

Pattern Of Social Media Usage For Academic Activities Among Students Of Selected Tertiary Institutions In Delta State, Nigeria

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Abstract: Social media use is very high in contemporary society including higher institutions. Studies show that students use them for both academic and non-academic purposes, but little or nothing seem to have been documented about the level and pattern of social media usage for academic activities among students of higher institutions in Delta State, Nigeria. This study draws insights from the Uses and Gratification Theory and adopted survey with a sample of 368 selected via multi-stage sampling. Data was analyzed by mean scores against a benchmark mean of 2.50. Findings show high level of social media usage for academic activities among the students who mostly use WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Instagram for easy access to course-related materials, continued learning under relaxed environment, follow-up online research using the shared web links, storage of course materials on phones for easy access/sharing and keeping themselves academically active in and out of classrooms anywhere/anytime. Findings support claims by Uses and Gratification Theory and previous studies that social media use is expected to be high since they gratify students' academic needs. The study recommends that government and management of tertiary institutions should promote access to social media on campuses while lecturers should integrate them into teaching.

Keywords: Academic, Social media, Uses and gratification; Course-related materials; Lectures.

Introduction

The term "social media" refers to a collection of Internet-based digital communication applications that allow networks of people who share similar interests and tastes to create and share personal information easily and quickly. Social media are collections of internet-based applications that combine mobile and web-based technologies to build highly interactive platforms for individuals and groups to share, create, discuss, and modify user-generated contents (Ijeh 2008; Selwyn 2012; Auwal 2015; Owusu-Acheaw and Larson 2015).

Social media use is very high in contemporary society because they allow for on-demand sharing of messages on incredibly accessible and simple-to-use digital devices (especially computers and smart phones), at any time and from anywhere (Ijeh and Edun 2015; Boateng and Amankwaa 2016; Odun and Utulu 2016). Content creation and sharing are also dynamic and instantaneous and these have significantly altered the nature and pace of human communication to enhance the "global village" concept of modern world (Chandler and Munday, 2011; Sawyer and Chen, 2012; Ufuophu-Biri and Ijeh 2021). Social media have also been described as the most current and appealing instruments for connecting people globally such that individuals, groups and organizations use them to build profiles, exchange information, hold online meetings and participate in many activities (Mingle and Adams, 2015; Ijeh 2017).

Expectedly, students of higher institutions and their teachers now increasingly use social media for academic purposes. This is because social media have impacted on and transformed communication, learning and education (Ijeh and Avworo 2017; Mirembe, Lubega and Kibukamusoke, 2019) The widespread adoption of social media for higher education enhances the quality of education by providing opportunities to keep in touch with developments in other regions of the world, thereby making learning more interesting, broader and dynamic. Social media provide opportunities for students to download and upload a myriad of contents, which open up avenues for greater collaborations and conversations across international boundaries everywhere and at any time so long as Internet connections are available (Udoudo and Ojo 2016; Ijeh 2017). It is against this

background that this study attempted to investigate the level and pattern of social media usage for academic activities among students of selected tertiary institutions in Delta State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Many scholars provide perspectives on the phenomenon of social media use for academic purposes. Ojo (2018), reports that the use of social media in schools has become critical not only as media tools but also as instruments for effective education delivery and that necessary steps should be taken to promote the use social media in educational institutions, particularly in rural regions, because of their potentials. Ansari and Khan (2020), point out that the rise of ICT enhances the volume of course content and the simplicity with which it may be shared and that social media can be used for collaborative learning since they allow for high levels of involvement between students and their teachers, which encourage students' creativity, dynamism and research-orientation. Conversely, Ahmad, Yakubu, Sulaiman and Abdullahi (2020), report that many students in tertiary institutions use social media more for social and information purposes than for academic purposes, while Kolan and Dzandza (2018) observe that social media have detrimental effects on young users' education because they distract and expose them to insecurities. They also note that social media impact negatively on students' use of English because of the use of short forms in communication in their chats and posts.

The studies above, and many others, show that students use social media for both academic and non-academic purposes with positive and negative effects. However, none of these studies appears to have focused on the higher institutions in Delta State, Nigeria, covered in this study. What is the level of social media usage among students of selected tertiary institutions in Delta State, Nigeria? To what extent do they use social media for academic activities and how? These questions indicate a gap in knowledge gap that this study on the pattern of social media usage for academic activities among students of selected tertiary institutions in Delta State, Nigeria, attempted to fill.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are to find out:

1. the level of social media usage among students of selected tertiary institutions in Delta State, Nigeria;
2. how much students of selected tertiary institutions in Delta State, Nigeria, use social media for academic activities and
3. the pattern of social media usage for academic activities among students of selected tertiary institutions in Delta State, Nigeria.

Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the level of social media usage among students of selected tertiary institutions in Delta State, Nigeria?
2. How much do students of the selected tertiary institutions in Delta State, Nigeria, use social media for academic activities?
3. What is the pattern of social media usage for academic activities among students of selected tertiary institutions in Delta State, Nigeria?

Delimitation

This study is delimited to regular students of Delta State University, Abraka, Delta State Polytechnic, Otefe-Oghara, and College of Education, Warri, as at the 2020/2021 Academic Session.

Social Media and Student Academic Activities in Nigeria

The use of social media in schools is no longer new because of the increased use of computers and smart phones to access information (Ijeh 2017). Also, social media have transformed inter-personal and social communications particularly among young people (mostly students), who rely on them to access instructional materials to boost their learning efforts (Papoola 2014; Kolan and Dzanda 2018; Ufuophu-Biri and Ijeh 2021).

Social media are prominent forms of the “new media”, which according to Ijeh and Omasheye (2016), are digital communication channels that enable users to integrate texts, images, pictures, sounds, and videos, with the aid of the computer technology, and share same easily and with real time speed across the globe. Social media are also seen as highly interactive, a feature that makes them attractive to students who use them daily in their academic pursuits all over the world especially as they support peer-to-peer learning and collaborations. (Amobi 2011; Whiting and Williams 2013; Oteme and Ijeh 2022).

Social media platforms eliminate geographical barriers and can therefore be utilized for teaching and learning everywhere and at any time, as students can easily access educational materials both inside and outside classrooms so long as they have the appropriate gadget and Internet connectivity. Social media boost students' problem-solving skills also. In higher education, where instructors seek to employ technology to enhance teaching and learning, social media enhance students' active learning because of their increasing popularity (Ijeh 2017; Abdul et al., 2021).

Students access relevant course materials/resources at any time and from any location via social media. These are part of the exciting potentials that technological advancements have offered to schools, teachers and students (Nana 2013; Ijeh and Avworo 2017). In view of this, institutions and academics are increasingly relying on social media technology to collaborate and build knowledge. It is obvious that social media are employed as platforms for students to engage with their instructors, fellow students and other academics from across the world in many higher institutions nowadays with the potential to improve teaching and learning.

In Nigeria, computers (especially laptops) and smart phones are commonly used to connect to social media by students who have access to the Internet and this exposes them to wider perspectives of topics handled in classes. Social media are popular among young people who have been described as members of the Internet generation or “digital natives” whose knowledge and wide use of digital technologies are making them forces of social transformation (Ufuophu-Biri and Ijeh 2021).

Student's exposure to and use of social media networks has both beneficial and harmful consequences (Ijeh and Edun 2015). On the positive side, students use social media to source, create and share academic materials that serve to supplement the ones provided by their teachers. They may also find and share information on scholarships/sponsorships, academic activities and events such timetables, tutorials, conferences, seminars as well as other opportunities to gain new study skills and/or improve already acquired academic ones (Oye, Helou, and Ralim 2012; Whiting and Williams 2013; Boateng and Amankwaa, 2016; Mensah and Nizam 2016; Ijeh and Avworo 2017; Ansari and Khan 2020).

On the negative side, there is evidence that many students spend a lot of time on social media for non-academic purposes such as creating and sharing jokes/hilarious audio/video; playing games; making friends; flirting/dating; following the social lives of celebrities and engaging in product/service promotion/deals among other forms of commercial and socializing activities which can distract them and impact negatively on their academic (Ijeh 2017). It is observable in Nigeria today that many students tend to become unintentionally glued to their smart phones as they constantly search for the non-academic updates on social media even in classrooms, libraries, laboratories and other venues of academic engagements. Many of them engage in idle chats during lectures. Many phony profiles exist on social media where boys pretend to be girls and vice versa in order to befriend unwary fellow social media users (Owusu-Acheaw and Larson 2015; Mensah and Nizam 2016; Kolan and Dzanda 2019; Ahmad et al 2020).

Theoretical Framework (Uses and Gratification Theory)

The concept of “Uses and Gratifications” in media studies is traceable to Herta Herzog whose work: *Motivations and Gratifications of Daily Serial Listeners* in the 1940s muted the idea that media audience ‘use’ media contents to ‘gratify’ defined needs (Newbold 1995; Baran and Davis 2003). However, the term *Uses and Gratification Theory* (U&G) is credited to Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler and Michael Gurevitch in the early 1970s (Ijeh 2011; Musa, Azmi and Ismail 2015; Oberiri 2017),

The theory postulates that the public ‘use’ the media of mass communication mainly to ‘gratify’ specific needs (Ijeh and Onojeghwo 2009; Olaniran 2014; Menon and Meghana 2021). The theory is reported to shift focus from ‘what the mass media do to people’ to ‘what people do with the mass media’ (Quan-Haase and Young 2010). In other words, U&G draws scholars’ attention to the fact that people decide to use certain mass

media based on their convictions that such media can serve certain needs which range from personal to societal needs. By extension therefore, individuals' and/or groups' level of use of a particular medium would depend on their needs and how much the medium meets such needs (Oberiri 2017; Ngonso 2019).

The relationship between this study and U&G rests on the fact that the levels of social media usage for academic activities among the students of the selected tertiary institutions in Delta State, Nigeria, and the pattern of such usage, in terms of which specific social media are used for academic activities and how they are used, depend largely on the needs of the study population and how social media meet such needs. The students are likely to use social media that serve their academic purposes more than others that do not. Also, students of tertiary institutions would naturally interact with one another as they receive lectures in classes and engage in other academic activities, in addition to their personal studies. This suggests that their academic needs would be both personal and social and that social media that can fit in to the gratification of these needs are more likely to be widely used by them. This is because the more a medium/specific media content satisfies the needs of people, the more their tendency to continue to use such medium/media content.

Methodology

This study adopted survey research method and a population of 8,813 students, being the total number of regular students in the Abraka Campus of Delta State University, Delta State Polytechnic, Otefe-Oghara, and College of Education, Warri, as at the 2020/2021 Academic Session. A sample of 368 was used based on the Cochran's Formula for sample size determination from a study population. The study adopted a multi-stage sampling technique which involved clustered sampling to select respondents from all departments; stratified sampling to select from all levels of study and purposive sampling to select only students who use social media to respond to the questionnaire. Emanating data was analyzed by comparing computed mean scores to benchmark mean of 2.50 (i.e benchmark mean for a 4-point likert scale = $[4+3+2+1] \div 4$) and decision rule viz: When Mean calculated > 2.50 , outcome is positive and when Mean calculated ≤ 2.50 , outcome is negative.

Data Analysis

This section presents answers to the three research questions guiding this study, arising from data analysis. 330 copies of the questionnaire out of the 368 (89.67%) distributed were found usable in this study. The data analyses and answers to the respective research questions based on 330 respondents are presented under respective sub-heads below:

Level of Social Media Usage

Data emanating from field work with regards to Research Question 1 (What is the level of social media usage among students of selected tertiary institutions in Delta State, Nigeria?) indicates that 206 out of the 330 respondents, representing 62.42%, use social media for 5 hours and above, while the remaining 124 (37.58%) of them use it for less duration on a daily average.

Table 1: Students' Daily Average Usage of Social Media

SN	Hours of Usage	Frequency	Percentage
1	Above 12 hours	12	3.63%
2	9 – 12 hours	99	30%
3	5 – 8 hours	95	28.79%
4	1 – 4 hours	85	25.76%
5	Less than 1 hour	39	11.82%
	Total	330	100

From this distribution, the study concludes that the level of social media usage among students of the selected tertiary institutions in Delta State is high.

Level of Students' Average Usage of Social Media for Academic Activities

Research Question 2 focused on how much students of the selected tertiary institutions in Delta State use social media for academic activities daily. Emanating data as set out in Table 2 indicates that majority of the students (85 [25.76%]) use social media for academic activities for a cumulative average of 5-8 hours daily. This is followed by those who use them for academic activities cumulatively between 9-12 hours daily (69 [20.91%]) and those who use them for academic activities cumulatively between 1-4 hours daily (63 [19.09%]). The fourth, fifth and sixth in the ranking of number of students who use social media for academic activities in the selected higher institutions in this study are Once in 1-3 days (32 [9.7%]); Less than 1 hour daily (31 [9.39%]) and once a week (15 [4.54%]) on a cumulative average. 9 respondents ((2.73%) reported rarely using social media for academic activities while 2 (0.61%) said they never do.

Table 2: Respondents' Usage of Social Media for Academic Activities

SN	Duration of usage	Frequency	Percentage
1	Above 12 hours	2	0.6%
2	9 – 12 hours	69	20.91%
3	5 – 8 hours	85	25.76%
4	1 – 4 hours	63	19.09%
5	Less than 1 hour	31	9.39%
6	Once in 1 – 3 days	32	9.7%
7	Once in 4 – 6 days	10	3.03%
8	Once a week	15	4.54%
9	Once in 2 – 3 weeks	5	1.52%
10	Once a month	7	2.12%
11	Rarely	9	2.73%
12	Never	2	0.61%
	Total	330	100

Table 2 indicates that majority of the students (156 representing 47.27%) of the 330 respondents use social media for academic activities more than 5 hours daily. The study assume that students who dedicate more than 5 hours daily to private academic activities on social media are heavy users and therefore concludes that the use of social media for academic activities among students of the selected tertiary institutions in Delta State, Nigeria is high.

Pattern of Social Media Usage

Available data related to Research Question 3 (What is the pattern of social media usage for academic activities among students of selected tertiary institutions in Delta State, Nigeria?) indicates the social media mostly used by the students of the selected higher institutions (Table 3) and what academic activities the students use them for (Table 4). With regards to responses on social media platforms used among students of the selected tertiary institutions in, respondents were requested to indicate five of their most used social media in no particular order. Accordingly, a total of 1,578 mentions of 34 social media platforms were made. The data is distributed in Table 3.

Table 3: Social Media Most Used by Students of the Selected Tertiary Institutions in Delta State, Nigeria

SN	Social Media	Frequency	Percentage
1	WhatsApp	295	18.59%
2	Facebook	290	18.27%
3	YouTube	285	17.96%
4	Twitter	180	11.34%

5	Instagram	130	8.19%
6	Telegram	100	6.30%
7	Skype	75	4.73%
8	TikTok	55	3.47%
9	Snapchat	50	3.15%
10	Likee	35	2.21%
11	Quora	25	1.58%
12	LinkedIn	10	0.63%
13	Academia	8	0.50%
14	Spotify	7	0.44%
15	Pinterest	7	0.44%
16	Myspace	5	0.32%
17	Reddit	5	0.32%
18	Discord	5	0.32%
19	Crunchyroll	5	0.32%
20	15 Others (Mentioned only once each)	1 x 15 (= 15)	0.06% x 15 (= 0.95%)
	Total	1,587	100

Table indicates that the top five most used social media for academic activities by students of the selected tertiary institutions are WhatsApp (295: 18.59%), Facebook (290: 18.27%), YouTube (285: 17.96%), Twitter (180: 11.34%) and Instagram (130: 8.19%).

Responses on the specific academic activities of the 328 students of the selected tertiary institutions who said they used social media for academic activities on Table 2 are presented and analyzed with the computation of mean score in Table 4. The decision on the outcome of mean score test for each academic activity was based on a benchmark mean of 2.50.

Table 4: Academic Activities that Students of the Selected Tertiary Institutions in Delta State Use Social Media for

SN	Academic Activities	SA f (fx)	A f (fx)	D f (fx)	SD f (fx)	Total	Mean	Outcome
1	Access to course-related materials	209 (836)	104 (312)	13 (26)	2 (2)	328 (1,176)	3.59	Positive
2	Continued learning under relaxed environment	169 (676)	116 (348)	25 (50)	18 (18)	328 (1,092)	3.33	Positive
3	Follow-up online research using the shared web links	153 (612)	138 (414)	28 (56)	9 (9)	328 (1,091)	3.33	Positive
4	Easy storage of course materials on phones for easy access and sharing	163 (652)	115 (345)	38 (76)	12 (12)	328 (1,085)	3.31	Positive
5	Being academically active in and out of the classroom anywhere/anytime	151 (604)	132 (396)	28 (56)	17 (17)	328 (1,073)	3.27	Positive
6	Sustaining course-related interactions outside the classroom	150 (600)	117 (351)	45 (90)	16 (16)	328 (1,057)	3.22	Positive
7	Easy access to previous lectures and insights into forthcoming lectures	108 (432)	146 (438)	53 (106)	21 (21)	328 (997)	3.04	Positive

8	Easy access to lecture notes	124 (496)	112 (336)	66 (132)	26 (26)	328 (990)	3.02	Positive
9	Instant questions-and-answer engagements	101 (404)	153 (459)	48 (96)	26 (26)	328 (985)	3.00	Positive
10	Easy access to rich array of divergent opinions from students' contributions to post-class discussions	119 (476)	122 (366)	57 (114)	30 (30)	328 (986)	3.01	Positive
11	Easy reminders on course contents/assignments	83 (332)	127 (381)	79 (158)	39 (39)	328 (910)	2.77	Positive
12	Savings in cost of going to classes all the time	83 (332)	82 (246)	75 (150)	88 (88)	328 (816)	2.49	Negative
13	Savings in time of attending classes always	61 (244)	90 (270)	80 (160)	97 (97)	328 (771)	2.35	Negative

NOTE: VALUE OF X (SA=4; A=3; D=2; SD=1)

Table 4 shows that students of the selected tertiary institutions in Delta State use social media for easy access to course-related materials; continued learning under relaxed environment; follow-up online research using the shared web links; storage of course materials on phones for easy access and sharing and keeping themselves academically active in and out of the classroom anywhere/anytime with mean scores of 3.59; 3.33; 3.33; 3.31 and 3.27 against a benchmark mean of 2.50. Other significant uses of social media for academic activities reported are sustained course-related interactions outside the classroom (3.22); Easy access to previous lectures and insights into forthcoming lectures (3.04); Easy access to lecture notes (3.02); Instant questions-and-answer engagements (3.00); Easy access to rich array of divergent opinions from students' contributions to post-class discussions (3.01) and Easy reminders on course contents/assignments (2.79). On the other hand, indications that students of the selected tertiary institutions in Delta State use social media to save cost (2.49) and time (2.35) of attending classes regularly failed the mean score test as they both returned mean scores less than the benchmark mean of 2.50.

Arising from the analyses above, this study concludes that WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Instagram are the top five most used social media platforms by students of the selected tertiary institutions in Delta State, Nigeria and that they use them for easy access to course-related materials, continued learning under relaxed environment, follow-up online research using the shared web links, storage of course materials on phones for easy access and sharing, keeping themselves academically active in and out of the classroom anywhere/anytime, sustained course-related interactions outside the classroom, easy access to previous lectures and insights into forthcoming lectures, easy access to lecture notes, instant questions-and-answer engagements, easy access to rich array of divergent opinions from students' contributions to post-class discussions and easy reminders on course contents/assignments. The students do not use social media as substitute to class attendance.

Discussion of Findings

One of the findings in this study is that the level of social media usage among students of the selected tertiary institutions in Delta State, Nigeria is high. This finding supports the findings of earlier studies which report that students of higher institutions spend a lot of their time on social media networks (Nana 2013; Papoola 2014; Ijeh and Edun 2015; Ahmad et al 2020; Ufuophu-Biri & Ijeh 2021).

Another finding is that the use of social media for academic activities among students of the selected tertiary institutions is high. This finding corroborates findings in previous studies, which provide evidence that students now increasingly harness social media platforms as tools to advance their educational pursuits (Amobi 2011, Whiting and Williams 2013; Papoola 2014, Ijeh 2017; Abdul et al., 2021).

This study reveals that WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Instagram are the top five most used social media platforms by students of the selected tertiary institutions in Delta State, Nigeria and that the students use them for easy access to course-related materials, continued learning under relaxed environment,

follow-up online research using the shared web links, storage of course materials on phones for easy access and sharing, keeping themselves academically active in and out of the classroom anywhere/anytime, sustained course-related interactions outside the classroom, easy access to previous lectures and insights into forthcoming lectures, easy access to lecture notes, instant questions-and-answer engagements, easy access to rich array of divergent opinions from students' contributions to post-class discussions and easy reminders on course contents/assignments. These findings uphold existing claims that social media platforms help students progress academically and the prediction by Uses and Gratification Theory that students would willingly use media for academic activities if the latter satisfy their individual and group academic needs (Ijeh 2011). They also support claims that young people are drawn to social media because they (social media) give them (students) more choice over content generation as well as where, when, and how they share it. In other words, rather than being passive consumers, young people create social media usage patterns that allow them to invent, produce and share messages that satisfy needs for choice, convenience, customization and control (Nana 2013; Ahmad et al 2020; Oteme and Ijeh 2022).

Findings in the study also indicate that social media do not replace the traditional academic practice of going to classes. This finding corroborates the notion that social media use for academic purposes can best serve as a complement to conventional classroom teaching and learning experiences but not a substitute (Nana 2013; Oye 2013; Ijeh and Avworo 2017; Ahmad et al 2020).

Conclusion

This study reveals that the levels of social media usage among the students and the extent to which they use them for academic activities are high. An enquiry into the pattern of social media usage for academic activities among the students shows that WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Instagram are the five most used social media platforms and that they use them mainly for easy access to course-related materials and to continue learning under relaxed environment outside their classrooms. The students also use social media platforms for easy follow-up online research using the shared web links (since all they need to do is simply click on them), storage of course materials on their mobile phones for easy access and sharing, which help to keep them academically active in and out of the classroom anywhere/anytime. Their use of social media for academic activities also include sustained course-related interactions outside the classroom, easy access to previous lectures and insights into forthcoming lectures, easy access to lecture notes, instant questions-and-answer engagements, easy access to rich array of divergent opinions from students' contributions to post-class discussions and easy reminders on course contents/assignments.

Recommendations

Arising from the conclusion of this study, the researchers recommends as follows:

- Government and authorities of tertiary institutions should promote access to social media on campuses by providing incentives for students to own smart phones and laptops, which are required to sign-up on social media platforms and provide reliable Internet access via free wifi facilities to staff and students.
- Academic staff of tertiary institutions should adopt social media platforms that are popular among their students as teaching supplements since social media significantly attract students' attention.
- Academic staff and students of tertiary institutions should adopt social media platforms to complement conventional classroom teaching and learning academic activities and never attempt to use them as substitutes.

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