

An inquiry into the use of social media as a learning tool among university students

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the use of social media as a learning tool among university students with gender and school ownership as moderator variables. The study involved 259 university students selected from three universities consisting of federal, state and private universities in Osun State, Nigeria. The instrument used for data collection is a self-developed instrument titled 'University Students' Use of Social Media'. Three research questions were answered in the study. Data were analysed using frequency count, percentage, mean, standard deviation, t-test and Analysis of Variance. The study revealed that university students use social media effectively for both academic and non-academic purposes with no significance difference in the use on the platform of gender and school ownership. The study therefore recommends the incorporation of the use of social media in instructional delivery in the teaching-learning process.

KEYWORDS

Inquiry, learning tool, social media and university students

RÉSUMÉ

La recherche a étudié l'utilisation de médias sociaux comme outil de étude parmi des étudiants avec le genre et de la propriété d'école comme variables de modérateur. L'étude a fait participer 259 étudiants sélectionnés de trois universités fédérales, publiques et privées dans l'état d'Osun, Nigéria. L'instrument utilisé pour la collection de données est un instrument auto-développé intitulé « utilisation par d'étudiants de Médias sociaux ». Une question de recherches a été répondue dans l'étude tandis que deux hypothèses de recherches étaient évaluées. Des données ont été analysées utilisant le compte de fréquence, le pourcentage, le moyen, l'écart type, le t-test et l'analyse de la variance. L'étude a indiqué que les étudiants emploient les médias sociaux effectivement pour des buts scolaires et non-académiques sans différence significative du genre et de la propriété d'école à l'utilisation de la plate-forme. L'étude recommande donc

l'incorporation de l'utilisation des medias sociaux dans l'instruction et dans le processus d'enseignement et d'apprentissage.

MOTS-CLÉS

Enquête, outil d'apprentissage, les medias sociaux et les étudiants

INTRODUCTION

Modern communication technology tools have broadened the level of dissemination of information across different parts of the world in relation to the socio-economic and political aspects of human endeavours. The surge in the rate of information dissemination and exchange is enhanced by the use of some tools amongst which social media occupy a prominent position premised on their cost effectiveness which make them available to nearly everybody irrespective of his/her economic status. According to Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy and Silvestre (2011), social media is a means that dwells on mobile and web based technology for the creation of highly interactive platforms through which individuals and community are able to share, co-create, discuss and modify user generated content.

In the view of Ndaku (2013), social media do not only give information to the users but also allow for interaction. The scholar therefore sees it as a group of internet based applications that allows for the creation and exchange of user generated content. Ameyaw, Asante and Asante (2017) describe social media as relatively inexpensive and widely accessible tool that allow the users to publish and acquire information coupled with the opportunity to collaborate with other on issues of common interest or build relationship.

Social media provide unlimited avenue for the users to access information, express their opinion and interact with people beyond the artificial territorial boundaries without much economic burden. These attributes of social media encourage the pervasive use particularly among students in higher institutions who are found of creating and updating their profile, expressing their feelings, sharing their opinions, establishing online relations through different social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Telegram, Twitter, YouTube amongst others.

According to Hussain (2012), university students use social media for academic activities, development of social networks and sharing of their experiences with their colleagues and the international community. Norsiah, Mohd, Syamsyul and Siti (2013) show that social media are used by university students to satisfy their learning needs, search for information, communicate with friends and families, entertainment and solving of assignment tasks. Grey, Asogwa and Edogor (2013) reveal that university students use social media for purposes such as entertainment, accessing information on education and discussing national issues. The study further reveals the utilization of social media for illicit actions such as cyber-crimes and pornography. Amadi and Ewa (2018) ascertain that university students use social media for entertainment, communication, socialization and education. The findings of the above scholars in term of the use of social media by university students reveal the use of social media for both academic and non-academic purposes by the students.

The unlimited opportunities accorded students in information dissemination and exchange through the use of social media have led to suggestions for the incorporation of social media in the teaching–learning process. Muriithi (2013) accedes to the use of social networking sites among university students for academic purpose. Raymond and Amankwaa (2016) reveal wide

utilization of social media by students in higher institutions coupled with the submission of the students that the usage is contributing significantly to their academic life thereby suggesting the inclusion in the school curriculum as tools for learning. ViewSonic Education (2018) leveraging on studies conducted by different scholars in relation to the commitment of teenagers to social media usage advocates the incorporation of social media into the school curriculum so as to facilitate and advance engagement in academic work by students.

However, the influence of social media usage on students' academic performance has continued to be a controversial issue among scholars. Butikofer (2010) states that social networking which is an offshoots of social media enhances students' proficiency in technology, exposes them to diverse views, develops their communication skill and increases their ability to work on group project. According to Stenger (2013), the use of social media enables students to connect with other educators, share information on a larger scale and encourages interactive learning while Rithika and Selvaraj (2013) ascertain the effectiveness of social media in connecting people from different parts of the world. It can therefore be inferred that, social media can serve as a tool for collaboration among students across the world.

While some scholars view social media as a platform that could positively influence students' academic performance, others are of opposite view. Ndaku (2013) reveals that social media impact negatively on students' academic performance in terms of students' failure to devote most of their time to their academic work based on their commitment to the use of social media for non-academic purpose. The scholar further reveals that social media usage among students leads to poor grammatical ability couple with inability to write the correct spelling of some words. Asemah, Okpanachi and Edegoh (2013) also corroborate the negative impact of social media on university students' academic performance based on the commitment of most of their time to the use. The views of the above scholars in term of the negative effects of social media on academic performance, is further reinforced by Ameyaw et al. (2017).

The debate surrounding the influence of social media on students' academic performance could be attributed to variables such as gender and school ownership since these variables could influence the use of social media for either academic or non-academic purpose since they are capable of creating technology gap which can influence the use of social medial tools, and the purpose for the use.

According to Adepetun (2017), there is persistent of digital gender gap despite the pervasiveness of Internet infrastructure across the globe. The author while referring to the finding of the International Communication Union states that the gap has been on decline since 2013 in other countries of the world except Africa. Gillian (2018) citing the World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report, 2017 reveals increase in technology gender gap with male on the positive side. This also goes in line with Nick (2018). This prevalence of technology gap based on gender and in favour of male could influence the use of social media and what they are used for, among university students.

Ameyaw et al. (2017) assert that the use of social media vary between male and female with the male better committed to the use for academic purpose. Rithika and Selvaraj (2013) also reveal that male uses social media more than female which Alsaif (2016) also attests to. However, Nisiforou and Laghos (2015) did not find gender difference in the use of social media. The divergent findings on the influence of gender on the use of social media couple with the existence of technology gender make gender a relevant variable in this study since it will reveal whether gender plays a significant role in social media usage for learning among university students.

Another variable that could play a significant role in the use of social media among university students is school ownership because of the variation in the caliber of students attending public and private schools. The poor funding of education in Nigeria has greatly impacted negatively on the qualities of infrastructural and learning resources in public schools. It has also resulted in unstable academic calendar due to incessant strike among all categories of staff in public schools. These problems have led to fall in the standard of education thereby making a lot of graduates from higher institutions in the country unemployable.

The decay in public higher institutions in Nigeria has made parents who could afford the fees for private institutions to opt for them. Private universities pay more in term of school fees than public but are better equipped and enjoy stable academic calendar. However, they are met for the privileged ones in term of socio-economic status. The financial implication of attending a private school could also create a technology gap in term of having access to information and communication tools between students in public and private universities which could further determine their use of social media and the reasons for the use.

According to Iruonagbe, Imhonopi and Egharevba (2015), public universities are bedeviled with poor funding, inconsistent policy making and implementation, infrastructural decay and unstable academic calendar thereby leading to preference for private ones. Oseni (2015) equally acknowledges the problem confronting public universities and the excellent performance of private universities in entrepreneurial programmes but cautioned against the proliferation of private universities without the required qualities. Lawal and Viatenu (2017) reveals that students in private universities in Southwest, Nigeria are exposed to better learning facilities in terms of the Internet, computer and laboratories. The dichotomy between private and public universities in terms of facilities and finance makes the investigation of the influence of school ownership as a variable in this study relevant.

Jeffrey, Musah and Adjei (2016) while comparing the use of social media between public and private high school students in Ghana find significance difference in the use of social media based on school ownership with private school students on the higher side. This has also been attested to by Masthi, Pruthvis and Mallekavu (2017) premised on their investigation in India. However, the influence of school ownership on the use of social media among university students has not been given the required attention in the area covered in this study thereby making it relevant as a variable.

Statement of the problem

Modern development in the field of information and communication technology has promoted information dissemination and interaction among people in different locations within the global system. The availability of different media amongst which social media occupy a prominent position with the availability on hand held tools such as mobile phones coupled with its cost effectiveness which makes it affordable for people across different socio-economic strata has further eliminated barriers placed on communication in terms of location and time thereby facilitating communication among people within the global system without physical contact.

Social media as one of the offshoots of modern technology have created avenue for interaction and information dissemination across the globe with university students as one of the active users. However, concerns have been raised by stakeholders within the academic realm on the effects of social media usage on students' academic performance. While some scholars have attributed dwindling students' academic performance to the excessive use of social media for non-academic purpose, others are of different views thereby making it impossible to resolve the issue of the relationship between social media usage and students' academic performance.

This study therefore investigated the use of social media as a learning tool among university students with a view to show whether the usage is tended towards academic activities by university students with gender and school ownership as moderator variables.

Research questions

1. Do university students use social media for learning?
2. Is there a significant difference in the use of social media for learning among university students based on gender?
3. Is there a significant difference in the use of social media for learning among university students based on school ownership?

METHODOLOGY

Research design

The study is a survey research design since it involves the selection of some respondents from the population in order to assess their opinions without manipulating any of the variables involved.

Population

The population is made up of all the students in the three universities involved in the study.

Sample and sampling technique

A total of 300 students premised on 100 students from three selected universities made up of federal, state and private universities in Osun State were randomly selected for the study but only 259 actually participated in the study.

Research instrument

The instrument used for data collection is a self-developed questionnaire titled “University Students’ Use of Social Media”. The instrument is made up of two sections. Section ‘A’ consists the demographic data of the respondents in terms of gender and school ownership while Section ‘B’ is made up of 15 items designed to elicit relevant information pertaining to the research topic. The items are presented in Likert form of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree.

Validity of the instrument

The initial draft of the instrument was given to two lecturers in the field of educational technology to assess the relevance of the instrument in relation to the research topic. Their comments and observations were taken into consideration in the final draft of the instrument.

Reliability of the instrument

The instrument was administered to 20 university students that were not involved in the real study, their responses were analysed using Cronbach alpha analysis and a reliability coefficient of 0.75 was obtained.

Procedure for data collection

The instrument was administered in the selected universities through three research assistants based on one in each of the universities. The questionnaire was administered to 100 participants

in each of the institutions involved in the study making a total of 300 but only 259 copies were retrieved.

Data analysis

Data were analysed using simple percentage, mean, standard deviation, t-test and Analysis of Variance. Percentage, mean and standard deviation were use in analysing data for research question 1 while research questions 2 and 3 were analysed using t-test and Analysis of Variance respectively.

RESULTS

This section deals with demographic analysis of the respondents and analysis of the research questions.

TABLE 1
Gender distribution of the respondents

	F	%
Male	140	54.1
Female	119	45.9
Total	259	100.0

Table 1 presents the gender distribution of the respondents. It shows that 54.1% and 45.9% of the respondents are males and females respectively. The table shows that the number of male participants is greater than that of the female which is attributed to higher number of males than female in the population of the study. However, both male and female are well represented in the selection.

TABLE 2
University ownership distribution of the respondents

Level	F	%
Federal	86	33.2
State	93	35.9
Private	80	30.9
Total	259	100.0

Table 2 presents the distribution of respondents based on school ownership. It shows that 33.2% is from federal university, 35.9% from state university and 30.9% from private university. The table also reveals that all the universities are well represented.

TABLE 3
Analysis of the use of social media as a learning tool by university students.

S/N	ITEM	Responses								Mean	S.D
		Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Agree		Strongly agree			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	f	%		
1	I used social media to relate with my peers and classmates on social matters	3	1.2%	2	0.8%	68	26.3%	186	71.8%	3.69	.549
2	I use social media for entertainment (pleasure)	2	0.8%	7	2.7%	106	40.9%	144	55.6%	3.51	.593
3	I use social media for communication purposes	1	0.4%	6	2.3%	95	36.7%	157	60.6%	3.58	.561
4	I use social media to keep vigilance about happenings in the world (news)	3	1.2%	8	3.1%	77	29.7%	171	66.0%	3.61	.609
5	I use social media mostly for my assignment (educational purpose)	4	1.5%	16	6.2%	111	42.9%	128	49.4%	3.40	.677
6	I engage in academic discussion with my classmates through social media	7	2.7%	24	9.3%	110	42.5%	118	45.6%	3.31	.750
7	I access online resources through social media for academic purpose	5	1.9%	8	3.1%	100	38.6%	146	56.4%	3.49	.655
8	I interact with students on academic issues in other institutions of learning through social media	7	2.7%	29	11.2%	122	47.1%	101	39.0%	3.22	.750
9	I rely on information on social media to do my assignment	20	7.7%	61	23.6%	82	31.7%	96	37.1%	2.98	.958
10	I engage in group discussion through social media	16	6.2%	56	21.6%	89	34.4%	98	37.8%	3.04	.918
11	I relate with my lecturers on academic issues through social media	24	9.3%	77	29.7%	88	34.0%	70	27.0%	2.79	.947
12	I play games on social media for leisure	19	7.3%	56	21.6%	90	34.7%	94	36.3%	3.00	.936
13	I use social media to make friends	23	8.9%	31	12.0%	97	37.5%	108	41.7%	3.12	.939
14	Social media give me the opportunity to express my views on social issues	5	1.9%	29	11.2%	111	42.9%	114	44.0%	3.29	.740
15	I enjoy watching films on social media	16	6.2%	41	15.8%	107	41.3%	95	36.7%	3.08	.876
	Grand Mean	3.274									

Table 3 presents the analysis of the use of social media by university students. The respondents asserted that they use social media to; relate with their peers and classmates on social matters ($\bar{X} = 3.69$), entertain themselves ($\bar{X} = 3.51$), communicate with people ($\bar{X} = 3.58$), keep vigilance

about happenings in the world (news) ($\bar{X} = 3.61$), seek information in doing their assignment (educational purpose) ($\bar{X} = 3.40$), engage in academic discussion with their classmates ($\bar{X} = 3.31$), access online resources for academic purpose ($\bar{X} = 3.49$), interact with students in other institutions of learning ($\bar{X} = 3.22$), acquire information in doing their school assignments ($\bar{X} = 2.98$), engage in group discussion ($\bar{X} = 3.04$), interact with their lecturers ($\bar{X} = 2.79$), play games for leisure ($\bar{X} = 3.00$), make friends ($\bar{X} = 3.12$), express their views on prevailing issues ($\bar{X} = 3.29$), watch films ($\bar{X} = 3.08$), The weighted average of 3.274 indicates high university students' commitment to the use of social media for academic and non-academic purposes.

TABLE 4

Summary of t-test analysis of the use of social media for learning among university students based on gender

Sex	N	Mean	S. D	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Remark
Male	140	62.85	7.01	0.736	257	0.462	Not significant
Female	119	63.49	6.87				

Table 4 shows that there is no significant difference in the use of social media for learning among university students based on gender. ($t = 0.736$, $df = 257$, $p > 0.05$). This implies that both male and female students do not differ in the use of social media for both academic and non-academic purposes.

TABLE 5

Summary of ANOVA showing the use of social media for learning among university students based on school ownership

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	58.906	2	29.453	.608	.545
Within Groups	12400.221	256	48.438		
Total	12459.127	258			

Table 5 reveals that there is no significant difference in the use of social media among university students based on school ownership, [$F(2, 256) = 0.608$, $p = 0.545$]. This implies that students in all the selected institution do not differ in the use of social media for both academic and non-academic purposes.

DISCUSSION

The study showed the commitment of university students to the use of social media for learning. Most of the students agreed that they use social media in; seeking information when doing their school assignment, sourcing for online academic resources, interacting with their classmates and students in order institutions on academic issues, interacting academically with their lecturers and attending to other academic issues that could be resolved via social media. This finding is in line with Muriithi (2013), and Raymond and Amankwaa (2016). The study also revealed that the students use social media effectively for non-academic purposes. The grand mean of 3.274 obtained based on the analysis of responses of the participants lays credence to the use of social media for both academic and non-academic purposes by university students as revealed by Hussain (2012), Norsiah et al. (2013), Grey et al. (2013) and Amadi and Ewa (2018). The commitment of the users lays credence to the postulation of Kietzmann et al., (2011) that social media is as an effective means of communication based on their inexpensive nature as postulated by Ameyaw et al. (2017).

The study further revealed lack of gender difference in the use of social media for learning among university students ($t = 0.736$, $df = 257$, $p > 0.05$). This finding runs contrary to Rithika and Selvaraj (2013), Alsaif (2016) and Ameyaw et al. (2017) but goes in line with Nisiforou and Laghos (2015). The gender neutrality of the finding implies that both male and female university students are committed to the use of social media for both academic and non-academic purposes. It is further shown through the finding that university students irrespective of the school ownership are inclined to using social media for both academic and non-academic purposes ($F(2, 256) = 0.608$, $p = 0.545$). The finding is contrary to Jeffrey et al. (2016), and Masthi et al. (2017). This result could be attributed to the cost effectiveness of the use of social media which does not entail much financially burden on the users.

The use of social media has been a controversial issue among scholars in the field of education. Students commitment to it has been viewed as a contributory factor to their poor academic performance premised on the notion that the use is basically for non-academic purpose at the detriment of their academic work. However, it has been revealed by this study that students use social media effectively for both academic and non-academic purposes. Therefore, dwindling students' academic performance could not be exclusively attributed to excessive use of social media. The study also reveals no significant difference in the use of social media among university students on the platform of gender and school ownership.

The study therefore suggests that university students' poor academic performance should not be exclusively attributed to the use of social media as they used them extensively for both academic and non-academic purposes, social network platforms should be created by lecturers for interaction with students on academic issues and the use of social media in the teaching-learning process at university level should be encouraged through the incorporation into the school curriculum.

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