

## **Social Media: Usage and Influence on Undergraduate Studies in Nigerian Universities**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study examined social media usage among undergraduates vis-à-vis its influence on their studies. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population for the study comprised all undergraduate students of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife Nigeria. Five faculties were randomly selected, from which 850 students were selected using random and convenience sampling techniques. A self-designed instrument titled "Social Media Usage and Influence Questionnaire (SMUI-Q)" was used for data collection. The results show social media platforms used by undergraduates, include WhatsApp (97%), Facebook (85%), Instagram (65%), YouTube (62%), Twitter (25%), LinkedIn (21%), Google Plus (15%), Snapchat (10%), and Skype (7%). Further, undergraduates spend an average of 2-3 hours daily on social media, and their perceived purposes of social media usage include: socialisation (83%), information (74%), academic (73%), business (68%), and entertainment (61%). The results highlight Internet addiction (45%), distraction (32%), anti-social behaviour (6%), cyber bullying (4%), and writing and spelling skills deficiency (24%) as the influences of social media on undergraduate studies. The study concludes that the social media platforms mostly used are WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube; which are used mainly for socialisation, information, and academic purposes and may also perhaps suggest the reason for addiction to social media.

**Keywords:** *Social media; Usage; Influence; Undergraduate studies, Nigerian Universities*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Modern technology in communication has no doubt helped to serve as a means of connecting people and as a medium of interaction in the social world and educational arena. Consequently, higher education has been exploring the exciting opportunities that technologies have brought to institutions, educators and students. As a result, there has been rapid growth in the availability and uptake of online teaching and learning by many colleges and universities. Technology has changed the way people interact and has brought about the emergence of an open social platform in the form of social media. This allows persons to easily connect with each other, thereby making the world a global village. The advent of social media has impacted significantly on students both in their academic and social life as a means of making connections for various purposes.

Boateng & Amankwaa (2016) asserted that social media has influenced instructors, students, and other academic stakeholders to unite with each other to promote knowledge construction in teaching and learning. For this reason, McLoughlin & Lee (2007) state that the use of social media platforms has impacted positively on individuals through creating diversification between different categories of people. The use of social media has become global. Some of the popular social media platforms are Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, MySpace, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Google Plus, among others. Institutions and academics are continually exploring social media technologies for collaboration and knowledge construction. Today, social media is used in higher education institutions as a platform where students connect with their instructors, fellow students and other scholars across the globe.

The influence of social media platforms on education production cannot be overemphasised. George & Dellasega (2011) contend that the use of social media platforms improves students' learning opportunities, fosters collaborative studies and group discussion, allows for communication outside the classroom, and enhances critical thinking. Today, students are exposed to social media platforms on a daily basis; they use desktop computers, laptops, tablets and mobile phones to actively engage in social media platforms for chatting, blogging, content sharing and online learning purposes (Cassidy, Griffin, Manolovitz, Shen, & Turney, 2011). Thus, students spend much of their study time on social media rather than in their academic undertakings which seems to have an adverse effect on their study time, diverting their attention from their studies (Ndaku, 2013). Lenhart, Purcell, Smith and Zickuhr (2010) stress that despite the peculiarity of social media for learning interaction, not all students use social media platforms for academic purposes. It is against this background that the present study has germinated, and aims at examining social media usage and its influence on undergraduate studies.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Boateng and Amankwaa (2016) defined social media as the application that allows users to converse and interact with each other. It is an online space that is used by people to connect, share, communicate, establish or maintain connection with others for various purposes. Social media is an online platform which enables people to build social networks or relations with other people who share similar personal or career interests, activities, backgrounds or real-life connections. Social media is therefore the interaction among individuals in which they create and share information and ideas in networks. However, social media relies on many electronic devices like tablets, i-pads, laptops, and Internet-based technologies for connecting people. Thus, social media can be described as technologies that facilitate social interaction, make collaboration possible, and enable deliberation among people at the global level.

Boyd & Ellison (2007) define social media as Internet-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. According to Ali, Iqbal & Iqbal (2016), social media is the collection of applications such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, LinkedIn and YouTube, among others, that link people together as they share information through social networking. As indicated by Junco, Heiberger & Loken (2010), social media is referred to as a collection of Internet websites, services, and practices that support collaboration, community building, participation and sharing. From the above, it can be deduced that social media is the platform that gives individuals the opportunity to interact, using two way communication, such that it allows anyone who has an online account to share their opinions with other social media users.

Social media has become one of the prominent communication tools, particularly in the school community. Talaue, Alsaad, AlRushaidan & AlHagail (2018) emphasise that social media platforms help with access to information and educational-related materials. Considering the aforementioned, many students and instructors are using social media as a teaching and learning tool. More so, academic institutions are increasingly using social media platforms, such as Facebook and LinkedIn, to connect with current and potential students and to deliver instructional content (Paul, Baker, & Cochran, 2012) Therefore, social media platforms allow students to interact with one another, their teachers and communities that share in their education and related activities (Pardo 2013). Bearing this in mind, many universities now maintain profiles and groups on social networking sites such as Facebook, where students and faculty can interact, share resources and express ideas.

Conversely, Lenhart, Purcell, Smith & Zickuhr (2010) assert that not all students interact constantly on social media platforms for academic purposes. This suggests that social media platforms are explored by students for different reasons. Junco & Cotton (2012) affirm that time spent by student on social media is slightly negatively related to time spent studying. In this same manner, Pempek, Yermolayeva & Calvert (2009) declare that most students spend valuable hours daily on social media platforms. Rideout (2012) reveals that young people spend time on social media more than twice the average amount of time spent in school each year. This supports the position of Subrahmanyam & Patricia (2008) who underscore that using social media sites has both negative and positive effects, because there are harmful ways in which the Internet can be used.

Despite the benefits of social media on student learning and achievement with respect to knowledge sharing, Rithika & Sara (2013) underline that even when social media is used for an educational purpose, students incorporate the technology into their lives in a way that may differ from the intentions of the course instructor. Extant literature has provided an array of challenges of social media on students' academic life. O'Keeffe & Kathleen (2011) highlight the negative impacts of social media to include accessing inappropriate content, online harassment, and cyber bullying. The following challenges are the most prominent ones posed by social media as shown in the literature.

### **Internet Addiction**

Decades ago, the main issue was the addiction to television; today's issues deal with Internet addiction and the increased amount of time young people and adults spend searching the Internet. Students can get very involved in social media activities, such that they become social media addicts. Due to this addictive behaviour, students use social media even while in the classroom, which creates a disturbance for other students and concentration issues for them. Inability to carefully follow lectures affects their grades. Many students spend much time on their laptops, tablets, desktop computers and smart phones to check Tweets and status updates of their friends and families. Addiction to the use of social media platforms can squander an individual's time that could be used for profitable tasks and exercises. Christakis & Moreno (2009) consider addiction to social networks to be capable of frustrating precious time and the lives of individuals.

### **Distraction**

Spending immeasurable hours on social sites can deflect the focus and concentration from a particular task. Thus, excessive use of social media networking takes most of the time of students and redirects it towards non-constructive, sometimes unethical, deceptive and/or improper activities. As a result, social media platforms increase students' tendency towards non-instructive, unscrupulous and inappropriate activities. Students have been found oftentimes utilising social media to while away time and for purposes which disengage them from real academic engagement. The results of a study by Owusu-Acheaw & Larson (2015), showed that the use of social media had affected students' academic; most of the respondents used social media sites to chat rather than for academic purposes.

### **Anti-Social Behaviour**

Anti-social behaviours are actions that are not acceptable in a given society. However, some of these unacceptable actions do find expression on social networks and thereby make its users vulnerable to such. Social network websites grab the attention of some students and then divert it towards unethical and inappropriate practices. Some students, instead of taking advantage of social media for learning purposes, have diverted their attention to, erroneous usage which includes sexting, hacking, fraud and scams. Several cases are available where people have committed fraud and scams through online networking. According to Fodeman & Monroe (2009), many students

use social media platforms to post embarrassing, humiliating, and hurtful content in text, photos, and videos which harm others. Engaging in these habits may impede students' studies and academic life.

### **Cyber Bullying**

Cyber bullying involves any behaviour performed through electronic media by individuals or groups that repeatedly communicates hostile or aggressive messages intended to inflict harm or discomfort on others (Tokunaga, 2010). Cyber bullying uses different forms of writing and posting mean or inappropriate things online. These include threatening messages, sexual harassment, and ridiculous posts on somebody's personality, posting of lies, rumours or gossip, and encouraging others to share and circulate the posts. Lenhart, Duggan, Perrin, Stepler, Rainie & Parker (2015) postulate that cyber bullying among students is associated with their increased access to social media platforms.

### **Writing and Spelling Skills Deficiency**

Students generally utilise slang words or word abbreviations on long range interpersonal communication when interacting on social media platforms. This habit has the capacity to affect their communication skills with respect to writing and spelling. Some social media users often depend on their smart phones for language structure and spelling check highlights. This reduces their command of language and language use and their creative writing skills (Hashem, & El-Badawy, 2015).

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The use of social media in education provides students with the ability to get more useful information, to connect with learning groups and other educational systems that make education convenient. Social network tools afford students and institutions with multiple opportunities to improve learning methods. Contrary to this, some students have diverted social media usage towards non-educational, unethical and inappropriate actions and behaviours. It appears that some students, instead of taking advantage of the opportunities afforded by social media for learning purposes, have shifted their attention to using it for other reasons. Although social media can potentially increase student learning through interactions, it can also impact negatively on students' academic achievements. Taking into consideration this situation, the study therefore examines the usage and influence of social media on undergraduate studies.

## **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of the study are to:

1. Examine the extent of social media usage among undergraduates in Obafemi Awolowo University;
2. Investigate the perceived purpose of social media usage among undergraduates in Obafemi Awolowo University; and
3. Determine the influence of social media on undergraduate studies.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions were developed to guide the study:

1. What is the extent of social media usage among undergraduates in Obafemi Awolowo University?
2. What is the perceived purpose of social media usage among undergraduates in Obafemi Awolowo University?
3. What is the influence of social media on undergraduate studies?

## METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. This method was considered suitable as it enabled the researchers to investigate the already existing situation and acquire first-hand information from the respondents in order to interpret, discuss and report situations as they exist. The population for the study comprised all undergraduate students at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria. The random sampling technique was used to select five faculties. From each faculty, 170 undergraduates were selected using convenience sampling technique. The sample for the study comprised 850 students. A self-designed and validated instrument titled "Social Media Usage and Influence Questionnaire (SMUI-Q)" was used to elicit information from the respondents. The research instrument was subjected to both face and construct validity measures for consistency. The reliability of the instrument was ensured at 0.86 reliability coefficient. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics of frequency counts and percentages.

## RESULTS

### Research Question One: What is the extent of social media usage among undergraduates in Obafemi Awolowo University?

To answer this research question, data were grouped into two and analysed using frequency counts and percentages, as shown in the tables below. Table 1 shows the social media platforms used by undergraduate students while Table 2 shows the daily time spent by undergraduate students on social media.

**Table 1:** Social Media Platforms Used by Undergraduate Students

S/N	Social Media	Frequency	Percentage
1.	WhatsApp	829	97%
2.	Facebook	724	85%
3.	Instagram	552	65%
4.	YouTube	531	62%
5.	Twitter	241	25%
6.	LinkedIn	174	21%
7.	Google Plus	128	15%
8.	Snapchat	84	10%
9.	Skype	63	7%

**Source:** Field Survey, 2019

As can be seen in Table 1, the four social media platforms most used by students at Obafemi Awolowo University are WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube.

**Table 2:** Time Spent by Undergraduates on Social Media in a Typical Day

S/N	Duration	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Less than one hour	153	18%
2.	1 to 2 hours	204	24%
3.	2 to 3 hours	264	31%
4.	3 to 4 hours	111	13%
5.	4 to 5 hours	76	9%
6.	More than 5 hours	42	5%
<b>Total</b>		<b>850</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source:** Field Survey, 2019

Table 2 shows the results on time spent by the undergraduate students on social media in a typical day. As shown in the table, most of the undergraduates spend an average of 2 to 3 hours daily on social media platforms (31%), while 24% spend an average of 1 to 2 hours daily.

**Research Question Two: What is the perceived purpose of social media usage among undergraduates in Obafemi Awolowo University?** To answer this research question, the data collected were analysed using frequency counts and percentages as shown in Table 3 below.

**Table 3:** Perceived purpose of Social Media Usage among Undergraduates

S/N	Purposes	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Socialisation Purpose	706	83%
2.	Information Purpose	629	74%
3.	Academic Purpose	621	73%
4.	Business Purpose	578	68%
5.	Entertainment Purpose	519	61%

**Source:** Field Survey, 2019

The data in Table 3 affirmed that most of the undergraduate students use social media platforms mainly for socialisation, information, and academic purposes. This is in keeping with the trend for youths to engage in social media usage largely to socialise with friends and families. This perhaps explains the priority given to the purpose of using social media.

**Research Question Three:** What is the influence of social media on undergraduate studies? To answer this research question, data collected were analysed using frequency counts and percentage statistical method as shown in Table 4.

**Table 4:** Influence of Social Media on Undergraduate Studies

S/N	Statements	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Internet Addiction	383	45%
2.	Distraction	272	32%
3.	Anti-Social Behaviour	51	06%
4.	Cyber Bullying	34	04%
5.	Writing and Spelling Skills deficiency	204	24%

**Source:** Field Survey, 2019

The results shown in Table 4 indicate that Internet addiction and distraction are the major influences of social media on undergraduate studies among the participants. This is so, because some of the participants attest to have formed the habit of using social media to chat even when lectures are

on-going, while some usually postpone academic tasks to spend time on social media platforms. More so, some participants claimed to use social media to while away time rather than using it for academic purpose. These claims from the findings explain the extent to which undergraduates are distracted and addicted to the use of social media at the university.

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

Emanating from the study are findings that the social media platforms mostly used by the undergraduate students are WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. This corroborates the findings of Wiley & Sisson (2006) who stated that more than 90% of tertiary school students use social platforms. The findings from the study also support Kaya & Bicen (2016) who disclosed that Facebook and WhatsApp were mostly used by students. Hashem & El-Badawy (2015) noted that the social media types used by students include Snapchat, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube. As such, the study results are validated. Also, findings from the study indicate that undergraduate students spend an average of 2 to 3 hours daily on social media platforms. This may explain the extent of Internet addiction among undergraduates. The finding is in keeping with the study by Talaue, Alsaad, AlRushaidan & AlHagail (2018) which revealed that students spend on average 1 to 3 hours per day on social media. Similarly, Hashem & El-Badawy (2015) indicated that 50% of students spend 1 to 3 hours studying a day and 33% spent that same amount of time on social media per day.

In the same way, findings from the study indicate that undergraduates used social media platforms mainly for socialisation, information, and academic purposes. The reason for this is not far from the priority the undergraduates placed on the purposes of using social media platforms. This perhaps explains the extent of influence the social media platforms has on their studies. The findings support the study of Talaue, Alsaad, AlRushaidan & AlHagail (2018) who noted that the purposes of social media platforms usage by students included getting information for educational and entertainment purposes. From the results, it can be deduced that the undergraduate students use social media platforms for socialisation more than they do for academic purposes. This finding upholds that in the study by Oye (2012), who observed that social media platforms are mainly used by students for socialising activities rather than academic purposes. In the same vein, Owusu-Acheaw & Larson (2015) revealed that students mainly used social media sites to chat rather than for academic purposes. Students tend to connect with friends for chatting purpose rather than to engage in conversation to seek academic knowledge.

Furthermore, findings from the study reveal that Internet addiction and distraction are the major influences of social media on undergraduate studies. The result is not far from the claims of some of the participants' habit of spending hours daily on social media with the resultant effect of postponing their academic tasks to spend time on the social media platforms, usually to while away time. Support for this finding can be seen in the study by Ndaku (2013) which showed that students spend much of their study time on social media which has diverted their attention from attaining educational objectives. Further, Rideout (2012) has shown that students spend time on social media platforms more than twice the average amount of time spent in school each year. This view is however rejected by Onyeka, Sajoh & Bulus (2013) who acknowledged that social media sites not only re-engage learners with their studies but also enhance their academic performance.

## **LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The study is limited to undergraduates at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria. While most studies have explored the positive influence of social media, this study gives consideration to examining the negative influence of social media on undergraduate studies. The study results are

also limited to nine social media platforms, namely WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google Plus, Snapchat, and Skype.

## **CONCLUSION**

The paper highlights the usage of social media among undergraduates at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria, vis-à-vis its influence on their studies. By implication, the study has provided information on social media platforms used by undergraduates and the purpose of their usage. This is assumed to serve as a basis for understanding, improving and achieving learning outcomes through appropriate use of social media so as to avoid the possible negative influence on studies as highlighted in this study. From the study, there is a clear understanding that the participants use one social media platform or the other for certain purpose(s); with a resultant influence on their studies. Thus, from the findings, the study arrived at the conclusion that the most used social media platforms are WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube; these platforms are used mainly for socialisation, information, and academic purposes. Findings from the study indicated that the undergraduate students surveyed spend an average of 2 to 3 hours daily on social media platforms; which may have an impact of distraction and addiction to social media platforms.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made, related to the context of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria:

1. Undergraduates should set their priority right by taking advantage of social media more for learning, online discussion, seeking academic help from academic faculty, downloading materials for reading and research purpose, and for solving academic related problems.
2. Students should invest their time wisely and concentrate more on their studies rather than spend their precious time on social media platforms for non-beneficial engagement.
3. Lecturers should restrict students from using their phones when lectures are on-going. This will help to curb the extent to which students are distracted during lecture periods.
4. Lecturers can adopt the strategy of online learning by channelling assignments or discussions on social media platforms to help inculcate the habit of using these media platforms for academic work by the students.
5. Awareness programmes related to social media usage should be arranged at the institutional, faculty and departmental levels, to enlighten students on the impact of Internet addiction as a means of lessening their chances of falling prey to the harmful impacts of social media.
6. Parents should check regularly on their teenage children's activities on social media so as to curb their excesses.

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