

## IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS ATTITUDE TOWARDS EDUCATION IN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA, NSUKKA

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### Abstract

In our contemporary society, social media has been widely accepted and used, especially by undergraduate students at different levels of tertiary education. The study aims to ascertain the impact of social media on undergraduate students' attitude towards education in University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Cross-sectional survey research design, with a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection, was employed. 208 persons participated in the study, 200 for the quantitative instrument, and for the qualitative instrument, 8. Two major research questions, hypotheses, and propositions guided the study respectively. In-depth interview was the qualitative instrument adopted, and for the quantitative instrument, questionnaire. SPSS version 22, descriptive statistics, and chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) were engaged for data analysis and to illustrate the relationship between variables. Findings show that most female students engage social media for entertainment rather than for academic purposes, and that majority of students in higher levels, use social media for academic-oriented tasks. To this end, the paper recommends that students engage social media mainly for academic-related activities. Also, university authorities are encouraged to cooperate with the government to create agencies that will censor the use of internet by undergraduates, in order to mitigate distractions of social media on their academic pursuit.

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**Keywords:** Social media, education, Attitude, academic pursuit

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### Introduction

The word social refers to activities involving the human milieu and the people cohabiting and sharing resources within the human milieu (Oguguo et al., 2020). Al-Rahim and Othman (2013) asserted that the word 'social' in social media implies interactions with associates and friends with ease and in an effective manner, which reinforces the bond among folks. Social media is relatively a new media for social networking and dissemination of information through exploration and utilization of social ties (Uche & Obiora 2016). Dollarhide (2023) asserts that social media enhances cross fertilization of minds and information through virtual networks. Accordingly, over 4.7 billion people engage in social media tools, which amount to 60% of the world's population. Tayo et al. (2019) stated that the advent of social media has significantly impacted students, both their academic and social life, and serves as a means of reaching out and building connections for different drives. Gazi, Cetin, and Caki (2017) noted that social media has become so relevant, almost indispensable for people, owing to its convenience of communication at any time.

Aligwe et al. (2017) noted that, the 21st Century global communication industry is referred to as the prosumer era, based on the grounds that social media offers individuals opportunities to be both consumers and producers of a variety of communications at the same time. Greenhow and Lewin (2016) opined that the most youths prefer the role of consumers to being full participants of social media. According to Ahmad (2019), social

media platforms serve as a tool that allows people or corporations to make, interact with, and share new user-generated or current materials in a digital setting. Social media platforms are internet-based applications built on Web 2.0 system and technology (Oguguo et al., 2020). Web 2.0 encompasses a broader diversity of web-based technologies, which enable users to contribute to, as well as dissect and utilize information (Uche & Obiora, 2016).

According to Arnove et al. (2023), education as a discipline is primarily concerned with the transmission of knowledge through teaching and learning in schools or school-like environments, as opposed to various non-formal and informal means of socialization, such as education through parent-child relationships. Yahya (2020), affirms that education has become a critical area where social media has been largely institutionalized with established, critical mass users. In a study by Adetoro and Okike (2022), it was found that undergraduates are significant active users of social media, with an estimated 86% young persons below age 30 engaging in one social media platform or the other. For Udenze and Oshionebo (2020), youths have an increased yearning for smartphones, which may have a huge impact on WhatsApp usage. Consequently, social media may negatively impact on the academic performance of university students, such that it hinders their path of success if not well checked (Ahmad, 2019).

The young generation, especially teenagers and youths, has been shown through a study by Mensah and Nizam (2016), to be active, consistent users of technology in innovative ways, which they refer to as millennial, and this has changed the way they think, work, and communicate, though still in the formative years of their lives. They further stated that, today's young generation, because of social media tools, have become addicted to technology and are entirely withdrawn. In another study by Tayo et al. (2019), on the most frequently used social media platforms by undergraduates, findings indicate as follows: WhatsApp (97%), Facebook (85%), Instagram (65%), and Twitter (25%). The study reveals the influence of the above mentioned social media tools on undergraduate students and studies to include internet addiction (45%), distraction (32%), anti-social behavior (6%), cyber bullying (4%), and writing and spelling skills deficiency (24%). Also, it was observed that an average of 2-3 hours daily was being spent on social media by undergraduate students.

Research has also shown that most lecturers frown at students' attitude of taking pictures, smiling, and exchanging screenshots in the class instead of physically participating, and paying attention to lectures (Abolo & Olusola, 2019). Ahmad (2019) observed a disconnection in the form of deviation, distraction, and divided attention, between social networking activities and academic work among students and teachers as well. He further stated that, social media has predominantly preoccupied the minds of students and the world at large, thereby causing a lot of havoc on students, teachers, as well as educational administrators. Reliance on social media tools has contributed to poor quality of education and dwindling research skills, which leads to poor quality research outputs (Kanelechi et al., 2014). A study by Aligwe et al. (2017) depicts students' ignorance of the consequences of their irresponsibility in the engagement of social media tools, and it is injurious to their online reputation. The level of irresponsibility in social media use among students is also a function of lack of social media education in their respective universities according to the study.

Research carried out by Nannim et al. (2023) assert that students, instead of focusing on their assigned academic tasks, inadvertently spend much time to surf the internet for pleasure and other leisure things. Moreover, they employ social media

platforms to cheat in examinations and to blackmail one another without any justifiable cause. On the other hand, a study by Adetoro and Okike (2022) indicate that students strive to attain a significant height of recognition in social media handles; their lives revolve around these social platforms to the extent they feel lost and weak, and lack the requisite skills to get along with friends, family, and others anytime they are offline. Thus, they are not able to introduce and maintain intimate relationships, likewise responding in a satisfactory manner in physical or offline social situations. Therefore, this study aims to provide answers to 2 major questions: First, what is the impact of social media on undergraduate students' attitude towards education in University of Nigeria, Nsukka? Second, to what extent does gender affect undergraduates use of social media for academic purposes at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka? Consequently, the main objective of the study is to ascertain the impact of social media engagements on the undergraduates of University of Nigeria, Nsukka, especially with regards to their attitude to education. The degree of their awareness and/or knowledge of the impact is another task for the present study. Palpably, there is an increase in the use of social media among students and this development necessitated the present study.

### **Hypotheses**

The following research hypotheses have been systematically formulated as the study guide:

1. Female undergraduates will be more likely to use social media tools for academically oriented activities than male undergraduate students.
2. Students in lower levels are more likely to use social media for their academic work than students in higher levels.

### **Propositions**

Two propositions have been systematically formulated to also guide the study:

1. Unlimited satisfaction derived from social media trends is likely to affect undergraduates focus and quality time necessary for their study in UNN.
2. Easy accessibility and perceived benefits are likely to influence the pattern and choice of social media use among undergraduates of UNN.

### **Methods**

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design with a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection. The design is suitable for collecting original data at one point in time only, to describe a population too large to be observed directly. Given the nature of the study, limited time and resources available, the design was most appropriate and helped the researchers to acquire a general description of the subject matter of the research at a time. The combined method of data collection, that is, quantitative and qualitative, was aimed to ascertain the real impact of social media on undergraduates students' attitude towards education in UNN, with the aim of proffering potent, practical solutions to it. The quantitative instrument, Questionnaire, contained a list of pre-set questions to elicit information on the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents and the substantive issues of the research, while the qualitative instrument, In-depth Interview, consists of insightful, salient probes intended to enhance information extracted from the questionnaire. The present study was conducted in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN), which was founded in 1995 by Nnamdi Azikiwe (Governor General of Nigeria between 1960 and 1966). Located in Nsukka, Enugu State, Nigeria, UNN formally opened on 7th of October, 1960, and presently has four campuses, 15

faculties, and 102 departments, offering 82 undergraduate programs and 211 postgraduate programs ([www.unn.edu.ng](http://www.unn.edu.ng)). Enugu campus, also known as UNEC, has 7 faculties which are as follows: Business Administration, Law, Health Sciences, Environmental Studies, Medical Sciences, Dentistry, and Basic Medical Sciences. University of Nigeria, Nsukka campus hosts about ten faculties; Social Sciences, Biological Sciences, Pharmacy, and Arts. Others are Education, Engineering, Agricultural Sciences, Vocational Technical Education (VTE), Physical Sciences, and Veterinary Medicine. The University is made up of students who live either in hostels or off campus. The population of undergraduates in the UNN is 25,657, while the population of staff is 2,911. Put together, the total population of undergraduates and academic staff in the University of Nigeria is 28,568 (Academic Planning Unit, UNN 2022). All the undergraduates and staff of UNN constitute the population of this study.

The total sample size for this study was 208, 200 for quantitative instrument and 8 (4 undergraduates and 4 staff members) for the qualitative tool. Undergraduate students of all level and staff of all categories, academic and nonacademic, were involved in the study. The multi-stage, simple random, and availability sampling techniques were employed in selecting the faculties, departments, respondents, and participants for the study. Faculties were clustered into two, and two faculties each were selected from each cluster using a simple random sampling technique, thus giving a total of four faculties, which are Arts, Engineering, Social Sciences, and Physical Sciences. A simple random sampling technique was also adopted in choosing one department each, from the four faculties already selected. The four departments are English and Literary Studies, Agric and Bioresources Engineering, Psychology, and Computer Science. Each of these departments was given an equal number of fifty respondents and/or questionnaire. Availability sampling technique was employed in selecting respondents and two interviewees and/or participants each (one student and one staff) from the four departments already chosen for the qualitative instrument.

The in-depth interview (IDI) guide and questionnaire were used for data collection. The IDI session was recorded with an electronic device with the permission of the participants. A questionnaire containing both demographic questions and substantive issues of the research was also used to collect data for this study. Data gathered through both instruments were used complementarily, with the IDI responses providing explanations and clarifications for the patterns established through the questionnaire. This study employed qualitative and quantitative methods in analyzing data. The IDI session was transcribed and further edited for clarity. The researcher coded the data by reading through and identifying labels, which could be in the form of words or phrases. These were later combined to form themes. Data collected through the questionnaire was statistically documented and edited for clarity. The data was further analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution tables and percentages. The hypotheses formulated were tested using Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ). Both the hypotheses and Chi-square helped to determine the strength and relationships that exist between the variables under study. The qualitative method of data analysis was used to complement the quantitative data. Phrases with contextual or special connotations were noted and used as illustrative quotes in complementing the statistical data.

## **Results**

Out of 200 questionnaires administered, 196 representing 98% of the total sum were successfully filled and retrieved. So, data presentation and analysis were based on the number completed and returned. Table 1 on socio-demographic data shows that 59.7% of the respondents are male, while 40.3% of the respondents are female. This implies that there were more males than female respondents in the study. With regards to age, 43.9% of the respondents are between the ages of 16-20 years, 41.3% between 20-24 years, 10.7% 24-28 years, and 4.1% 28 years and above. This implies that the majority of the respondents are between the ages of 16-20 years. Data on year of study depict that 42.3% of the respondents are in first year, while 16.8% are in second year. Those in third, fourth, and fifth year constitute 12.8%, 15.8%, and 12.2% respectively. 95.4% of the respondents are single, while 2.6% are married. Equally, 1.5% are divorced as 0.5% separated. As expected, most of the respondents are singles. Religious status of the respondents shows that 95.9% of the respondents are Christians, 3.1% are Muslims, while 1.0% are African traditionalists. This implies that UNN as an academic community are predominantly Christians. Information on place of residence shows that 35.7% of the respondents reside in the hostel, while 64.3% stay off-campus. The implication is that there is urgent need for more hostels to be built to accommodate more students. At this point, the two hypotheses formulated for this study were tested using chi-square statistics.

**Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondent**

<b>Sex</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Male	117	59.7
Female	79	40.3
Total	196	100.0
<b>Age category</b>		
16-20 years	86	43.9
20-24 years	81	41.3
24-28 years	21	10.7
28 years and above	8	4.1
Total	196	100.0
<b>Year of study</b>		
First year	83	42.3
Second year	33	16.8
Third year	25	12.8
Fourth year	31	15.8
Fifth year	24	12.2
Total	196	100.0
<b>Marital status</b>		
Single	187	95.4
Married	5	2.6
Divorced	3	1.5
Separated	1	0.5
Total	196	100.0
<b>Religious status</b>		
Christianity	188	95.9
Islam	6	3.1

African traditionalist	2	1.0
Total	196	100.0
<b>Place of residence</b>		
Hostel	70	35.7
Off campus	126	64.3
Total	196	100.0

**Source:** Field Survey, 2023.

Information contained in table 2 below shows that 5.1% of the female respondents don't know if social media trends have an impact on the academic performance of undergraduates, 15.2% of the female respondents indicated that social media trends do not have an impact on the academic performance of undergraduate, while 79.7% of the female respondents indicated that social media trends have an impact on the academic performance of undergraduates. Greater percentage of the female respondents indicated that social media trends have an impact on the academic performance of undergraduates. However, since the p-value is greater than .05, the null hypothesis is retained. Therefore, the study concludes that female undergraduates are not significantly likely to use social media for academically oriented activities than male undergraduates.

**Table 2: Sex\* Do social media trends have an impact on the academic performance on undergraduates**

		<b>Do social media trends have an impact on the academic performance on undergraduates</b>			<b>Total</b>
		<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>I don't know</b>	
Sex	Male	92(78.6%)	21(17.9%)	4(3.4%)	117(100%)
	Female	63(79.7%)	12(15.2%)	4(5.1%)	79(100%)
<b>Total</b>		<b>155(100%)</b>	<b>33(100%)</b>	<b>8(100%)</b>	<b>196(100%)</b>

$\chi^2 = .533; df = 2; p = .766$

Information contained in Table 3 shows that 6.0% and 3.0% of the respondents who are in first and second year don't know if social media trends have an impact on academic performance of undergraduates, 27.3% and 16.9% of the respondents who are in first and second year indicated that social media trends do not have an impact on academic performance of undergraduates, while 69.7% and 77.1% of the respondents who are in first and second year indicated that social media trends have an impact on academic performance of undergraduates. The table also shows that 4.2% and 3.2% of the respondents who are in fourth and fifth year don't know if social media trends have an impact on academic performance of undergraduate, 20.8%, 12.9%, and 4% of the respondents who are in third, fourth and fifth year indicated that social media trends do not have an impact on academic performance on undergraduates, while 75%, 83.9%, and 96% of the respondents who are in third, fourth, and fifth year indicated that social media trends have an impact on academic performance of undergraduates. A greater percentage of the respondents who are in third, fourth, and fifth year indicated that social media trends have an impact on academic performance of undergraduates. However, since the p-value is greater than .05, the null hypothesis is retained. Therefore, the study concludes that students in lower levels are significantly less likely to use social media for their academic work than students in higher levels.

**Table 3: Year of study \* Do social media trends have an impact on the academic performance of undergraduates**

Year of study	Do social media trends have an impact on the academic performance of undergraduates			Total
	Yes	No	I don't know	
First year	64(77.1%)	14(16.9%)	5(6.0%)	83(100%)
Second year	23(69.7%)	9(27.3%)	1(3.0%)	33(100%)
Third year	24(96%)	1(4%)	0	25(100%)
Fourth year	26(83.9%)	4(12.9%)	1(3.2%)	31(100%)
Fifth year	18(75%)	5(20.8%)	1(4.2%)	24(100%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>155(100%)</b>	<b>33(100%)</b>	<b>8(100%)</b>	<b>196(100%)</b>

$X^2 = 8.481$ ;  $df = 8$ ;  $p = .388$

**Research proposition 1:** The first research proposition seeks to find out whether unlimited satisfaction derived from social media trends is likely to affect undergraduates' focus and quality time that ought to be spent on academic research in Nigerian universities. Findings from study confirm that most undergraduates engage in social media platforms for entertainment. Most interviewees opined that undergraduates spend most of their time on media platforms seeking for online satisfactory pleasure other than academic related activities.

**Research proposition 2:** The second research proposition seeks to find out whether easy accessibility and perceived benefits are likely to influence the pattern and choice of social media use amongst undergraduates of Nigerian universities. Findings from the study confirm that easy accessibility and perceived benefits influence the pattern and choice of social media use amongst undergraduates of Nigerian universities. Most interviewees asserted that social media helps them in achieving academic related activities, entertainment and online businesses. Interviewees opined that they use social media for academic research, entertainment, online business, news, etc. Also, they asserted that it is easily accessible since the world is rapidly advancing in technology.

**Research proposition 1** Unlimited satisfaction derived from social media trends is likely to affect undergraduates focus and quality time that ought to be spent on academic research in Nigerian universities.

**Research proposition 2** Easy accessibility and perceived benefits are likely to influence the pattern and choice of social media use amongst undergraduates of Nigerian universities.

### Discussion

The study investigated how social media trends influence undergraduates' attitudes toward education at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN), and the findings revealed a complex pattern that reflects wider contradictions in other studies. The study found no statistically significant gender differences in the use of social media for academic purposes, indicating that female undergraduates were not more likely than male undergraduates to rely on social media for learning. Similarly, no significant differences were observed across levels of study, suggesting that lower-level students were not more

inclined than higher-level students to use social media for academic engagement. These results imply that demographic factors such as gender and level of study may no longer substantially shape patterns of academic social media use, possibly because social media adoption has become nearly universal across student categories. The qualitative results shed more light on why these differences may not appear statistically. Many students described using social media primarily for entertainment, leisure, and social interaction rather than for academic engagement. This aligns with research showing that although social media has potential academic benefits, undergraduates frequently gravitate toward its recreational uses. A study in Spain showed that social media engagement can enhance academic performance when deliberately structured for educational purposes, such as collaborative learning, discussion forums, and resource sharing (Santoveña Casal, 2019). Similarly, evidence from Nigerian universities indicates that certain platforms, such as Instagram, can positively predict academic achievement when used constructively (Ugama et al., 2022).

Despite these benefits, a substantial body of research highlights negative or negligible academic effects associated with high-frequency social media use. Studies involving large undergraduate samples indicate that excessive use is linked to reduced academic performance and poorer psychological well-being (Khan et al., 2024). Research in Saudi Arabia also demonstrates that unregulated social media use among medical students often leads to increased distraction, reduced concentration, and weakened academic performance, even when students recognise its potential academic value (Alshantiti et al., 2023). Heavy social media use has further been associated with impaired working memory and diminished academic achievement, suggesting that cognitive overload and constant multitasking can interfere with students' ability to sustain attention and complete academic tasks effectively (Ajibade et al., 2022). Similar concerns have been documented among college students, where high levels of recreational social media use have been linked to reduced study time and overall academic decline (Alsulimani & Sharma, 2019). The qualitative data further indicate that accessibility, convenience, and perceived usefulness significantly shape students' social media habits. Participants emphasised that the ease of accessing social platforms with minimal cost or effort makes them highly appealing for everyday use. This is consistent with evidence from Pakistani and Nigerian university contexts showing that perceived benefits and accessibility influence usage patterns, even though excessive time online remains academically detrimental. When students perceive social media as useful for learning, they may engage with it productively, yet when the perceived benefits center on entertainment, the academic potential diminishes sharply.

The study's finding of no significant gender or level-of-study differences also reflects emerging trends in Nigerian higher education, where social media usage has become highly normalised across demographic groups. Research involving science undergraduates found similar patterns, reporting no significant gender differences in daily time spent on social media, despite variations in perceived academic impact (Ugama et al., 2022). This suggests that motivations and self-regulation, rather than gender or academic level, may better explain differences in academic-oriented use. Finally, the negative consequences highlighted in the finding which includes distraction, reduced academic engagement, and potential addiction are well supported by prior studies. Research among Nigerian tertiary students showed that social media addiction significantly reduces engagement, enthusiasm, and commitment toward academic work (Ajibade et al., 2022).

These insights help contextualize the patterns observed at the study area, although students appreciate the accessibility of social media, a substantial proportion

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The study concludes that social media plays an increasingly significant but ambivalent role in shaping undergraduates' attitudes toward education at UNN. While social media platforms possess considerable potential to support learning through collaboration, academic communication, and access to resources, many students continue to use them predominantly for entertainment and social interaction. This tendency may limit the academic value of social media, contributing to distraction and reduced focus. The absence of significant gender or level-of-study differences further suggests that social media use has become deeply embedded across undergraduate populations, making personal motivation, perceived usefulness, and self-regulation more influential than demographic factors.

Based on these findings, the study recommends that schools should integrate digital literacy, time-management training, and responsible social media use education into student orientation programmes. Emphasis should also be placed on helping students harness social media productively for research, collaboration, and information sharing while reducing recreational overuse. Academic departments and lecturers should consider creating structured, academically focused social media groups such as WhatsApp or Telegram platforms for classes to support communication and group learning, consistent with evidence that structured engagement enhances academic performance. Universities should also develop guidelines that encourage moderation of non-academic social media use during lectures and study hours. Such guidelines should be educative rather than punitive, promoting balanced and mindful use rather than censorship.

Furthermore, universities should expand access to formal digital learning platforms and academic repositories so that students do not rely exclusively on social media for study materials. Finally, further research should explore how motivation, mental health, and patterns of use shape academic outcomes over time, ideally through longitudinal studies that follow students across multiple academic sessions. These steps would help ensure that social media becomes a tool that enhances learning rather than an obstacle to academic success.

### **Declarations**

**Informed Consent:** An introductory letter seeking the consent and voluntary participation of the respondents was presented, and they all gave oral informed consent prior to their involvement in the study. Equally, the consent of the participants was sought and received for the publication of the data.

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