1996). With such critiques, further examination of the theory has been suggested (Alharbi and Abdullah, 2018).

Path-goal leadership highlights four leadership styles (Northouse, 2018). First, with **directive leadership behavior**, employees are told clearly how to do the tasks, what is expected with established performance standards and regulations. High directiveness from the leaders can help in translating the university objectives into temporary goals and serve as guidance for the academic staff (Hautala, *et al*, 2018). Directive leaders can improve the exchanging and processing of information that then result in higher performance (Saleem *et al.*, 2020). Second, with **participative leadership behaviors**, subordinates are asked for opinions and involved in making decisions. Facing with unstructured and



non-routine tasks, the members hope to receive clear guidance rather than sympathy from their leaders; they are satisfied with the directive and participative leadership behaviors (Saleem *et al.*, 2021). Third, leaders with **supportive leadership behavior** are approachable and care about subordinates' well-being and demands. With routine and simple tasks, supportive leadership behavior is effective because the leader provides subordinates with rewards and encouragement (Dugan 2017). Last, **achievement oriented leaders** set clear and challenging goals for subordinates and seeks continuous improvement and show high confidence in subordinates (Northouse, 2021).

Here are some examples of how path-goal theory might inform your day-to-day strategies in the workplace (Rana *et al.*, 2019).

1. Goal Clarity and Alignment

- Leaders should clearly define team goals, ensuring that they're specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound (SMART).
- You should communicate these goals effectively, emphasising their importance and relevance to the team's overall purpose.
- By aligning individual goals with the overarching team objectives, you can create a sense of unity and motivation.

2. Personalised Support

- Leaders should understand the unique needs and capabilities of each team member. As such, it's important to provide tailored support accordingly.
- This may involve coaching or mentoring, for example. You could also provide resources and training to help team members overcome challenges and develop their skills.
- By offering personalised support, leaders demonstrate commitment to the growth and success of each team member.

3. Transparent Communication

- Open and transparent communication helps leaders cultivate trust and motivate their teams. Information should be shared regarding the team's progress and challenges, and also regarding developments in the organisation.
- In addition, two-way communication should be encouraged. You can benefit from actively listening to team members' ideas, concerns and feedback. Transparent communication promotes a sense of involvement and fosters collaboration, which will ultimately increase motivation.

4. Empowerment and Autonomy

- Leaders should empower team members by delegating authority and providing autonomy whenever possible. This can involve trusting team members to make decisions and take ownership of their work.
- By granting autonomy, you can promote a sense of ownership and responsibility among your employees.

5. Recognition and Reward

- It's important to acknowledge and appreciate the efforts of your team members. Recognising and rewarding individual and collective achievements will reinforce positive behaviour, and encourage continued high performance.
- Leaders can implement a system of rewards and recognition that aligns with the goals and values of the team, ensuring fairness and equity in the distribution of rewards.

6. Continual Feedback and Coaching

- When it comes to maintaining motivation and improving performance, feedback is key. Leaders should provide constructive feedback, highlighting areas of improvement and recognising strengths.
- You should also offer guidance and coaching to help team members develop their skills and overcome obstacles.

7. Create a Positive Work Environment

- A positive work environment promotes collaboration, respect and psychological safety. To achieve this, you can encourage open communication, support teamwork, and address conflicts or issues promptly.
- A positive work environment enhances team members' satisfaction and engagement, ultimately leading to improved performance.

8. Development Opportunities

- It's a good idea to provide opportunities for team members to enhance their skills and knowledge through training, workshops or conferences, for example. By investing in their professional growth, you can demonstrate your commitment to the team's success.
- This has several benefits. For a start, you motivate team members to perform at their best. Plus development opportunities contribute to employee retention and loyalty.

9. Lead by Example

- As a leader, it's crucial to embody the behaviours and values that you expect from your team members. This is really leadership 101. Demonstrating a strong work ethic, integrity and positive attitude will generate the same in return.
- Leaders who lead by example inspire and motivate their teams to follow suit, creating a culture of excellence and high performance.



Figure 2.3 Leadership and Management Theories: Path-Goal Leadership Theory

The phenomena of the theoretical constructs explain the correlation between Academic Social Networking Sites (ASNSs) and management policy on Research productivity. The influence of the two variables is presumed on the theory will increase in one variable leads to an increase in the other variable and a decrease in one variable see a decrease in the other. Research productivity which is the dependent variable should depend on all the independent variables, while the independent variables would positively impact on the dependent variable. Each of the independent variable has direct relationship with the dependent variable because they would all enhance the research productivity of the lecturers in federal universities in Nigeria. The conceptual construct of this study is to examine the influence of academic social networking sites and management policy on the research productivity of lecturers In Figure 2.1. The conceptual

model shows linkages and the influence of academic social networking sites and management policy on the research productivity of lecturers.

Conclusion

In conclusion the Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) and the Path-Goal Theory (PGT) offer distinct perspectives on influence of academic social networking sites and management policy on the research productivity of lecturers. UGT focuses on how lecturers actively seek social media to fulfill research productivity, while PGT emphasizes how leaders or management policy can motivate lecturers by clarifying goals and providing necessary support. This answer will explore the core aspects of UGT, its applications, and contrast it with PGT. While UGT posits that lecturers engage with social media to satisfy various needs, such as information seeking, social interaction, and entertainment. In contrast, PGT emphasizes the role of management policy or leadership in motivating lecturers by clarifying paths to goals and providing support, which may not directly address the lecturers' needs and motivations highlighted by UGT. This distinction illustrates the multifaceted nature of lecturers' motivation, where both theories can complement each other in understanding behavior.

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