

THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON UNDERGRADUATES' STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the influence of social media on undergraduate studies at the University of Port Harcourt, a pressing concern in the context of rising digital interactions among students. With the ubiquity of social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, understanding their impact on academic engagement has become essential. Employing a quantitative research approach, the research aims to elucidate the dynamics of social media usage among undergraduates, focusing on the frequency of engagement, time allocation, and the implications for academic performance. The theoretical framework integrates the Uses and Gratifications Theory and Technological Determinism Theory, providing a comprehensive lens through which to analyze students' motivations for engaging with social media and the consequent effects on their educational experiences. Findings indicate that students at the University of Port Harcourt frequently use social media for various academic purposes, including peer communication, information sharing, and collaborative learning. However, the analysed data also suggest a potential diversion of attention from academic tasks, with students spending substantial time on social media platforms. This duality represents a significant challenge, as the benefits of enhanced interaction are often overshadowed by issues of procrastination and distraction. The study's insights underscore the necessity for educational strategies that harness the positive aspects of social media while mitigating its adverse effects. Recommendations include the establishment of dedicated academic groups on popular platforms, workshops on digital wellness, and the integration of educational content into social media interactions.

KEYWORDS: Social Media, Undergraduates' Study

INTRODUCTION

The advent of the internet has transformed global communication and information exchange, nurturing a decentralized network adorned with interconnected computers and devices that utilize standardized communication protocols for data sharing (Kurose, James, & Keith, 2016). This digital infrastructure has been fundamental in the development and proliferation of social media, creating the conditions necessary for diverse social networking platforms to emerge, thereby revolutionizing the ways in which individuals connect, communicate, and disseminate information (Jose, 2013).

In contemporary society, social media has become an omnipresent facet of daily life, permeating various sectors and shaping human interactions. The ease of use, speed, and durability of these platforms contribute to the significant amount of time individuals allocate to social networks, which increasingly influence public discourse and set trends across myriad domains including environmental issues, education, politics, technology, and entertainment (Tufekci, 2014). Leveraging mobile and web-based technologies, social media provides highly interactive environments for individuals and communities to share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content (Kietzman, 2012). The impact of these platforms on educational outcomes is considerable, as research suggests that engagement with social media can enhance learning opportunities, facilitate collaborative studies, encourage group discussions, enable communication beyond the confines of the classroom, and bolster critical thinking skills (George & Dellasega, 2011).

Students today are exposed to social media on a near-daily basis, utilizing a range of devices such as desktop computers, laptops, tablets, and smartphones for chatting, blogging, content sharing, and online learning (Cassidy, Griffin, Manolovitz, Shen, & Turney, 2011). However, the interplay between social media and academic engagement raises concerns, as students often allocate significant amounts of their study time to social media activities, potentially diverting their focus from academic tasks (Ndaku, 2013). While some studies acknowledge the specific learning interactions afforded by social media, some caution that not all students leverage these platforms for academic enhancement (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010).

Currently, the most prominent social media platforms include Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, YouTube, Wikipedia, LinkedIn, Instagram, TikTok, Pinterest, and Snapchat, among others. Notably, SixDegrees.com was an early entrant into the social networking space, yet it succumbed to the pressures of the evolving digital landscape by 2000 after failing to maintain its user base. This was followed by the emergence of platforms such as Friendster and LinkedIn in 2002, with Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, Yahoo 360, and Twitter debuting in the subsequent years, each iterating on the concept of social networking (Boyd, 2014). Notably, TikTok has gained remarkable popularity since its launch in 2016 as a platform for short-form videos, becoming a cultural touchstone among younger demographics.

At the University of Port Harcourt, students predominantly engage with platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, Twitter, and WhatsApp, often spending hours daily on these applications through their smartphones. This habitual engagement frequently eclipses their academic endeavors, as undergraduates report devoting significant time—often between two to three hours—to social media interactions at the expense of their educational pursuits. Despite the negative implications for academic performance, existing literature also emphasizes a range of

positive and neutral effects stemming from social media use, including enhanced communication with faculty and peers, collaborative engagement on academic topics, and broader discussions around educational interests (Adam & Ab-Rahim, 2014).

The integration of social media into the undergraduate experience provokes critical questions regarding its impact on academic engagement, learning outcomes, and student well-being. While proponents highlight its potential to nurture collaboration and facilitate information sharing, critics warn against excessive use that may precipitate distraction and procrastination, ultimately diminishing academic performance. Consequently, understanding the complex relationship between social media usage and undergraduate studies is imperative. This study seeks to address the question: what influence does social media have on undergraduate students' academic experiences at the University of Port Harcourt?

The primary aim of this research is to investigate the dynamics of social media influence on undergraduate studies at the University of Port Harcourt. Specific objectives include identifying the most frequently accessed social networking sites by students, assessing the amount of time spent on social media activities each day, determining the frequency of online engagement among undergraduates, evaluating their visits to educational social media platforms, and examining the impact of social media use on academic performance. Guided by these objectives, the research questions have been formulated accordingly.

The significance of this study is manifold, as it will provide valuable insights into how social media influences academic experiences among undergraduates at the University of Port Harcourt. The findings are intended to assist students in recognizing the potential positive or negative ramifications of social media on their academic pursuits and to facilitate better time management strategies to balance academic obligations with social media engagement. Furthermore, this study may prompt university authorities to consider formulating policies that incorporate social media into educational curricula as part of a Learning Management System (LMS).

This research is specifically focused on the influence of social media on undergraduate studies at the University of Port Harcourt. 'Influence' is conceptualized as the capacity of a stimulus to affect individuals' thoughts, actions, or decisions, while 'social media' encompasses internet and mobile-based tools for sharing and discussing information among individuals, applicable to personal, organizational, and corporate contexts.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Technological Determinism (TD) asserts that a society's technology fundamentally drives the structure of its social relations and cultural values. Coined by Thorstein Veblen, the concept has been extensively critiqued and developed by various scholars, including Karl Marx, who interpreted technological advancements as important influences on the organization of societal relations (Croteau & Hoynes, 2012). TD posits that technological change is a primary force in shaping social dynamics, with inherent implications that warrant careful consideration of its effects, particularly in the digital age.

In contemporary discourse, technological determinism serves as a critical lens for understanding the pervasive role of social media in shaping individual behavior and societal interactions. Umeogwu and Ojiakor (2014) articulated that, advancements in technology including

social media influence social change, which can carry both positive and negative ramifications for academic outcomes. The integration of social media into the educational sphere has transformed how students learn, communicate, and engage with academic content, altering traditional paradigms of interaction within the university environment.

As highlighted by Oladele (2015), social media consumption has increased significantly among youth, with statistics indicating that young individuals in the United States spend approximately seven and a half hours daily engaging with various media forms, illustrating the depth of this interaction. This heightened engagement evidences the direct influence that social media has on students' educational practices and academic responsibilities.

The Technological Determinism Theory is instrumental for this research as it elucidates the transformative effects of social media on the educational landscape. It facilitates an understanding of how social media platforms reshape peer interactions, study habits, and the accessibility of information, thereby influencing academic performance. This theoretical lens enriches the investigation into how undergraduates navigate their academic responsibilities in an interconnected digital world by framing social media as a technological force that significantly alters educational experiences.

CONCEPT OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is that means that employs mobile and web-based technology to create highly interactive platforms via which individuals and community share, co-create, discuss and modifies user-generated content (Kietzmann, 2012). Social media is a tool that is used both on the personal level, organization and corporate level. Social media is a phrase being tossed around a lot. It is a website that does not just give you information but interact with you while giving you information. The interactive nature of social media such as Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, Snapchat, YouTube and so on has further popularized the tools among undergraduates across the world as it allows them to re-create contents, connect, upload and share information. This technology has impacted students-societies as they have changed the way they communicate and relate with one another through online channels and the conduct of their daily activities (Tanakinjal, Sondoh, Andrias and Ibrahim, 2012). (Andreas and Michael ,2010) are of the opinion that social media is a group of internet-based application that builds on the ideological foundation and allows the creation and exchange of users generated content. The internet usage effect of social media, in views of (Nielsen ,2012) is that, students continue to spend more time on social media than any other site.

SOCIAL NETWORK AND EDUCATION

A social networking site is where users can set up a profile of themselves, create formal connections to people they know, communicate and share preferences and interest (Smith, 2018). It is used to describe community base website, online discussion forum, chat rooms and other social space online. Commonly, the phrase 'social networking sites' is used as an umbrella term for all social media and computer-mediated communication, including but not limited to Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube. The advent of social network platforms may also be impacting the way in which learners engage with technology in general (Garcia and Patel, 2021).

Social networking and their educational uses are of interest to many researchers. However, in the past, social networking were viewed as a distraction and offered no educational benefit. Blocking this social network was a form of protection for students against wasting time. Though many arguments can be made about the possible risks of adolescent social networking, it is important to point out the benefits of these websites as well. Many schools have started to use these sites to promote education, keep students up to date with assignments, and offer help to those in need. In general, the Internet and social networking sites can be a positive influence amongst undergraduates but however, there are constraints.

SOCIAL MEDIA FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSE

The use of social media by undergraduate students has been generating research attention in recent years among different scholars around the world. Some of these studies have been conducted in developing countries, particularly in Nigeria. However social media research in relation to academic activities have mostly been regarded as a distraction rather than something of value by many researchers (Wickramanayake and Jika, 2018). Social media has become an indispensable tool for the younger generation, especially among undergraduates. Social media is very popular especially among the younger generation . They are very easy to access since there is more than one way to log into social media platforms like through mobile and computer-based technology. The most popular platforms of social media are the social networking platforms (Ahmed, Rahim, Alabdullah, and Thottoli, 2019). Studies have confirmed that this generation now has a psychological addiction with the internet in general (Qiaolei, 2014) and particularly with social media. (Akakandelwa and Walubita ,2018) noted that Whatsapp was the commonly used social media tools among the students and that they engage actively on these tools between 31 to 60 minutes on daily basis. Also, the respondents indicated that they used the Social networking tools more for social life than for academic activities. In contrast, (Hussain ,2012) noted that majority of the students 90% acknowledged that they preferred using Facebook to other social media tools like Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube etc .

Social media offers diverse networking opportunities, all of which can enhance career development. These opportunities are made possible through several unique features of social media. First, its focus on user-generated content encourages scholarly inquiry and dialog among users. Second, its easy access through the Internet allows users to participate in events around the world' (Roman, 2014). Some social media platforms such as Wikipedia and to some extent blogs encourage investigative-based and collaborative activities among students in higher education. This open access for active participation can therefore create opportunities for effective learning. Linked with this principle of collaborative development among learners, social media enable learners and teachers to share and publish information as a result of the learning activity (e.g., course materials such as course syllabus, course notes and assignments etc). Undergraduates' can function collaboratively through exploring the opportunities given by online social atmosphere to resolve certain academic issues (Andreas , 2010) , this is indicative that through collaborative or team learning through integration of social media, students can establish positive contact, using the goal of working towards particular final results, The study ensures that, it's promising to consider social networking learning because it encourages collective understanding generation and encourages

active user participation. Research conducted by (Blaschke, 2014) supports that students could benefit from social media use throughout their university years.

EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS

There are various studies that have tried to understand the nature of the impact that regular use of social media has on the academic performance of students at various level of education. These researches have been conducted all around the world and in different institutions. Also, the findings have been as varied as the researchers and the subject of research. Also, the studies have taken different approaches to investigate the problem. While some focused on social media in general, others have focused on a specific platform. This is understandable because social media has different user population and are used for different purposes (Hadebe, Owolabi, & Mlambo, 2016). (Apuke, 2016) found that undergraduate students who spend most of their time on Social networking sites are liable to perform awfully in their academic purposes than those who did not. This was in tandem with findings by (Talaue, AISaad, AIRushaidan, AIHugail and AIFahhad, 2018) who found that the time spend engaging on social media have negative influence on students' academic performance. (Ghareb and Sharif 2015) found that undergraduate students use more of Facebook on daily basis with average of 1-3 hour and this negatively affects their academic performance. It is also common for people to associate poor academic achievement and procrastination with social media use. 'On average, college students report that they engage in academic procrastination between 30 and 60% of the time' (Fogel, & Nutter-Upham, 2011). Academic procrastination can be understood as knowing that one is supposed to, and perhaps even wanting to, complete an academic task but failing to perform the activity within the expected or desired time frame (Rozental, Carlbring and Andersson, 2015). Research carried out by (Glick & Orsillo 2015) found that 'Given the negative consequences of procrastination on academic performance and emotional and physical health, the frequency of this behavior is of concern. Unfortunately, despite a recent increase in research in this area, there is still much to learn about the causes and maintaining factors of procrastination.'

Raut & Patil (2016) highlights how social media influenced education sector the study revealed various positive and negative impacts of social media on education or students. It also highlighted measure to minimize the negative impact of social media on students' academic performances such as; moderating their access to social media sites, reducing the amount of time spent on social network sites. Tamayo & de la Cruz (2014) studied relationship between the use of Social Media sites and the Academic Performance of the the students of Bachelor of Science in Information Technology at Centro Escolar University- Malolos. The study shows that using Social Media impedes student's learning and directly affects the students' attendance at school. The result of the analysis was plotted in a scatter diagram to show a clear view of correlation or relationship between the variables. Social Media and Academic Performance has effect to each other. It only means that when a student gets too involve with the use of Social Media, it affects his performance in class activities and overall academic performance.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Ndaku 2013 carried out research on *the impact of social media on students' academic performance -A study of students of University of Abuja*. The aim of the study was to analyze the impact of social media on the student's academic performance. To achieve this, the survey research method was used. Subjects were drawn from the University of Abuja, using the simple random sampling technique and purposive sampling. Four research questions guided the study. Research findings showed that a great number of students in University of Abuja, had access to the internet. To this end, the researcher recommended that sites should be created for educational purposes as well. This is to create a balance between social networking and academic activities of students to avoid setbacks in the academic performance of the students. This study explores how social media affects academic performance among University of Abuja students, emphasizing the need to balance online social activities with educational engagement to mitigate negative impacts on learning outcomes.

Asemah, E.S and Edegoh, L.O.N. 2013 worked on the Influence of Social Media on the Academic Performance of the Undergraduate Students of Kogi State University, Anyigba, Nigeria. The paper examined the influence of social media on the academic performance of the undergraduate students of KogiState University. The rationale behind the study is to find out whether the exposure of the students to social media has effect on their academic performance. The paper was anchored on two theories; namely: social information processing theory and media equation theory. The survey research method was adopted, employing the questionnaire as an instrument of data collection. The findings show that undergraduate students of Kogi State University, Anyigba, Nigeria, have access to social media and that their exposure to social media is to a very great extent. Findings also show that exposure to social media has effect on the students and that the effect is negative. Findings also show that facebook is the most used social media by undergraduate students of Kogi State University. Based on the findings, the paper concludes that exposure to social media by the undergraduate students of Kogi State University has negative effect on their academic performance.

The study by (Asemah and Edegoh , 2013) is particularly relevant to understanding how social media affects undergraduates' academic performance. It particularly examines the link between social media use and academic results, which is a vital issue for stakeholders in education today. The study offers concrete proof that regular usage of social media platforms, especially Facebook, might have a negative impact on students' academic performance by concentrating on students at KogiState University in Nigeria. This study emphasizes a constant presence of social media in students' life as well as the possible academic consequences of overuse.

Furthermore, the methodology of the study—which used a survey to collect data—provides a tangible illustration of how to evaluate the influence of social media on academic performance, which is immediately applicable to other research projects of a similar nature. The results are crucial because they imply that, despite social media's potential as a useful tool for communication and information exchange, excessive use of it can undermine academic achievement and focus. In light of the growing number of digital distractions, the study's recommendations for educators, parents, and students to prioritize academic goals over social media use are especially important.

METHOD

This study adopted a quantitative research approach utilising a descriptive survey design, which involves using a self-designed questionnaire, administered on a sample of undergraduates at the University of Port Harcourt. The population of this study are undergraduates of the University of Port Harcourt. According to Information and Communication Technology Centre (ICTC) of the University of Port Harcourt, the enrolled undergraduate population size is 40,000 in 2024. The sample size of the study was 381 derived from the population using Philip Meyer's sampling size determination template. This sample size of 381 was considered appropriate for a population of 40,000 undergraduates at the University of Port Harcourt. The sampling technique adopted for this study was the Cluster Sampling Technique. This was employed because of the dispersed nature of the population of students. The researcher deemed it fit to get the elements where they stay in clusters and to avoid the possibility of double sampling in the investigation. The University of Port Harcourt comprises 14 Faculties. However, because some faculties have only recently been established at the time of his study with fewer students, they were not included in the research. Additionally, certain faculties were merged under the category of other faculties and were grouped under a collective category. Consequently, the researcher purposively selected 10 faculties that are fully enrolled with students. Each of the faculties selected was assigned 38 members of the sample.

The method of data analysis adopted for the study is the descriptive and statistical method of analysis. The following shows how the responses were analysed using the Likert scale: Strongly agree (SA) - 4 points, Agree (A) - 3 points, Disagree (D) - 2 points, Strongly Disagree (SD) - 1 point, so the average mean is 3 and any mean less than 3 was not accepted and regarded as unaccepted while those that are above were seen as accepted.

DATA ANALYSIS

The primary objective of this study is to assess the influence of social media on the academic performance of students at the University of Port Harcourt (UniPort). This section presents a detailed analysis of the data collected through a structured questionnaire distributed to the participants. A total of 381 copies of questionnaire were administered, with 375 completed responses retrieved for analysis.

The initial findings indicate a favorable perception of social media accessibility among UniPort students. Specifically, Item 1 demonstrates that a significant majority of respondents acknowledge access to a diverse range of social networking sites, reflected in a weighted mean score of 3.4, suggesting a positive total accessibility. Conversely, in Item 2, participants expressed disagreement with the assertion that Facebook is the predominant platform, achieving a lower weighted mean score of 1.4, which indicates a possible preference for alternative social media platforms.

Further insights from Item 3 reveal that respondents also disagreed with the notion that Instagram is more popular than other platforms, as indicated by a weighted mean score of 2.4. This finding underscores the complex and varied landscape of social media usage among the undergraduate population. Item 4 highlights that WhatsApp is extensively utilized for

communication and group activities, garnering a strong average response with a weighted mean score of 3.9. In stark contrast, Item 5 illustrates a lack of consensus on Twitter being a favored platform for academic discussions, resulting in a low weighted mean score of 2.1.

Analysis of time spent on social media is encapsulated in the subsequent findings. In Item 6, respondents acknowledged spending in excess of four hours daily on social media, with a weighted mean score of 3.2. However, Item 7 indicates a disagreement with the statement concerning the use of social media during lectures, yielding a weighted mean score of 2.4. This suggests that students do not engage with social media frequently during instructional periods. However, in Item 8, participants agreed that social media occupies a significant portion of their leisure time, illustrated by a weighted mean score of 3.2. Item 9 further confirms that many students utilize social media primarily for non-academic pursuits, recording a weighted mean score of 3.3. Notably, respondents in Item 10 expressed disagreement with the notion that they spend less than two hours on educational activities through social media, reflected in a mean score of 2.1, indicating a propensity to engage more for entertainment and personal interests.

The frequency of social media engagement is further articulated in Items 11 to 15. In Item 11, respondents confirmed their habit of visiting social media sites multiple times a day, reflected in a weighted mean score of 3.7. Item 12 highlights a significant level of compulsion, with respondents feeling the need to check their social media accounts every hour, evidenced by a score of 3.2. Despite this habitual usage, Item 13 indicates strong disagreement (weighted mean score of 1.5) with the concept of frequent social media engagement during exam periods, suggesting that students reduce such activities during critical academic phases. Furthermore, respondents affirmed an increase in social media activity during weekends and holidays in Item 14, receiving a weighted mean score of 3.9, and Item 15 shows consistent daily access to social media with a score of 3.7.

In evaluating educational engagement through social media, Items 16 to 20 illustrate compelling trends. Respondents in Item 16 affirmed their regular visits to educationally-focused social media sites, attaining a weighted mean score of 3.1. Similarly, in Item 17, it was noted that educational videos from YouTube is utilized frequently other than entertainment, and in Item 18, respondents conveyed membership in educational groups, both scoring 3.1. Item 19 highlights participation in online study groups via social media, achieving a mean score of 2.9, which reflects a notable inclination towards collaborative academic engagement. Lastly, respondents indicated a willingness to access research-oriented websites like ResearchGate and Google Scholar through social media links, receiving a weighted mean score of 2.9.

The analyses of responses pertaining to the impact of social media on academic studies are encompassed in Items 21 to 25. In Item 21, respondents generally agreed that social media usage positively influences their academic performance, reflected in a weighted mean score of 3.0. Additionally, Item 22 highlights the role of social media in facilitating understanding through group interactions, with a matching weighted mean score of 3.0. Notably, respondents disagreed with the claim in Item 23 that social media serves as a distraction from academic responsibilities; this assertion garnered a weighted mean score of 2.0, indicating a prevalent sentiment that social media does not detract significantly from their academic focus. Item 24 supports this perspective,

revealing strong disagreement with the notion that social media negatively influences study time, also reflected by a mean score of 2.0. Interestingly, Item 25 saw strong consensus, as respondents affirmed that social media enables them to access and share valuable academic resources, evidenced by a weighted mean score of 3.2.

The data presented to elucidate the perceived effects of social media on academic studies among respondents shows that in Item 21, participants express a consensus regarding the positive influence of social media on their academic performance, achieving a weighted mean score of 3.0. This finding suggests that the majority of respondents believe that engagement with social media platforms contributes constructively to their academic success. Furthermore, Item 22 indicate that respondents acknowledge the role of social media in enhancing their understanding of academic content through collaborative group interactions, which is also reflected in a weighted mean score of 3.0. This underscores the potential of social media as a tool for providing collective learning and idea exchange among students. In contrast, Item 23 presents a notable disagreement among participants concerning the notion that social media acts as a distraction from their academic obligations, as indicated by a lower weighted mean score of 2.0. This suggests that a significant portion of respondents do not perceive social media to be a substantial impediment to their academic responsibilities. Similarly, Item 24 reinforces this perspective, as respondents generally disagreed with the assertion that social media adversely affects their study time, achieving an identical weighted mean score of 2.0. This finding further implies that social media usage does not significantly detract from the time allocated for academic study. Lastly, in Item 25, respondents expressed strong agreement regarding the notion that social media facilitates access to and sharing of valuable academic resources, evidenced by a weighted mean score of 3.2. This indicates a recognition of social media's utility in supporting academic endeavors and resource sharing among peers.

The analysed data indicates a multifaceted relationship between social media engagement and academic performance among UniPort students, highlighting both positive influences and contextual usage patterns that merit further exploration. The analysis shows a positive perception of social media's impact on academic performance, with respondents highlighting its value in enhancing understanding, facilitating collaboration, and providing access to academic resources while downplaying its potential as a distraction from their studies.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

RQ1: What are the common social networking sites University of Port Harcourt undergraduates have access to?

Most students agree that they have access to a wide variety of social networking platforms (WMS = 3.4), which indicates that social media use is prevalent and accessible across the student body. This suggests that students are not limited in their choice of platforms, having the flexibility to engage with different social media based on their preferences or needs. The platform that stands out the most in this context is WhatsApp. Students overwhelmingly agree that WhatsApp is frequently accessed for communication and group activities (WMS = 3.9). This suggests that

WhatsApp is not only popular but also serves a functional purpose for students, helping them coordinate group activities, communicate with peers, and potentially even collaborate on academic projects.

This is consistent with existing literature, which points to WhatsApp's dominance in academic settings for collaboration, coordination, and information exchange among university students (Bouhnik & Deshen, 2014). Its widespread use can be attributed to its simplicity, low data usage, and group messaging features, which make it an ideal platform for both social and academic engagement (Church & de Oliveira, 2013). WhatsApp's ability to facilitate instant communication between peers and academic groups further enhances its utility in a university context, making it indispensable for coordinating group projects, sharing academic materials, and even organizing extracurricular activities. While students have access to a wide range of social media platforms, WhatsApp clearly stands out as the most commonly used for communication and group activities, whereas platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter are less favored for general or academic use. This shows a shift in how students are leveraging different social media platforms, with WhatsApp serving as the most central tool for both social and academic interactions.

RQ2: How many hours do University of Port Harcourt undergraduates spend on social media activities daily?

The analyses suggest that a significant number of students spend more than four hours per day on social media, with a weighted mean score of 3.2, showing that most students agree with this statement. This aligns with broader research trends, which show that young adults, particularly university students, are heavy users of social media, often spending several hours daily on various platforms (Al-Menayes, 2015). However, while social media offers valuable opportunities for information sharing, communication, and even academic collaboration, much of the time spent by these students appears to be focused on non-academic activities. This finding indicates that University of Port Harcourt undergraduates spend several hours each day on social media, with the majority spending more than four hours daily. However, most of this time is devoted to non-academic activities, reflecting the broader trend of social media being used primarily for personal enjoyment rather than educational enhancement.

RQ3: How often do undergraduates of University of Port Harcourt visit social media sites?

The findings indicate that majority of students agree they visit social media multiple times a day with particularly high engagement on weekends and holidays when they have more free time to browse, communicate, or engage with content (Andreassen et al., 2017), and a reduced tendency to use social media during exams. Their behavior suggests that social media use is a habitual part of their lives, although some moderation occurs during critical academic periods. This high frequency of social media use aligns with global patterns of young adults as frequent users of social media, with daily or multiple daily visits being the norm and affirming that social media use is deeply embedded in the lives of young adults (Pew Research Center, 2018).

RQ4: How often do University of Port Harcourt undergraduates visit educational social media sites?

The findings illustrate that University of Port Harcourt undergraduates utilize educational social media sites with a notable frequency, indicating a significant trend in integrating social media into their learning processes. Respondents generally agree that they regularly visit social media platforms dedicated to educational content. This demonstrates that students recognize the value of social media as a resource for educational engagement. This aligns with the findings of Al-Menayes (2015), who noted that social media can enhance student engagement and provide new avenues for learning. The findings reveal a clear trend of University of Port Harcourt undergraduates engaging with educational social media sites regularly. They actively seek out educational content, utilize video platforms like YouTube for learning, and participate in educational groups, reflecting a modern approach to education that leverages the advantages of social media. However, the slightly lower engagement in structured study groups and academic websites highlights an area for potential growth, suggesting that there is room for students to enhance their academic experiences further through more focused use of educational social media.

RQ5: How does the use of social media sites affect undergraduate studies at the University of Port Harcourt?

The findings here indicate that social media has a mixed but generally positive effect on students' studies suggesting that students are able to leverage social media platforms to enhance their learning, potentially by accessing academic resources, tutorials, or peer support. The ability to access educational content, such as online study groups or academic discussions, can be beneficial for students and supports findings from studies that emphasise the educational potential of social media (Tess, 2013). This finding echoes previous research that highlights the value of social media in nurturing collaborative learning environments (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016). It suggests that undergraduates at the University of Port Harcourt generally perceive social media as a helpful tool for academic improvement. It helps them better understand course materials, access valuable resources, and collaborate with peers, without significantly distracting them or negatively affecting their study time. Therefore, social media, when used effectively, plays a positive role in supporting students' academic efforts.

SUMMARY

This study aimed to assess the impact of social media on the academic experiences of undergraduates at the University of Port Harcourt. It specifically sought to identify the social networking platforms accessible to these students, quantify their daily engagement in terms of hours spent online, and analyze the frequency of their visits to both general and educational social media sites. Furthermore, the research aimed to explore how social media usage influences their academic performance. The theoretical framework for the study was grounded in the Uses and Gratifications theory and Technological Determinism theory, and it employed a survey research design. A sample size of 381 participants was determined using the formula proposed by Philip Meyer, and data collection was facilitated through a structured questionnaire. The analysis employed simple percentages, frequencies, and a four-point Likert scale.

The findings suggest that WhatsApp is the most frequently accessed social networking site among the undergraduates at the University of Port Harcourt. In terms of daily usage, most students reported spending over four hours on social media platforms. Additionally, these undergraduates engage with social media multiple times a day, with increased activity noted on weekends and holidays. The research also indicated that students regularly visit educational social media sites, recognizing their benefits. This study concludes that social media has a positive effect on the academic experiences of these undergraduates, as they regard it as a valuable tool for enhancing their studies and facilitating academic improvement.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The major challenge faced during this study was how to distribute and retrieve the questionnaire, then other problems encountered were finance, time constraint, looking for materials and combining this project with other academic work such as assignments, test and exams.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study underscore the significant role that social media plays in the daily lives of undergraduate students at the University of Port Harcourt. WhatsApp emerges as the most frequently accessed platform, highlighting its importance for both social interaction and academic engagement. The observation that a majority of students spend over four hours daily on social media reflects their heavy reliance on these platforms for communication, entertainment, and academic endeavors.

The high frequency of visits to social media sites, particularly during weekends and holidays, illustrates the pervasive influence of these platforms in the students' routines. This habitual engagement suggests that social media has become a primary channel for interaction and information sharing among undergraduates. Furthermore, students' active participation in educational social media platforms indicates their recognition of these tools as valuable resources for academic purposes. This aligns with their total perception that social media has a positive effect on their academic performance, assisting them in learning and improving their studies.

Thus, social media is not merely a social tool; it is an integral component of the undergraduate experience at the University of Port Harcourt, serving as both a means of communication and a resource for education. To maximize its benefits, academic programs may consider further integrating social media into their curricula. At the same time, it is important to address potential drawbacks, such as excessive screen time, to ensure a balanced approach to social media usage in students' academic lives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings from this study, several recommendations are proposed to enhance the academic experience of undergraduates at the University of Port Harcourt through effective

engagement with social media. First, considering that WhatsApp is the most widely utilized platform among students, it is advisable to leverage its capabilities for academic purposes. Official groups can be established for classroom discussions, enabling seamless communication between students and lecturers. Such a collaborative environment would facilitate the distribution of study materials and provide an interactive educational space that encourages engagement outside of conventional classroom settings.

Furthermore, given the substantial amount of time students spend on social media—averaging over four hours daily—it is important to promote a balanced approach to online activities and academic responsibilities. This can be achieved by offering workshops dedicated to time management and digital wellness, thereby equipping students with the necessary skills to optimize their online engagement while fulfilling their academic commitments. These workshops could help students cultivate a healthy relationship with social media, ultimately enhancing their productivity and well-being.

The frequent usage of social media, particularly during weekends and holidays, presents a valuable opportunity to organize academic activities that capitalize on these engagement patterns. Institutions should consider hosting live discussions, webinars, and study groups on social media platforms during these peak usage times. Such initiatives would not only keep students productively occupied but also promote collaborative learning experiences that extend beyond traditional classroom environments.

Additionally, there should be an active encouragement of the use of educational social media platforms by incorporating them into course materials. Educators can provide students with a curated list of valuable academic channels that enhance their learning. This approach can guide students in traversing the vast landscape of social media with a focus on academic enrichment, thereby nurturing an environment conducive to learning.

Finally, it is important to promote the positive aspects of social media as an academic tool. Encouraging lecturers to create and share educational content on these platforms can stimulate active academic discussions, reinforcing the perception of social media as a beneficial resource for learning. The university can effectively harness the potential of these platforms to enhance students' academic experiences and outcomes if they integrate educational opportunities into the social media landscape.

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