USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AMONG STUDENTS OF TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS: EFFECTS ON THEIR ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

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Abstract

Social media has become an integral part of daily life and students of tertiary institutions are no exception. Social media refers to online platforms or tools that allow users to create, share and interact with content, information or other users in a virtual environment. Social media has revolutionalized the way people communicate, interact and share information and has therefore, become an integral part of modern life. In Nigeria, the proliferation of social media has been rapid, with millions of citizens, including students of tertiary institutions actively engaging on various platforms. The advancement of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has brought about significant changes to education generally. Social media users are allowed to collaborate generate and distribute contents virtually. This paper therefore, examined the use of social media among students of tertiary institutions and how it affects their academic performance. Various relevant literatures reviewed showed that majority of the students of tertiary institutions in Nigeria use social media frequently with Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp being the most popular platforms. While students use social media primarily for communication and information sharing, they are also faced with challenges of misinformation. It was suggested amongst others that management of institutions should leverage social media for academic purposes which should promote responsible usage among students. The paper was underpinned by the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM).

Keywords: Social Media, Communication, Information Sharing, Tertiary Institutions

Word Count: 220

Introduction

The advent of social media has revolutionized the way people communicate, interact and share information. In Nigeria, the proliferation of social media has been rapid, with millions of citizens, including students of tertiary institutions actively engaging on various platforms. The country has one of the highest social media penetration rates in Africa, with over 70% of its population actively using social media (Akinwalere & Adeosun, 2022). Nigerian students like their counterparts worldwide, are digital natives who have grown up with social media. They use social media platforms to connect with friends, share experiences and access information. However, concerns have been raised about the impact of social media on students' academic performance, mental health and social relationships.

Social media refers to online platforms or tools that allow users to create share and interact with content, information or other users in a virtual environment. The term 'social media' is a broad term that encompasses a wide range of platforms and technologies which includes social networking sites, micro-blogging platforms, photo and video sharing platforms, online forums and discussion boards, virtual worlds, online gaming communities, podcasting platforms, etc. Social media platforms typically allow users to create and share content, connect with others, engage in conversations, share opinions and ideas, join communities and groups as well as follow news and trends (Ezeah, 2019).

The advancement of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has brought about significant changes to education generally. Social media users are allowed to collaborate, generate and distribute contents virtually. As a result, there is a great change in communication in the educational environment. In most tertiary institutions in Nigeria today, lecturers and students engage in virtual teaching and learning thus enabling students to create and share

content, engage in knowledge interactively and communicate within the virtual environment (Akinwalere & Adeosun, 2022).

Despite the growing body of research on social media use among students of tertiary institution globally, there is a need for context-specific studies in Nigeria. The country's unique cultural, economical and political context coupled with its rapid adoption of social media, necessitated a deeper understanding of how social media use affects students of tertiary institution. Hence, the study aims to investigate the use of social media among students of tertiary institutions in Nigeria with particular reference to Edo State, exploring its implications for their academic performance. By examining the motivations, behaviours and outcomes of social media use among students of tertiary institutions, this study seeks to contribute to the existing body of knowledge and inform strategies for promoting responsible social media use in the educational sector.

Concept of Social Media

Social media refers to a wide range of internet-based platforms that allow users to interact with each other through shared content, such as text, images, videos and more. It is based on the idea of sharing information and connecting with others. It is computer-mediated tools that allow students to create, share and exchange information, ideas, pictures, videos for virtual communities and learners (Ezeah, 2019). It is commonly used for both personal and professional purposes, such as staying in touch with friends and family, networking, marketing and promoting brands or products.

The issue of using the social media in the classroom has been a controversial topic for several years. Many parents and educators have been fearful of the repercussions of having the social media in the classroom. Social media is growing rapidly throughout the world. More

adults and teenagers are joining sites such as Facebook, MySpace, Skype, WhatsApp and Twitter to interact with friends, family, and strangers. Social networking sites also enable community involvement in locating expertise, sharing content and collaborating to build content, and allow knowledge workers to extend the range and scope of their professional relationships. Social media networking allows researchers to draw from a social network of information and people outside of their traditional circle of friends. (Aral, 2020).

Social media also refers to online platforms or tools that allow users to create, share and interact with content, information or other users (Werbach, 2019). The concept of social media has revolutionized the way people communicate, interact and share information. Research Gate is an example of social networking platform for researchers. Social networking helps teachers promote reflective analysis and the emergence of a learning community that goes beyond the institutional walls. Facebook website of a teacher discloses large amounts of information, anticipates higher levels of motivation and affective learning, indicating positive attitudes toward the course and the teacher. Social networking also offers educators an excellent platform to forge their own professional identity by sharing with other colleagues and debating ideas, allowing them to extend their professional relationships. Social networking sites provide helpful information to educators and help them deal with certain situations better. Students also feel more comfortable approaching teachers/educators who are present and friendly or who interact casually with them on Facebook, WhatsApp and Research Gate; it gives students the encouragement they need (Berger, 2019). He further opined that social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube etc have become an integral part of modern life enabling users to: Connect with friends, family and like-minded individuals; Share updates,

photos, videos and thoughts; Join communities and discussions; Follow news, trends and influencers; and Engage in online conversations and debates.

Social media has significantly altered the world of media unlike any other medium. With its viral, informal and unedited format, it has continued to grow, change and present new opportunities for both public relations and educational institutions generally.

Theoretical Review

Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) was developed by Fred Davis in 1989. It explains how individuals adopt and use technology. Fred posits that the likelihood of using technology depends on two main factors which are perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use.

➢ **Perceived Usefulness (PU)**: This is the degree to which a person believes that using the technology will improve his performance or outcome.

➢ **Perceived Ease of Use (PEU)**: This is the degree to which a person believes that using the technology will be effortless and easy.

According to TAM, if a person perceives technology as useful and easy to use, such a person is more likely to:

• Intend to use the technology (intention)

• Actually use the technology (usage)

• Continue to use the technology over time (continuation).

TAM has been applied widely in various fields including education to understand and predict technology adoption and usage. By understanding the factors that influence technology

acceptance, researchers and practitioners can design and implement technologies that are more likely to be adopted and used effectively.

The relevance of this model to this study is that TAM helps understand how students accept and adopt social media platforms which are essential to comprehend their social media use. It also predicts behavioural intention and usage thus enabling the prediction of students' likelihood of using social media for various purposes.

The use of TAM to explore students' perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use of social media can influence their behaviour and decision to use social media platforms. This can help identify areas for intervention and develop strategies to promote responsible social media use among students.

Types of Social Media Platforms

There are different types of social media platforms. Below are some commonly used social media platforms among students of tertiary institutions (Faerber, 2024):

- ✓ **Social networking sites:** Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter.   These are used to connect with friends, families, colleagues and like-minded individuals.

- ✓ **Messaging apps/instant messaging platforms:** WhatsApp, Telegram, Facebook Messenger, WeChat, Signal. These are mainly designed for messaging which primarily focuses on facilitating communication.

- ✓ **Video conferencing platforms:** Google Meet, Skype, Zoom, Cisco Webex, GoToMeeting. These are mainly designed for video conferencing which primarily focuses on facilitating communication and collaboration.

- ✓ **Learning management system (LMS)/educational platform:** Google Classroom, Canvas, Blackboard, Moodle, DEdmodo. These are mainly designed for online learning which primarily focuses on facilitating communication, collaboration and education.

- ✓ **Visual discovery and planning websites:**Pinterest, Instagram, Houzz. Used to save and share images and videos, discover new interests and plan projects.

- ✓ **Micro-blogging platforms:** Twitter, TikTok, Tumbir. Share short-form content like text updates, images or videos.

- ✓ **Video-sharing platforms:** You Tube, Vimeo, Dailymotion. Upload, share and view videos.

- ✓ **Live streaming platforms:** Twitch, Facebook Live, You Tube Live, Periscope. Broadcast real-time video content.

- ✓ **Forum and discussion boards:** Reddit, Quora, Discord, Stack Overflow. Engage in online discussions, ask questions and share knowledge.

- ✓ **Blogging and content creation platforms:** Medium, WordPress, Blogger, Ghost. Create and share long-form content like articles and blog posts.

- ✓ **Virtual worlds:** Meet, Skype, Classroom, Second Life, Minecraft, World of Warcraft, Roblox. Interact with others in virtual environments.

- ✓ **Podcasting platforms:** Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Google Podcasts, Anchor. Create, share and listen to audio content.

- ✓ **Photo and video sharing apps:** Snapchat, Instagram, TikTok, Flickr. Share ephemeral or permanent content with friends and followers.

Benefits and Challenges of Social Media

According to Werbach (2019); Anderson (2019), the following are the benefits and challenges of using social media generally:

Benefits

➢ **Easier Research Work:** Social media platforms like Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube serve as rich sources of information, making it easier for students and researchers to access current trends, expert opinions, and tutorials for academic or professional purposes.

➢ **Boosts Individual Self-Esteem Levels:** Positive feedback, likes, comments, and recognition on social media can enhance individuals' confidence and self-image. People often feel validated when their achievements or content are appreciated publicly.

➢ **Creates More Equality:** Social media gives everyone a voice, regardless of their social or economic background. It helps marginalized groups share their stories and advocate for rights, promoting inclusiveness and social justice.

➢ **Empowers Business Women:** Women entrepreneurs can use platforms like Instagram and Facebook to promote their businesses, access training, connect with clients, and find mentorship, helping them to succeed despite traditional gender barriers.

➢ **Job Opportunities:** Professional networks like LinkedIn help users discover job openings, connect with recruiters, and showcase their skills, thereby increasing employment opportunities and career development.

Challenges

➢ **Causes Students' Grades to Drop:** Excessive use of social media can distract students from their studies, leading to procrastination, reduced academic focus, and ultimately lower grades.

➤ **Enables the Spreading of False Information Rapidly:** Fake news and misinformation can go viral quickly, especially when users share unverified content. This can lead to panic, confusion, or manipulation of public opinion.

➤ **Exposes People to Government Information:** While access to government information can promote transparency, it may also lead to the leaking of classified or sensitive data, posing security risks and misuse by malicious entities.

➤ **Offline Relationship Problems:** Heavy use of social media may reduce face-to-face interactions, leading to misunderstandings, emotional distance, or conflict in personal relationships.

➤ **Encourages Wasting of Time:** Scrolling endlessly through feeds or engaging in unproductive content can consume a lot of time, reducing productivity and leading to poor time management.

Use of Social Media among Students of Tertiary Institutions

With remote learning and emerging technologies like artificial intelligence (AI), social media is an integral part of education more than ever. There are many different ways to use social media for education inside and outside the classroom. Social media is a powerful tool that is used to make nearly anything easier. The following are some of the ways students can use social media in tertiary institutions (Rappaport, 2023):

❖ **Extends Learning Opportunities:** Social media unleashes more learning opportunities. Online classes and remote jobs are the new norm, so teaching students to work from a distance becomes a necessity for digital literacy and preparing them for their careers. Social media platforms support educators in various ways from sharing announcements to holding live lectures.

❖ **Create Connections with Students and Alumni:** Social media provides a way for institutions to quickly and directly communicate with students, faculty, staff and alumni, fostering connections across various audiences. Social content can attract prospective students, keep parents informed, grow alumni networks, promote on-campus events and more. Focusing on nurturing community and publishing engaging content can also help increase enrollment. According to a study on Higher Education Social Media Benchmarks report by Yildirim (2020), it was found that 41% of school officials directly attributed increased enrollment to social strategy.

❖ **Build Brand Identity:** Social media supports and amplifies university branding. University marketing teams use social media to maintain a positive brand reputation for their institutions. With the right strategy, colleges, polytechnics and universities can attract more students, increase endowments, promote events or initiatives and improve alumni relations.

❖ **Use Posts to Broadcast Updates and Alerts:** Instructors and lecturers can meet students where they are by incorporating social media platforms which they are already familiar with like Facebook or Twitter. They can have students follow a class Facebook Page or join a Facebook Group to view posts about course updates, homework assignments and tests. Universities can have publicly accessible pages dedicated to specific schools or departments that students can see even if they aren't active on Facebook. When using social media for education, it is important to maintain a professional boundary. Email students a direct link to the Facebook Group for access and avoid sending friend requests. Groups are the perfect "home base," especially for online courses because it makes it easy to connect with students.

❖ **Use Live Streaming for Lectures and Discussions:** Instructors can use Facebook Groups, Instagram Live, YouTube Live or LinkedIn Live to stream lectures and facilitate more accessible learning. If a student cannot come to the lecture hall, such student can join online or review later. Adding live captions helps students to learn visually. Platforms like Instagram and YouTube allow live streams to be recorded, providing students with review material for mid-semesters and finals season. Recorded live streams also widen the institution's reach and authority by making lectures available to scholars and professors from other institutions.

❖ **Create a Class Blog for Discussions and Cross-Channel Learning**: Blogs are other great outlets for incorporating social media in learning. Students can link to the class blog on other social channels. For example, a student might share a photo from their visual essay on LinkedIn to attract the attention of recruiters for job or internships. Using blogs as a semester-long assignment can improve students' short-form writing and critical thinking.

❖ **Create a Class-Specific Pinterest Board:** Educators can use Pinterest to prepare and organize resources, lesson plans and worksheets for their teaching in one place. They can also set up Pinterest boards for each of their teachings and save pins that are relevant to lessons. Create boards according to the course and create sub-topic boards for weekly units, projects or worksheets. Pinterest can also be useful for students to curate a digital bibliography for research projects, papers or group assignments. Students can pin websites, books or videos to a board on a single topic and refer back to it when it is time to write an essay or thesis.

❖ **Prep for Post-Graduation and Create Alumni Relationships:** LinkedIn can help current students develop networking skills, craft their personal brand and connect with alumni. Flexing these career muscles could help them earn internships, gain mentors and secure job offers even before their graduation. Tertiary institutions also use LinkedIn as well. For example, a business school may have several private LinkedIn Groups for regional alumni chapters to connect them with students and faculty for internships, fundraising, volunteer opportunities and events. Encouraging students to post relevant articles, projects and research, internship experiences and other academic accomplishments helps the institutions to develop social proof on the platform. This is also an excellent example of the importance of incorporating advocacy into your social strategy.

❖ **Inclusion of Social Media Links on Tertiary Institutions' Website:** Students of higher learning use social channels to research schools. Many parents and prospective students will check a school's website first if they are interested, and offering even more ways to follow the school, creates a different insight into campus life.

❖ **Incorporate a Social Media Crisis Strategy:** Social media crisis strategy allows schools to communicate to the entire campus during an emergency. Be it a fire, tornado or other immediate campus emergency, a social media crisis plan can help institutions proactively prepare, keep parents and students updated on the situation by sharing information about the crisis and if authorities are involved. Many campuses have automated messaging alerts set up, but using social media also enables people to be updated in real time. Institutions can also use social listening, which involves analyzing

conversations and trends related to your brand, to aid with public relations crisis management plans.

Social Media in Tertiary Institutions

Social media networking is sharing and generating knowledge, and all of these features are of great value in the context of higher education. Social media plays an important role in the field of education and student's life. It is easier and convenient to access the information, provide information and communicate via social media. Teachers and students are connected to each other and can make use of these social media platforms for the working of their education. Professors are expanding their Social Media usage to host live lectures, offer off-hours support for students, or even host student debates. Social media helps Teachers/Educators to be connected to their students off campus as well as with their ex-students (Hilary &Dumebi, 2021).

Educators use social media as a way of teaching by creating groups and accounts for students where the information can be accessed, share ideas with each other and point students to Skype, WhatsApp, LinkedIn and Facebook. They create hash tags that allow students to tag their academic posts, and view submissions to see what the collective has creatively produced. One of the main reasons behind professors adapting to social media in classrooms is that they can teach the students via social media. Not only they are able to make the work easy but also are developing themselves professionally, creating a name for themselves in the community. Facebook, Twitter, Blogs and YouTube are the examples where you can see professors doing excel in their work. These social media platforms are highly accessible and hence can help professors in getting the high reputation in their profession.

Social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Google Plus, and Flickr, as well as open social practices such as blogging, are being used in learning for the purpose of convenient

communication with peer group students and potentially with others outside the class such as students of the same topic and subject experts. The fact that these social media are generally open to the world implies a need to carefully consider the risks of openness as well as need for ongoing communication with students in order to address their academic and deal with issues in the use of social media as they arise. These risks are counter-balanced by the academic benefits of open discussion and academic debate in authentic online environments. A new area of social media is increasing in popularity that is focused on building relationships with students outside of the classroom (Kolhar, Kazi & Alameen, 2021).

Effects of Social Media on Students' Academic Performance

The numerous benefits of using social media for educational purpose are far ranging. A study by Carlos (2022) stated that the use of social media tools improved the students' learning opportunities, allowed for real-time communication outside the classroom, fostered collaborative opportunities, and enhanced creativity. Students can watch educationally relevant videos or exchange information about what they have watched and learned, and then join online to further discuss with teachers. Even the teachers also can learn from the students during social networking interactions. Similarly, a teacher can supervise students while they are learning, reflecting, sharing, interacting and summarizing discussions. Social media provides a forum to contact peers and teachers from wherever they are, offering the flexibility of extended duty hours. Some social media, especially Facebook, WhatsApp and YouTube Apps features can boost students to involve in social and creative learning progressions that extend beyond traditional educational settings and institutions.

Social media has both positive and negative effects on the academic performance of students in tertiary institutions. It is essential for students of tertiary institutions to maximize the

positive effects and minimize the negative effects. This is to ensure that students use social media responsibly and maintain a balance between online activities and academic responsibilities. Sivakumar (2023) outlined the following positive and negative effects of social media on students' academic performance:

Positive Effects

a) **Access to Educational Resources and Information:** Social media platforms can provide students with access to educational contents, online courses and resources that can supplement their learning.

b) **Collaboration and Communication with Classmates and Teachers:** Social media can facilitate group projects, discussions and communication with teachers making it easier to clarify doubts and get feedback.

c) **Enhanced Creativity and Critical Thinking:** Social media can inspire creativity and critical thinking through exposure to diverse perspectives, ideas and multimedia contents.

d) **Improved Engagement and Motivation:** Social media can make learning more engaging and fun, encouraging students to participate and stay motivated.

Negative Effects

a) **Distractions and Decreased Focus:** Social media can be a significant distraction, leading to decreased focus and attention span, ultimately affecting academic performance.

b) **Reduced Attention Span and Memory:** Excessive social media use can lead to a decrease in attention span and memory, making it hard to retain information.

c) **Cyber-bullying and Social Pressures:** Social media can be a breeding ground for bullying and social pressures, affecting students' mental health and well-being.

d) **Decreased Face-to-Face Interaction and Social Skills:** Excessive social media use can lead to a decline in face-to-face interactions thus affecting students' social skills and ability to communicate effectively.

For students' academic performance to be improved, students should use social media responsibly by striking a balance between online activities and academic responsibilities.

Conclusion

Social media use is very high in contemporary society including tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Students use social media for both academic and non-academic purposes. The use of social media among students of tertiary institutions is a ubiquitous phenomenon that has transformed the way students interact, learn and share information. Social media are used for easy access to course-related materials, continued learning, online research, storage and sharing of course materials as well as staying academically active. While social media offers numerous benefits, such as access to educational resources, collaboration and creativity, it also poses challenges including distractions, cyber-bullying and decreased attention span. It is essential to establish guidelines and strategies for effective social media use in order to maximize the benefits and minimize the challenges/drawbacks.

Suggestions

Based on the reviewed literature and discussion, the following suggestions are made:

❖ Government and management of tertiary institutions should promote access to social media on campuses.

❖ Lecturers should integrate social media into the teaching and learning process.

❖ Students should be encouraged to use social media solely for academic purposes.

❖ Management should provide training for lecturers on effective social media use.

❖ Management should provide a continuous assessment on the impact of social media on the academic performance of students.

❖ Potentials of social media should be harness in tertiary institutions in order to enhance teaching, learning and students' engagement.

❖ Students should be regularly monitored and evaluated on social media use and their academic performance.

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