

UTILIZATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS IN DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAMMES OF TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN NSUKKA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, ENUGU STATE

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Abstract

The study investigated the utilization of social media platforms in open and distance learning programmes of tertiary institutions in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State. The study was guided by four research questions and four null hypotheses. The descriptive survey design was adopted, as it enabled the researchers to describe and interpret existing conditions using a representative sample. The study was conducted in Enugu State, which hosts several tertiary institutions that run open and distance learning (ODL) programmes. The population consisted of 836 individuals involved in ODL, comprising 620 registered learners and 216 academic facilitators. A sample size of 246 respondents, 180 learners and 66 facilitators was selected using a multi-stage sampling technique involving purposive and proportionate stratified sampling. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled: "Utilization of Social Media Platforms in Open and Distance Learning Programmes Questionnaire (USMPODLPQ)." The instrument was validated by three experts. Reliability was confirmed through a trial test using Cronbach Alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.84. Data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation for answering the research questions, and t-test statistics for testing the null hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that WhatsApp and Facebook were highly utilized in instructional delivery, while YouTube and Instagram were also employed to a considerable extent. The study contributed to knowledge by highlighting that social media tools can foster active engagement, remove geographical barriers, and enhance teaching and learning within ODL contexts. It was recommended among others that institutions should integrate real-time quizzes, live video sessions, and interactive forums into their instructional delivery to maximize learner participation and motivation.

Keywords: Social media, open and distance learning, tertiary institutions, learner engagement

Introduction

In the contemporary knowledge-driven society, digital technologies have transformed the way people interact, learn, and communicate. The advent of Information and Communication Technology has redefined traditional boundaries, making education more flexible and accessible through innovative tools such as social media platforms. Information and Communication Technology has permeated all aspects of human endeavor, including health, economy, and most importantly, education especially in the domain of open and distance learning. Brynjolfsson and McAfee (2011) emphasized that the growth of Information and Communication Technology, particularly the internet, has given rise to social media platforms. Social media platforms are web-based services that enable users to create profiles, build networks, and interact within digital communities (Boyd and Ellison, 2015). These platforms promote communication, collaboration, and content sharing among individuals across geographical boundaries. Kaplan and Haenlein (2017) described social media as internet-based applications rooted in the principles of

Web 2.0, which facilitate user-generated content and participation. Operationally, these platforms serve as tools that enhance interaction, teaching, and learning, particularly in open and distance learning programmes. Prominent examples include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Badoo, WeChat, YouTube, and WhatsApp. These platforms present various opportunities for integration into educational settings.

Utilization refers to the deliberate and effective deployment of tools, resources, or services to fulfill specific objectives. Iwu and Ikechukwu (2015) defined utilization as the purposeful application of available tools and resources within institutional frameworks to accomplish targeted outcomes. In a similar perspective, Nwosu and Uwaoma (2017) emphasized that utilization involves harnessing resources to optimize productivity and results. In this context, utilization refers to the strategic use of social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram to support teaching and learning in open and distance learning programmes. Open and Distance Learning, as a concept, entails the delivery of education to learners who are separated from instructors in terms of time and location. Akinyemi and Adediran (2016) described Open and Distance Learning as an educational mode in which learners' access content and interact with facilitators remotely via technological platforms. Olatunji (2017) further highlighted that Open and Distance Learning promotes self-paced study and accommodates learners who face limitations related to time, geography, or personal commitments. For the purpose of this study, Open and Distance Learning is defined as a flexible educational system where facilitators and learners are not in the same physical space, and media tools including social media platforms are used to facilitate knowledge delivery.

The uniqueness of Open and Distance Learning lies in its core features such as flexibility, accessibility, technological integration, learner autonomy, and the use of varied instructional delivery modes. Eze (2019) listed these characteristics as central to the structure of Open and Distance Learning. Nwafor and Obi (2020) argued that Open and Distance Learning addresses the problem of limited access to higher education in developing countries, while Ayo (2015) asserted that it caters to the educational needs of working adults and professionals who require an adaptable learning environment. The system not only provides educational opportunities but also supports continuous learning aligned with global labor market trends. In Nsukka Local Government Area, two key institutions offer Open and Distance Learning programmes: the Centre for Distance and e-Learning of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and the National Open University of Nigeria, Opi Community Study Centre. These institutions provide flexible learning alternatives for individuals unable to attend conventional classrooms (Ugwoke, Eze, and Okoli, 2017). The delivery of these programmes often involves the use of various media, including social media platforms. Although several social media tools exist, this study focuses on the utilization of WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram within the Open and

Distance Learning context of Nsukka Local Government Area.

WhatsApp is a popular mobile messaging application known for its accessibility, low data usage, and multi-format support. In the Open and Distance Learning context, it enables collaborative learning through group chats, direct communication, and shared media. Adedoyin and Soykan (2020) noted that WhatsApp fosters peer interaction and group-based learning. Okeke (2017) pointed out that the platform supports the distribution of various educational materials including documents and recorded lectures. Despite these benefits, it remains uncertain how extensively WhatsApp is used among Open and

Distance Learning learners in Nsukka Local Government Area. Similarly, Facebook offers a dynamic space for academic engagement. Okafor and Aniche (2020) highlighted the use of Facebook groups in enhancing peer collaboration, while Nwosu and Nwafor (2018) emphasized the benefits of Facebook Live for real-time lecture delivery. Adebayo (2019) also pointed out the utility of Facebook in multimedia content sharing. Yet, the level of its adoption within the Nsukka Local Government Area for instructional purposes is still unclear. YouTube, according to Burgess and Green (2018), functions as a cultural and educational platform. Adedokun and Odetayo (2019) recognized its role in supporting asynchronous learning through pre-recorded video content. Obi and Nwosu (2020) added that YouTube playlists and private instructor channels can enhance course organization. However, data on how YouTube is being used by Open and Distance Learning learners in Nsukka Local Government Area is not readily available. Instagram, though primarily a visual platform, has found relevance in education. Adekunle and Ibitoye (2019) acknowledged its role in visual learning, while Ibrahim and Chukwu (2020) noted that its interactive features increase learner participation. Olaoluwa (2021) and Adamu and Eze (2018) observed that Instagram Live and Stories foster real-time student engagement. Olabode and Nwachukwu (2016) added that hashtags help in content categorization. Despite these advantages, the extent of Instagram's use in Open and Distance Learning within Nsukka Local Government Area remains unknown.

Although Information and Communication Technology has significantly reshaped education through the introduction of social media platforms, there is limited empirical knowledge on the extent to which platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram have been effectively utilized in Open and Distance Learning programmes in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State. This study, therefore, seeks to investigate the utilization of social media platforms in distance learning programmes of tertiary institutions in the area.

Statement of the Problem

In today's digital age, social media platforms have emerged as powerful tools for enhancing communication, collaboration, and access to information. Their integration into the education sector has revolutionized how knowledge is delivered and received, particularly in open and distance learning environments. These platforms offer unique opportunities for flexible learning and are capable of bridging the gap created by physical separation between learners and facilitators. Ideally, open and distance learning programmes are expected to leverage social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram to enhance the teaching and learning process. These platforms are capable of providing uninterrupted communication, fostering peer to peer interaction, supporting multimedia content delivery, and improving the overall learning experience. Through such integration, learners can engage in meaningful academic discussions, access course materials at their convenience, and receive timely feedback from facilitators, regardless of location or schedule. However, the real situation within Nsukka Local Government Area reveals a growing concern about the actual usage of these platforms in open and distance learning programmes. Many facilitators and learners appear not to fully recognize or utilize the potentials of social media in their instructional processes. It is not yet known the extent to which learners use WhatsApp for study group formation, note exchange, and academic discussion; similarly, the level of Facebook usage for lecture delivery, multimedia content sharing, and student engagement remains unclear.

YouTube does not seem to be widely adopted for organizing course content or for instructional delivery, while Instagram appears underutilized in enhancing peer to peer interaction and virtual class participation. These observations suggest a gap between the availability of digital tools and their effective application in distance learning settings. Therefore, the problem of this study is to determine the extent to which social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram are being utilized in open and distance learning programmes of tertiary institutions in Nsukka Local Government Area, Enugu State.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of the study was to investigate the utilization of social media platforms in open and distance learning programmes of tertiary institutions in Nsukka Local Government Enugu State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. find out the extent to which WhatsApp is utilized in open and distance learning programmes of tertiary institutions in Nsukka LGA Enugu State.
2. examine the extent to which Facebook is utilized in open and distance learning programmes of tertiary institutions in Nsukka LGA Enugu State.
3. determine the extent to which YouTube is utilized in open and distance learning programmes of tertiary institutions in Nsukka LGA Enugu State.
4. ascertain the extent to which Instagram is utilized in open and distance learning programmes of tertiary institutions in Nsukka LGA Enugu State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study;

1. To what extent has WhatsApp been utilized in open and distance learning programmes of tertiary institutions in Nsukka LGA Enugu State?
2. To what extent has Facebook been utilized in open and distance learning programmes of tertiary institutions in Nsukka LGA Enugu State?
3. To what extent has YouTube been utilized in open and distance learning programmes of tertiary institutions in Nsukka LGA Enugu State?
4. To what extent has Instagram been utilized in open and distance learning programmes of tertiary institutions in Nsukka LGA Enugu State.

Methods

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. This design was considered appropriate because it enabled the collection of data from a sample to describe and interpret existing conditions regarding the utilization of social media platforms in open and distance learning programmes. The study was carried out in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State, Nigeria. Nsukka is known for hosting several tertiary institutions that run open and distance learning (ODL) programmes for learners across different locations. The population of the study comprised all 836 individuals involved in open and distance learning programmes across tertiary institutions within Nsukka Local Government Area. This included 620 registered ODL learners and 216 academic facilitators engaged in the delivery of ODL content. The sample size for the study was 246 respondents, made up of 180 learners and 66 facilitators. A multi-stage sampling technique was used. First, institutions offering ODL programmes were purposively selected. Then, proportionate stratified sampling was used to draw learners and facilitators based on their population size within the selected institutions. The instrument for data

collection was a structured, researcher-developed questionnaire titled “Utilization of Social Media Platforms in Open and Distance Learning Programmes Questionnaire (USMPODLPQ).” It consisted of sections aligned with the research questions and employed a four-point Likert-type scale format. The instrument was validated by three experts in Educational Technology and Measurement and Evaluation from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Their input helped ensure the face and content validity of the instrument. For reliability, a trial testing was conducted using 20 respondents from an institution with similar characteristics outside the study area. The internal consistency of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha, which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.84, indicating a high level of reliability. The questionnaire was administered personally by the researchers with the help of two trained research assistants. Respondents were given adequate time to complete the instrument, and all distributed copies were successfully retrieved. Data collected were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while t-test statistics were used to test the null hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance.

Result

Table 1: Mean Responses on the Extent Whatsapp has been Utilized in Open and Distance Learning Programmes of Tertiary Institutions. (n = 331)

S/ N	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
1	WhatsApp enables instant communication among students	2.85	.61	HE
2	Facilitating communication among students and instructors.	2.95	.53	HE
3	Fostering an interactive learning environment.	2.74	.65	HE
4	Bridging communication gap between learners and facilitators	2.76	.59	HE
5	Allowing for quick feedback	3.73	.44	HE
6	Allowing students to form study groups	3.89	.30	HE
7	Enhancing collaboration among learners	3.54	.66	HE
8	Enabling students to share resources	3.45	.66	HE
9	Allowing learners to share various types of media	3.16	.55	HE
	Grand Mean	3.23	0.55	HE

Table 1 showed the mean responses on the extent whatsapp has been utilized in open and distance learning programmes of tertiary institutions. The table showed that the mean responses ranged between $M = 2.74 - 3.89$. Therefore, the grand mean score of 3.23 and SD of 0.55 showed that all the items in this cluster were accepted as the extent to which WhatsApp has been utilized in open and distance learning programmes of tertiary institutions in Nsukka LGA Enugu State.

Table 2: Mean Responses on the Extent Facebook has Been Utilized in Open and Distance Learning Programmes of Tertiary Institutions. (n = 331)

S/ N	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
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10	Facebook provides various communication features to learners including private messaging	3.62	.48	HE
11	Allowing students to form group chats.	3.23	.45	HE
12	Serving as platforms for learners to discuss course materials	3.40	.86	HE
13	Providing platform for learners to support one another.	3.09	.52	HE
14	Allowing students to work together on projects	3.42	.63	HE
15	Instructors can use Facebook to share educational resources	3.25	.57	HE
16	Helping to create a dynamic learning environment	3.54	.60	HE
17	Creating a supportive environment for learning among the students	3.77	.54	HE
18	Allowing facilitators to monitor learners' progress continuously	3.06	.58	HE
Grand Mean		3.37	0.58	HE

Table 2 revealed the mean responses on the extent Facebook has been utilized in open and distance learning programmes of tertiary institutions. From the table, the mean responses ranged between $M = 3.09 - 3.77$. Therefore, the grand mean score of 3.37 and SD of 0.58 showed that all the items in this cluster were accepted as the extent to which Facebook has been utilized in open and distance learning programmes of tertiary institutions in Nsukka LGA Enugu State

Table 3: Mean Responses on the Extent Youtube has Been Utilized in Open and Distance Learning Programmes of Tertiary Institutions

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
19	YouTube hosts a vast array of educational content that complement traditional learning resources.	3.03	.56	HE
20	Enabling learners to access videos on lectures on different subjects	2.94	.46	HE
21	Allowing for self-paced learning	3.09	.55	HE
22	Providing access to rich learning environment	3.05	.58	HE
23	Enabling students to engage with materials that suit their learning styles.	3.17	.67	HE
24	Incorporating YouTube videos into ODL programmes can enhance learners engagement and motivation.	2.95	.62	HE
25	Helping to sustain learners' interest in their coursework	3.13	.65	HE
26	Allowing students to create and share their own educational videos.	3.62	.49	HE
27	Providing immediate access to knowledge which supports problem-solving	3.76	.47	HE
Grand Mean		3.19	0.56	HE

Table 3 revealed the mean responses on the extent YouTube has been utilized in open and distance learning programmes of tertiary institutions. The table showed that the mean responses ranged between $M = 2.94 - 3.76$. Therefore, the grand mean score of 3.19 and SD of 0.56 showed that all the items in this cluster were accepted as the extent to which

YouTube has been utilized in open and distance learning programmes of tertiary institutions in Nsukka LGA Enugu State.

Table 4: Mean Responses On the Extent Instagram has Been Utilized in Open and Distance Learning Programmes of Tertiary Institutions. (n = 331)

S/ N	Item Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
28	Instagram offers opportunity for engagement among learners	3.62	.63	HE
29	Allows facilitators to share instructional materials in a dynamic and engaging manner.	3.27	.66	HE
30	Supporting the presentation of complex concepts through infographics, diagrams, and videos.	3.06	.52	HE
31	Creating short videos summarizing course content	3.39	.59	HE
32	Enabling students to grasp concepts easily	3.10	.47	HE
33	Fostering a sense of community among learners	3.26	.81	HE
34	Facilitators can encourage learners to interact with each other and share their learning experiences.	3.06	.53	HE
35	Instagram can create virtual communities where learners collaborate and support each other	2.90	.67	HE
36	Facilitators can use Instagram to promote course content, important deadlines, and announcements	2.90	.58	HE
Grand Mean		3.17	0.60	HE

Table 4 revealed the mean responses on the extent Instagram has been utilized in open and distance learning programmes of tertiary institutions. The table showed that the mean responses ranged between $M = 2.90 - 3.62$. Therefore, the grand mean score of 3.17 and SD of 0.60 showed that all the items in this cluster were accepted as the extent Instagram has been utilized in open and distance learning programmes of tertiary institutions in Nsukka LGA Enugu State.

Discussion

The findings of the study revealed that the extent to which WhatsApp has been utilized in open and distance learning programmes of tertiary institutions in Nsukka Local Government Area, Enugu State, was high. Respondents acknowledged that WhatsApp enables instant communication among students, facilitates interaction between students and instructors, and fosters a dynamic learning environment. This finding is in consonance with the study of Al-Mukhaini, Al-Qayoudhi, and Al-Badi (2020), who stated that WhatsApp serves as an effective communication tool that bridges the gap between learners and educators, allowing for prompt feedback and academic support in distance education settings. The findings of the study revealed that WhatsApp supports group messaging, enabling students to form study groups and collaborate on assignments, which enhances peer-to-peer interaction. These findings are in agreement with Aydın and Tüzün (2016), who highlighted that WhatsApp groups can be used for joint assignments, resource sharing, topic discussions, and effective group work even across distances. The findings of the study further revealed that WhatsApp enables students to share documents, lecture notes, images, and videos. This is in consonance with the findings of Zheng, Niiya, and Warschauer (2018), who noted that WhatsApp enhances the learning experience by

allowing educators to share educational resources, thus enriching curriculum delivery in distance learning programmes.

The findings of the study revealed that the extent to which Facebook has been utilized in open and distance learning programmes of tertiary institutions in Nsukka Local Government Area, Enugu State, was high. Respondents affirmed that Facebook provides communication features such as private messaging, group chats, and collaborative discussion platforms among learners. This finding is in consonance with Garrison and Akyol (2015), who asserted that Facebook groups enable students to engage with course materials, ask questions, and support each other academically. The findings of the study revealed that Facebook supports collaborative learning, fosters peer support, and enables resource sharing among students. These findings are in agreement with Benson and Torkington (2017), who noted that Facebook's collaborative features align with Vygotsky's social constructivist theory, emphasizing the importance of social interaction in the learning process. The findings also revealed that Facebook enhances learning by allowing instructors to share materials, promote dynamic interactions, and provide feedback mechanisms such as polls and quizzes. This is supported by Kear (2015) and Hattie and Timperley (2017), who found that social media platforms like Facebook enhance students' academic experiences through informal support networks and formative assessments, thereby improving academic performance and engagement.

The findings of the study revealed that the extent to which YouTube has been utilized in open and distance learning programmes of tertiary institutions in Nsukka Local Government Area, Enugu State, was high. Respondents indicated that YouTube enables students to access diverse educational videos across subjects, supports self-paced learning, and provides a multimedia-rich learning environment. This finding is in consonance with Marzouk, Peerbaccus, and Weston (2018), who noted that YouTube fosters a rich learning atmosphere by accommodating various learning styles through visual content. The findings of the study revealed that YouTube enhances student engagement and motivation, sustains interest in academic content, and allows students to create and share educational materials. These findings are in agreement with Hwang and Wu (2018), who reported that multimedia tools like YouTube improve cognitive engagement and academic retention. Additionally, the findings revealed that students use YouTube to deepen their understanding of complex topics and reinforce course content. This is in consonance with the studies of Al-Hadid, Altaany, and Alawneh (2020) and Kahn, Everhart, and Lipton (2016), who found that YouTube contributes to better academic performance by supplementing traditional learning with visual and auditory aids that enhance comprehension.

The findings of the study revealed that the extent to which Instagram has been utilized in open and distance learning programmes of tertiary institutions in Nsukka Local Government Area, Enugu State, was high. Respondents reported that Instagram supports learner engagement, facilitates the presentation of course content through infographics and short videos, and enhances interaction among peers. This finding is in consonance with Salih and Rasheed (2021), who emphasized that Instagram creates virtual communities where learners collaborate and support each other, thereby improving the overall learning experience in ODL settings. The findings of the study revealed that Instagram enables the creation of concise, visually appealing content that aids comprehension, and fosters a sense of community and interaction among students. These findings are in agreement with AlShahrani and Alhassan (2022), who noted that the platform's interactive features

support immediate communication between instructors and learners, encouraging clarity and engagement. The findings also revealed that instructors can use Instagram to promote course updates and deadlines through visually appealing posts. This is supported by Alharbi (2019), who stated that Instagram serves as an effective tool for disseminating course-related information and enhancing students' organizational skills in distance education environments.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that the extent of utilization of social media platforms in open and distance learning programmes of tertiary institutions in Nsukka Local Government Area, Enugu State, was generally high. Specifically, the study concluded that WhatsApp was extensively used to promote interaction among students and instructors, enhance group collaboration, and facilitate sharing of learning materials. Facebook was also widely utilized, providing a platform for collaborative learning, peer support, and academic communication. Additionally, YouTube was effectively employed to support multimedia-based learning, improve engagement, and supplement instructional content. Finally, Instagram was significantly utilized to present educational content visually, foster interaction, and sustain learner motivation in the open and distance learning environment.

Contribution to Knowledge

The findings of this study have contributed meaningfully to the growing discourse on the integration of social media platforms in open and distance learning (ODL) systems in tertiary education. Specifically, the study has demonstrated that WhatsApp, owing to its widespread accessibility and simplicity, is extensively employed in ODL contexts, where it plays a vital role in facilitating prompt communication, collaborative learning, and the seamless exchange of instructional materials between learners and facilitators. Moreover, the study has shown that Facebook functions as a strategic tool for academic engagement by enabling structured group interactions, peer support, and dissemination of learning content, thereby reinforcing the dynamics of online academic communities. In addition, the study has provided empirical evidence on the considerable use of YouTube as a platform for delivering audio-visual instructional content, which supports learner autonomy, reinforces comprehension, and enhances the overall distance learning experience through its asynchronous and interactive features.

Educational Implications of the Study

The findings of this study hold important implications for the implementation and advancement of open and distance learning (ODL) in tertiary institutions. The high level of utilization of social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram suggests that these tools possess the capacity to overcome geographical limitations, thereby promoting inclusivity and access to education for learners in remote and underserved areas. This underscores the need for educational institutions to prioritize the integration of these platforms into their instructional delivery systems. Furthermore, the interactive and user-driven nature of social media creates a dynamic learning environment that can enhance learner motivation, participation, and academic engagement. Tertiary institutions are therefore encouraged to embed these tools within their pedagogical strategies to improve learning outcomes in ODL settings. In addition, the findings point to the necessity for educational policymakers to establish comprehensive

frameworks and operational guidelines for the integration of social media in distance learning programmes. Such policies would ensure standardization, quality assurance, and alignment with institutional objectives. Finally, the study emphasizes the need for continuous professional development of educators in the effective use of social media for teaching and learning. Equipping facilitators with the necessary digital competencies is critical to maximizing the pedagogical potential of these platforms in ODL programmes.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Tertiary institutions in Nsukka Local Government Area should enhance the effectiveness of open and distance learning by integrating interactive features such as real-time quizzes, discussion forums, and live video sessions to improve learner engagement and participation.
2. Open and distance learning institutions should maximize the potential of social media by establishing dedicated learning groups, organizing live instructional sessions, and adopting collaborative learning strategies to improve accessibility and promote interaction among students.
3. Managers of open and distance learning programmes should encourage educators to develop well-structured, high-quality video content—including recorded lectures, demonstrations, and tutorial sessions—to improve students' comprehension and retention of course materials.
4. Tertiary institutions should explore the educational potential of platforms like Instagram by creating academic pages and utilizing short video tutorials, infographics, and interactive question-and-answer sessions to support visual learning and ensure effective dissemination of knowledge.

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