Social Media Impact on Students' Academic Development. A Study of Unizik Students

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ABSTRACT   Published Online: December 22, 2025

This study investigates the impact of social media on the academic development of undergraduate students at Nnamdi Azikiwe University (UNIZIK), Awka. The primary objective is to assess how students utilize social media for academic purposes, identify the most commonly used platforms, examine its effects on academic performance, and determine the factors that hinder effective academic use of social media. Grounded in Social Learning Theory, which emphasizes learning through observation and interaction, the research aims to explore how social media can be harnessed as a tool for academic support and growth. A quantitative research approach was employed, utilizing a survey method to collect data from 300 undergraduate students. This sample size was determined using the Comrey and Lee (1992) method. The survey focused on students' social media usage patterns and their perceived impact on academic performance. The findings revealed that all respondents actively engage with social media, with WhatsApp and Facebook emerging as the most preferred platforms for academic activities. Contrary to many prior studies that suggested a negative impact, 5% of students in this study reported a positive influence of social media on their academic performance. Many students use social media to access supplementary academic resources, complementing their classroom learning. However, challenges such as poor internet connectivity, distractions, and difficulty in locating relevant academic content were identified as barriers to effective use. Despite these challenges, students generally view social media as a valuable academic tool. The study recommends that students focus on academic content while using social media, limit time spent on non-educational activities, and that educators increase the availability of academic resources on these platforms. These strategies aim to balance the academic benefits of social media with its potential distractions, maximizing its positive impact. The study underscores the dual nature of social media, calling for a balanced and focused approach by both students and educators to enhance its academic value.

KEYWORDS:
Social media, Academic development, Undergraduate students, Academic performance, educational resources

INTRODUCTION

The advent of modern communication technology has revolutionized the way people connect and interact, significantly impacting both social and educational landscapes. In the realm of higher education, these advancements have created new opportunities for institutions, educators, and students to engage with the learning process in innovative ways. As a result, there has been a rapid increase in the adoption of online teaching and learning platforms across many colleges and universities. Technology, particularly social media, has transformed human interaction, shrinking the world into a global village as envisioned by McLuhan.

Social media platforms have become integral to students' lives, influencing both their academic and social experiences. As noted by Boateng and Amankwaa (2016), social media has facilitated a collaborative environment where instructors, students, and other academic stakeholders can interact to promote knowledge construction in teaching and learning. The use of social media among undergraduate students is well-documented and supported by extensive literature

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(Asemah & Edegoh, 2012). Social media's unique characteristics and flexibility allow students to engage in academic pursuits efficiently. Shaharima (2018) highlights that social media enables users to communicate quickly and effectively, offering opportunities for creating influential networks, sharing innovative ideas, and reaching new audiences (Parvin, 2018).

However, social media usage among students also has its drawbacks. Tartari (2015) points out that some students become addicted to these platforms, leading to negative academic consequences. This study aims to empirically assess the impact of social media on the academic performance of undergraduate students at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Guided by three research questions and supported by a theoretical framework, the findings will be quantitatively analyzed to draw effective conclusions and recommendations.

The emergence of social media has created a distinct divide between the online and offline worlds. These online platforms, which connect people across vast distances, have made communication easier and faster. Young people, especially students, use social media to establish connections, engage in diverse relationships, and participate in numerous online communities. The use of social media among students has sparked significant discussion regarding its impact on academic performance. Connolly (2011) notes that the frequent use of social media tools by students has implications for their educational outcomes.

With the growing use of these tools by students as early as secondary school (Anderson & Rainie, 2012), their impact on education cannot be overlooked. Academic performance is often measured by the application of knowledge, skills, and understanding, and the grades students achieve in examinations (Banquil et al., 2020). Cheung et al. (2012) observe that social media, especially platforms like Facebook, are commonly used by students to communicate and explore information. However, excessive use of social media can detract from students' academic responsibilities, as they may prioritize online activities over their studies (Nonis & Hudson, 2016).

Social networks can be particularly problematic for teenagers, creating false impressions of relationships and encouraging impulsive behavior (Osharie, 2015). While some argue that social media provides access to knowledge and facilitates quick information exchange (Pathak, 2022), others believe it distracts students from their studies. Despite these concerns, social media remains a valuable tool for information dissemination and collaborative interaction, as noted by Ugwulebo and Okoro (2016).

Social networking has become a global phenomenon, with people from all over the world using these platforms to connect, share content, and network. For students, social media offers a platform to enhance self-esteem (Tazghini & Siedlecki, 2013), build and maintain relationships (Ellison, Vitak, Gray & Lampe, 2014), and engage in academic and social integration (Taylor & Greenfield, 2012). The potential of social media to support independent, self-directed learning and encourage active knowledge production is widely recognized (Dumpit & Fernandez, 2017).

The Impact of Social Media on Academic Performance
While social media offers numerous benefits for students, its use in academic contexts is still a topic of debate. According to Jones et al. (2010), although most students are active on social media, a significant percentage do not use these platforms for academic purposes. Tariq et al. (2012) warn that social media can divert students' attention away from their studies, leading to non-educational activities and time-wasting. Studies show that students often use social networking sites like Facebook for entertainment rather than academic purposes (Ellison, Stienfield & Lamp, 2007).

Social media has become a dominant force in the lives of young people, offering a platform for communication, entertainment, and information exchange. Grossman (2010) suggests that if Facebook were a country, it would rank as the third largest in the world, highlighting the platform's widespread influence. Social media's role in education is undeniable, with many universities using these platforms to facilitate communication between students, professors, and staff (Selwyn, 2009).

In Nigeria, social media usage among students is significant, with platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram being the most popular (Udodiong, 2019). These platforms are used by undergraduate students for professional networking, academic consultations, and group discussions. However, the extent to which UNIZIK students use social media for academic purposes remains unclear, necessitating this study's investigation.

Statement Of Problem
Social media has become inseparable from students' daily experiences, offering opportunities for knowledge exchange, collaboration, and resource sharing. Yet, the academic impact of these platforms remains contested. While social media can enhance learning, it can also distract students, leading to poor study habits and reduced performance. There is limited empirical evidence in the Nigerian context, particularly at UNIZIK, regarding which social media platforms students use most academically, how these platforms influence performance, and the barriers that impede effective usage. Understanding these dynamics is critical for optimizing social media's educational potential.

Objectives of the Study
The primary objective of this study is to assess the use of social media for academic purposes among undergraduates at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The specific objectives are:
1. To identify the social media platforms most commonly used for academic purposes.
2. To evaluate the impact of social media on students' academic performance.

3. To identify factors that may hinder students from using social media for academic purposes

Research Questions

the following research questions guided this work.

1. What are the social media platforms used mostly by students for academic purposes?
2. What are the impact of social media on students academic performance
3. What are the factors that hinder students from using social media for academic purposes

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media in Higher Education

Social media refers to Internet-based applications built on Web 2.0 principles, enabling users to create, share, and interact with user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube, blogs, and forums provide spaces for academic interaction, collaborative learning, and information dissemination (Alnsour et al., 2018; Zhou & Zimmermann, 2013).

Globally, studies indicate that social media enhances students' collaborative abilities, motivation, and access to personalized course materials (Wheeler, Yeomans, & Wheeler, 2018; Rifkin, Longnecker, Leach, & Ortia, 2019). In Africa, WhatsApp and Facebook dominate academic interactions, with students using these platforms to form study groups, coordinate assignments, and share educational resources (Shaharima, 2018; Udodiong, 2019).

Social Media and Academic Performance

The relationship between social media and academic performance is complex. Some scholars argue that excessive use leads to distraction and lower academic outcomes (Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010; Paul, Baker, & Cochran, 2012), while others emphasize its potential as a learning aid when used purposefully (Hampshire, 2010; Shaharima, 2018). Pathak (2022) notes that social media facilitates quick access to information and peer support, enhancing learning efficiency, whereas Tariq et al. (2012) warn of the negative consequences of unstructured usage.

Students' academic performance is often measured through grades, knowledge mastery, and skill acquisition (Komba, Hizza, & Jonathan, 2013; Yunlok, 2010). Social media can support these outcomes by enabling resource sharing, academic discussion, and collaboration, yet its misuse can result in procrastination and reduced engagement in structured learning activities (Agwi & Ogwueleka, 2018; Owusu-Acheaw & Larson, 2015).

Social Media Exposure and Potential Addiction

Undergraduates increasingly rely on smartphones and computers for constant social media engagement (Kuss & Griffiths, 2011). Excessive engagement may lead to addiction, characterized by compulsive checking of notifications and time-wasting on non-academic activities

(Morahan-Martin & Schumacher, 2000). Studies in Nigerian universities reveal that students often prioritize social media over essential academic tasks, affecting concentration, learning motivation, and emotional well-being (Olowu & Seri, 2012; Ogedebe, Emmanuel, & Musa, 2012; Olubiyi, 2012).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Social Learning Theory

Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977) emphasizes learning through observation, imitation, and interaction within a social context. Social media aligns with SLT by fostering collaboration, engagement, and vicarious learning. Students can learn by observing peers' posts, participating in discussions, and accessing shared academic resources, which complements traditional classroom learning. The interaction of behavior, cognition, and environment explains how social media influences academic habits and access to educational content.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A quantitative survey method was employed to collect data from a representative sample of undergraduate students at UNIZIK.

Population of the Study

The population comprised 39,795 undergraduates at UNIZIK (Engineer Dr. Azubuike Aniedo, 2024).

Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

A sample of 300 students was selected using the Comrey and Lee (1992) method, sufficient to represent the larger population.

Instrument for Data Collection

A structured questionnaire was used, with sections on demographics and psychographic variables addressing the study objectives.

DATA ANALYSIS

Research Question 1: Which Social Media Platform Do Students Use Most for Academic Purposes?

Table 1: Most Used Social Media Platforms for Academic Purposes

Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Facebook	98	33
Twitter	32	11
WhatsApp	127	43
YouTube	39	13
Total	**296**	**100**

Table 2: Students' Agreement on Using Social Media Academically

Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Agree	42	14
Strongly Agree	23	8

	39	13
Disagree	39	13
Strongly Disagree	192	65
Total	**296**	**100**

Research Question 3: Challenges Using Social Media for Academic Work

Table 3: Challenges Faced by Students Using Social Media for Academic Purposes

Option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Agree	132	45
Strongly Agree	164	55
Disagree	-	-
Strongly Disagree	-	-
Total	**296**	**100**

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The data in Table 1examines the social media platform which students use most. The table shows that all respondents (100%) are active on social media, demonstrating the ubiquity of these platforms among undergraduate students at UNIZIK. Among the platforms, WhatsApp emerged as the most preferred for academic purposes, with 127 respondents (43%) indicating frequent usage. Facebook followed closely, with 98 respondents (33%) reporting it as their preferred academic platform. Twitter and YouTube were less commonly used, accounting for 11% and 13% respectively.

These findings suggest that students favor platforms that facilitate instant communication, file sharing, and group interactions, which are crucial for collaborative academic activities. WhatsApp's dominance may be attributed to its simplicity, low data requirements, and strong group management features, making it ideal for sharing lecture notes, coordinating group projects, and discussing academic matters. Facebook's popularity can be linked to its broader functionality, including academic groups, events, and discussion forums.

The current results align with Udodiong (2019), who found that Nigerian undergraduates predominantly use WhatsApp and Facebook for educational purposes, highlighting these platforms' central role in peer-to-peer academic support. Similarly, Shaharima (2018) noted that social media facilitates access to study groups, supplementary resources, and peer feedback, reinforcing its educational value.

The findings also demonstrate a clear preference hierarchy among social media platforms for academic use, which has implications for educators designing digital learning strategies. Platforms like Twitter and YouTube, although useful for information dissemination and instructional videos, are less central for direct student interaction, suggesting the need to integrate multiple platforms to maximize academic engagement.

Table 2 examines the impact of social media on students academic work. The table reveals that 65% of respondents strongly disagreed that social media usage negatively affects their academic performance, while only 13% disagreed, and 22% either agreed or strongly agreed. This indicates that a substantial majority of students perceive social media as either neutral or beneficial to their academic outcomes.

These findings challenge studies suggesting that social media negatively impacts academic performance. Larbi, Adu-Kumi, Tettey, and Godfred (2021) argued that increased social media use for networking and entertainment reduces library visits and independent study, potentially diminishing academic achievement. However, the current study shows that when students purposefully use social media to complement classroom instruction, the platform serves as a positive academic tool.

Specifically, 56% of respondents reported using materials obtained from social media to supplement their class learning, reinforcing the notion that social media can facilitate meaningful academic engagement. This finding aligns with Hampshire (2010), who reported that students using social media for educational collaboration do not experience adverse academic effects. It also reflects Shaharima's (2018) argument that social media enhances communication, collaboration, and access to academic resources, while Parvin (2018) emphasized its capacity to transform educational networks, enabling students to exchange ideas and gain exposure to diverse perspectives.

Thus, the study highlights a dual impact of social media: while it holds potential for distraction, it can significantly enhance academic performance when used strategically. This suggests that student awareness, self-regulation, and purposeful engagement are key factors determining whether social media is a positive or negative influence on learning.

Table 3 reveals the factors that hinder students use of social media for academic purposes. The table presents a clear picture of the challenges students face in leveraging social media for educational purposes. A combined 100% of respondents (55% strongly agree; 45% agree) acknowledged encountering difficulties in using social media effectively for academic work. The most prominent challenges include:

1. Lack of consistent internet subscription.
2. Poor network connectivity, particularly in dormitory and off-campus areas.
3. Distractions from advertisements, irrelevant notifications, and entertainment content.
4. Difficulties in sourcing reliable academic materials on social media platforms.

These findings illustrate the barriers limiting the potential of social media as a tool for academic development. Tariq et al. (2012) support these results, warning that "social network addicts" often devote excessive attention to non-academic activities, reducing focus on studies and increasing engagement in frivolous or unethical behaviors, such as time-wasting browsing, casual chatting, and exposure to inappropriate content.

The study underscores that access to technology alone is insufficient to guarantee educational benefits. Structural

factors, such as internet availability and platform design, along with individual factors like self-discipline and purpose-driven engagement, significantly influence academic outcomes. Addressing these challenges requires multi-faceted interventions, including institutional support for reliable internet access, guided social media usage policies, and training for students on identifying credible academic resources online.

Comparative Analysis

Overall, the study's findings reflect the nuanced nature of social media in education. While students at UNIZIK actively engage with platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook, their academic benefits are contingent on purposeful usage, complementing formal instruction rather than replacing it. This aligns with the Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), which emphasizes that learning occurs through observation and interaction within a social environment; social media provides the context for these interactions when appropriately managed.

Comparatively, studies such as Kirschner and Karpinski (2010) and Paul, Baker, and Cochran (2012) report negative academic impacts in cases of unstructured social media use. However, consistent with Hampshire (2010) and Shaharima (2018), this study suggests that structured, academically oriented engagement can mitigate negative effects, enhancing collaborative learning, access to information, and academic performance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study on the impact of social media on students' academic development at UNIZIK, the following recommendations are proposed:

a) Prioritize Academic Use Students should primarily utilize social media platforms for academic purposes. This includes engaging with educational content, participating in academic discussions, and accessing scholarly resources to enhance their learning experiences.

b) Limit Time on Social Media: Students are encouraged to limit their daily time spent on social media. Instead, they should allocate these hours to reading academic texts, novels, and other educational materials that contribute to their knowledge and academic growth.

c)Enhance Academic Content on Social Media: Educational institutions and educators should expand the presence of academic content on social networking sites. Creating dedicated pages and groups for academic discussions, resources, and collaborations can help students leverage social media for academic advancement and reduce negative impacts on their performance.

d)Balance Social and Academic Activities: Students should strive to balance recreational social interactions with academic activities. Emphasis should be placed on dedicating more time to research and academic work, while managing time spent on casual chatting.

e)Focus on Academic Relevance: The use of social media should be oriented towards its academic relevance. Students should be guided to use these platforms for constructive academic purposes and to avoid engaging in activities that detract from their educational objectives.

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