

DIGITAL DIALOGUES: UNVEILING THE WIDESPREAD REACH OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN NIGERIAN SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITIES

¹Prof. Chika Oluwaseyi Adebayo, ²Dr. Ngozi Chinwe Obi and ³Akande Adeyemi Olumide

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Abstract

The rapid advancement of technology has transformed the global landscape, turning the world into a tightly-knit global village. This transformative shift is particularly evident among higher education students, who find themselves increasingly immersed in a myriad of social media platforms. From cutting-edge iPhones to the latest online applications, students in universities are actively engaged in a diverse array of social media, ranging from popular blogs and social networking sites like Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter, Skype, Google +, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, to content-sharing platforms such as YouTube.

Social media, as defined by Rouse (2013), encompasses online communication channels dedicated to community-based interaction, content-sharing, and collaboration. These platforms, including websites and applications facilitating fora, microblogging, social networking, and social bookmarking, serve as web-based tools that enable individuals to connect, share, and consume information. For university students, the use of social media extends beyond mere entertainment, with these platforms serving as invaluable learning tools, as highlighted by Al-Tarawineh (2014).

This paper explores the multifaceted role of social media in the lives of university students, addressing both positive and negative aspects of their engagement. On one hand, social media serves as a medium for social interaction, information retrieval, and leisure activities. On the other hand, it has found a place in the educational landscape, being utilized for teaching and learning purposes. However, amidst these positive applications, there is a growing concern about the negative consequences of excessive social media use. Students, in their quest for connection and information, also grapple with negative addictions such as involvement in cyber fraud, crime, bullying, harassment, and the consumption of explicit content (Graham & Kingsley, 2005).

Through an exploration of these various dimensions, this paper aims to provide insights into the evolving relationship between university

^{1,3}Department of Educational Management, University of Lagos

²University of Lagos Assoc. Prof. Olumide Adeyemi Akande

students and social media. It delves into the dynamics of their engagement, examining the impact on both personal and academic spheres. The study seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse on the integration of social media in higher education, shedding light on the challenges and opportunities it presents.

Introduction

The advancement in technology has made the world a global village. The average person especially the students in higher institutions have been increasingly enthralled with social media of all kinds, from the newest iPhone to the latest online application. Students in the university are involved in different types of social media such as Blogs, Facebook, Snap chat, Instagram, Twitter, Skype, Google +, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, You tube etc. These social media are used by students for social interaction, fun, getting information and as learning tools. Social media according to Rouse (2013) are the collectivity of online communications channels dedicated to community-based input, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration. It can also be in form of Websites and applications dedicated to fora, microblogging, social networking and social bookmarking. They are regarded as web-based communication tools that enable people to interact with one another by sharing and consuming information. Social media as used by students especially those in the university is on the increase, students spend most of their quality time chatting, binging and engaging in different social sites. In another vein, social media is also used in the university in a variety of different contexts for teaching and learning purposes (Al- Tarawineh, 2014). Besides the use of social media for teaching/learning and leisure, students also use it for negative addictions. These include pornography, cyber fraud, crime, bullying and harassment. (Graham & Kingsley, 2005).

Students in the university are very active with social media, their involvement is so in-depth as they could be sighted walking and chatting, viewing videos and involving in various online interactions. Students need to prioritize their engagement as they get involved in social media. Student engagement according to Kuh (2009) represents the time and effort students devote to activities that are empirically linked to desired outcomes of teaching and learning. It refers to the degree of attention, concern, interest, positivity and passion that students show when they are learning or being taught, which relate to the motivation and willingness to learn and progress in their education. Student engagement, can be described as the tendency for students to be behaviorally, emotionally, and cognitively involved in academic activities such as class attendance, listening attentively, participating in discussions, prompt submission of assignments, and following rules and directions in the class (Thijs & Verkuyten, 2009). In another vein, student engagement may be perceived in terms of internal exhibitions such as enthusiasm, curiosity, optimism, motivation, or interest, it could be intellectual and emotional. It is a key construct in motivation founded on the belief that learning improves when students are attracted or inspired, but it plummets when students are bored, detached, alienated or disengaged.

Several studies have linked students' involvement in social media to their engagement in the university, colleges and other higher institutions (Ogini, Awobodu, Saibu & Alaka, 2015). University students in the South –East are so engrossed with social media that it tends to relate to their engagement in lectures, classes and other academic activities. The students are habitually consume with their phones on social media and seemed disengaged from realities in the class and other learning activities (Richardson, 2017). Students are more often than not oblivious of lecturers' instruction in class as they seat with their peers, snap- chatting and videotaping. Most lecturers often expressed dissatisfaction as students take pictures, smile and exchange screen shots in the class instead of being physically present. Students' engagement is measured and observed with their responses to questions, asking

questions and participating in the ongoing lectures. These engagement indices are often disrupted by students as they are obsessed with social media. Students seemed to prefer blogging, chatting, uploading pictures to attentive class participation, they do not involve in class related discussions (Setzekorn, 2008). Students in the South –East universities spend more time on Facebook, Instagram, twitter than in academic activities; social media seemed to have taken their studying time. Lecturers often complain of assignment left undone and default in meeting deadlines. Thus social media is perceived to have influenced students' engagement such as reading, active participation in class, zeal to excel or appropriate learning habits (Taylor & Parsons, 2011).

The use of social media in the university also tends to influence students' engagement in another dimension as it could be used for learning interaction. Students are supposed to use the social networking sites as a supplementary to the lecturers' notes. Lecturers compose lecture summaries in different online applications for students who access, ask questions and forward their assignments. As positive as this learning online aids are, it seemed that the prevalence and continuous involvement of students in social networks continued to be on the increase, thereby imparting negatively on their academic engagement. The social media takes students' time, compete with their attention and assimilation in their studies. This lack of engagement, or disengagement, could negatively affect the overall student performance. In another dimension, students use social media for personal satisfaction in creating leisure and pleasure. Social networking by students encourages their interpersonal relations with visible and invisible friends. The social sites help students to establish and maintain very positive interactions and social connections. Oradini & Saunders (2007) noted that social networks are valuable and helpful to students in the university especially in their first few weeks of admission. Still on the pleasurable aspect of social media to students, Kalpidou, Costin & Morris (2011) indicated that upper university students connect socially with their peers on social media in a positive level. Social media therefore seemed to have influenced university students' engagement in three folds. These include students' use of social media for personal social interaction, for effective studying and learning and for other negative tendencies that could hinder students' engagement and academic performance.

Statement of the Problem

The increasing importance and awareness of technology have necessitated the growing involvement of university students on different social media. The students indulge in social networking for learning, communicating, friendship and pleasurable motives. The emergence of different sophisticated cellular phones has made it easier for student who no longer visit cybercafé but can chat, video and use the social media even in their classes. Besides pleasurable aim, the different social media can be used as educational tools to facilitate and enhance teaching/ learning by lecturers with the students. As the students become engrossed in different social media, there is the tendency for engagement, their ability to absorb learning activities to be influenced (Junco, 2012).

The South East university students are so absorbed in social media that there are most times seen getting distracted in lectures thereby preventing effective learning. Most students are so consumed in the cybernetic sphere of social media that they are unaware and seemed disengaged from reality as it relate to their academics. They get so influenced by the social networks negatively that their attention is focused on chatting, posting pictures, making friends, listening to music while their academic activities are neglected.

The influence of social media on university students could bother on their engagement resulting in mismanagement of time as they spend more time on Facebook than studying or class work. They get so addicted to social media instead of using their time for studying. Students spend more time on social media fun activities than in class or learning. In another vein, Students may not understand how to properly use social media for academic and developmental purposes as students tend to transfer their sentence construction, spellings, and acronyms to academic official assignments. The issue of cyber bullying and abuse of people fundamental rights

in social media arise with students (Osazee-Odia, 2017). Some lecturers and universities management have to suspend and expel some students based on negative comments in the media. In spite of the aforementioned probabilities on students' use of social media, there is every likelihood that the sites help students in their academics as well as preserve progressive social interaction. There appear some positive potentials of engagement to be harnessed by students through social media (Adaja & Ayodele, 2013). What then are the influences of social media on university students' engagement? Is it a triangle of better, good, or bad? Can the social media influence student engagement for academic excellence, promote interpersonal relationship or reduce their academic standing? It is against this background that the study investigates the students' engagement as they get engrossed in social media in the South- East universities, Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following questions were raised to guide the study:

1. What is the level of students' involvement in social media?
2. What is the perception of students on their engagement due to social media involvement?
3. What is the perception of lecturers on students' engagement due to social media involvement?
4. To what extent do social media influence students' engagement?

Hypotheses:

1. Students' involvement in social media will not significantly influence their level of engagement.
2. Lecturers' perceptions of students' engagement due to social media will not significantly differ from students' perception.

Methodology

The study employs the survey research design. The population consist all students and lecturers from five departments of two federal universities in the South- East geopolitical zone. The stratified sampling technique was used to select the five departments based on homogeneity. Thus we have population of 9420, 7902 students and 109, 107 lecturers respectively from the two universities. The Taro Yamane's formula was used to calculate the sample size bringing the total sample to be 763 students and 168 lecturers. Two researcher constructed questionnaire, Students' Perception on Social Media Usage and Engagement Level Questionnaire (SPSMUELQ) and Lecturers' Perception on Students Social Media Usage and Engagement Level Questionnaire (LPSSMELQ) were used to collect data. The research questions were answered in descriptive statistics of frequency mean standard deviation. The mean of the responses are calculated such that the Benchmark Mean is 2.5 and any mean less than the Benchmark is considered to be low. The hypotheses were tested with chi-square and t-test.

Analysis of Data

Research Question 1: What is the level of students' involvement in social media?

Table 1

Level of Students Involvement in Social Media

S/N	Statement	Mean	SD
1	I am regular at various media	3.98	1.344
2	I frequent different social blog	3.78	1.432
3	I am addicted to social media	2.99	1.254
4	I seldom visit social media sites	2.32	1.423
5	I am not used to social media	2.46	1.123
6	I am a great fan of social media	3.67	1.442
7	I cannot do without chatting	3.76	1.345

8	I always go online for various Sites	3.12	1.243
9	I am wary of social media	2.43	1.234
10	I rarely chat with friends	2.38	1.234
Grand Mean		3.09	1.308

Table 1 presents the degree of students' involvement in social media. The responses indicates that the students are regular at different social media, addicted to social media, fan of social media and cannot do without the social media . From the analysis, the grand mean (3.09) is greater than the Bench mark mean (2.5). This shows that the level of involvement of the participants (students) in social media is high.

Research Question 2: What is the perception of students on their engagement due to social media involvement?

Table 2

Students Perceptions on Engagement and Social Media

S/N	Statement	Mean	SD
Social media enable me to			
1	Chat online always	3.12	1.343
2	meet deadline in class work	2.98	1.435
3	divide my study attention	3.98	1.356
4	meet up my study time	3.65	1.237
5	source materials for study	3.32	1.234
6	get involve in group work	3.78	1.423
7	answer questions in class	3.57	1.254
8	speed up my academics	3.24	1.334
9	get distracted	2.45	1.245
10	postpone assignments	2.35	1.345
Grand mean		3.24	1.321

Table 2 presents the responses on students' perception on their engagement and social media involvement. The results show that social media enable students to chat online, meet deadline, get involved in class work and source study material. The values of the mean of the total responses, the grand mean (3.24) is greater than the Bench mark mean (2.5). This indicates that the participants (students) are of the perception that social media do not negatively influence their engagement. Research Question3: What is the perception of lecturers on students' engagement and social media involvement?

Table 3

Lecturers' perceptions on Engagement and Social Media

S/N	Statement	Mean	SD
Social media enable students to			
1	indulge in academic research get unwanted fame	2.42	0.123
2	have divided attention in class	3.47	1.432
3	be active in class	1.75	1.231
4	chat while in class	2.36	0.98
5	get distracted	1.65	1.234
6	stay away from studying	2.06	1.254

7	improve on their academics	2.37	2.312
8	improve in studying	2.05	1.322
9	default in classwork	2.37	1.224
10	Grand mean	2.05	1.237

Table 3 presents lecturers' perception on students' engagement due to social media involvement, The lecturers agreed that social media enabled students to get unwanted fame, chat while in class, get distracted and default in classwork. The values of the mean of the total responses, the grand mean (2.05) is less than the Bench mark mean (2.5). This indicates that the participants (lecturers) are of the perception that student engagement is negatively influenced due to their involvement in social media.

Hypothesis 1: Students' involvement in social media will not significantly influence their level of engagement

Table 4

Students Social Media Involvement and Engagement

Variable	N	Df	α	X ²	p-value	Remark
Social media involvement	931					
Engagement	931	27	0.05	23.4	0.008	Reject H0

Result significant @ 0.05 significance level, n=sample size, df= degree of freedom, t= independent t test, SD=Standard deviation

Table 4 presents the chi-square result of the influence of Students' involvement in social media on their level of engagement. The information shows that the correlation coefficient is significant at 0.05 level of significance (X²= 23.4, p-value (0.000) <0.05). This can be seen from the p-value (0.00) which is less than 0.05 significance level. Thus the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative accepted. This implies that Student involvement in social media have influence on their level of engagement.

Hypothesis 2: Lecturers' perceptions of students' engagement and social media will not significantly differ from students' perception

Table 5

Differences in perceptions of students and lecturers on Engagement and Social Media

Variable	N	Mean	SD	df	α	T	p-value	Remark
Students perceptions	763	40.71	8.97					
Lecturers perceptions	729	24.9	0					

Lecturers perceptions 168 22.37 4.48

Result significant @ 0.05 significance level, n=sample size, df= degree of freedom, t= independent t test, SD=Standard deviation

Table 5 shows the independent t-test result of the differences in students and lecturers' perception on students 'engagement due to their involvement in social media. The information on the table shows that the t-test statistic (24.9) is significant at 0.05 level of significance. This can be seen from the p-value (0.00) which is less than 0.05 significance level. Thus the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative accepted. This implies that the lecturers and students have varied perceptions on social media and students' engagement. The lecturers perceived social media to have negative influence on students' engagement while the students perceive it to be positive.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study regarding the level of students' involvement in social media specified that the university students in the South-East are deeply enmeshed in different social media. The Grand mean 3.09 for the research question is far higher than the Benchmark mean of 2.5. The students agreed to be regular user of various social media; being addicted to social media and regularly frequent blogs, social application online. Students in the universities all have android phones that serve as café. The students indulge in several social media such as Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram and WhatSap. Their activities revolve around making online friends, chatting, posting pictures, replying to posts and getting information on their study. It is common to see students chatting in sensitive places like classes, on the road, refectory and study rooms. The fact that the students are social media enthusiasts is in line with different studies Oginni, Awobodu, Saibu & Alaka (2015) and Adaja & Ayodele (2013). The authors in their studies established that students are almost being too engrossed in social media to the extent of chatting on the road, in the class and other school based activities. This finding is apt due to the technological advancement being currently experienced in Nigeria and globally. The world is now a global village and the students must therefore get acquainted to various social media to be in line with the trend.

Getting ensnarled by Social media do relate to students' engagement level. The findings on students' perception regarding the social media and their engagement level indicated that students perceived social media involvement as a boost to their engagement. The students pointed out that social media enabled them to speedily meet up deadlines, answer questions in class, meet up their study schedule, source for materials, be involved in group work and not get distracted. This findings is in line with Fredericks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, (2004) and Wang, Chen & Liang (2011) that social media has two streams – helping in students' academic and learning engagement and for pleasurable purposes. This is quite understood that students might not perceive their involvement in social media as being detrimental to their engagement, they see it from their parochial perspective and might not attribute their distractions, disengagement to social media as found by other studies (Lederer, 2012 & Oberiri, 2016). The students always prefer the leisure aspect of social media where they indulge in activities that are hidden from their parents/lecturers. They are so engrossed and are bent on making new friends online. Students take pride in displaying the number of their followers and compete to get the highest number of friends. Thus they are out to get desired and undesired friends who might not be really helpful (Oye, 2012). The researcher is of the view that students would always rate their social media association to be positive as the world is brought to their phones through online interaction.

In another vein, lecturers perceived students engagement to be adversely influenced by social media. The lecturers' agreed that social media enabled students to get distracted, chat while in the class, get unwanted fame, default in classwork and would not improve in their academics. This findings is in line with numerous studies where social media was found to be distraction to students, time consuming and would deprived them of full engagement in study (Mingle & Adams, 2015 and Junco, 2014). Some of the engagement influences on students as regards social media bother more on their academic attainment (Oyetunde, 2017 and Asemah, Okpanachi & Edegoh, 2013). Students' attention and priorities are channeled towards the leisure of social media that they concentrate more on winning friends, chat and overindulge in witty, lewd exchanges. Some of the communication among students could result in treats, criminal indulgences and cyber bullying (Lederer, 2012).

The result of findings from hypothesis 1 established that social media has significant influence on students engagement in the university. This finding spans from Research Question 2 where lecturers perceived students social media involvement to be negative to their academic engagement. This result is not unusual considering the fact that students are extremely involved in social media in the university. Involvement in social media could be likened to most habituated activities such as betting, clubbing, drinking and other indulged addicted pleasurable

deeds. Most university students are completely hooked on different media like ping, instagram and posting different pictures. They prefer to spend their time on these different sites rather than quality academic activities (Ogedebe, Emmanuel & Musa, 2012). This finding is corroborated by studies (Olowu & Seri, 2012 and Oyetunde, 2017). The authors established the various influences of social media as clouting, pornography and other negative maladjusted behaviour, while important ventures like study and writing are affected. The researcher is of the opinion that students are so excited chatting online but will hardly channel such vigor to academic pursuits. They spend averagely 12 to 10 hours a day on social media while their academics suffer in procrastination and negligence.

Students and lecturers differ in their perceptions on the engagement level of students due to social interaction. Their perceptions are at variance as indicated in Research Questions 1 and 2. The students as stated in their answers claimed that social media is more of academic and information building than leisure. This was contrasted by the lecturers who blatantly pointed out that social interaction is time consuming, distract students and lead to low academic standing. The variations in the answers of the two key players of university education was corroborated by Martins (2009) that lecturers are designers in institutions, they ensure that students learn while students prefer to be uncensored in their leisure. The disparities in the perceptions of students and lecturers regarding students engagement is quite understood considering lecturers as in locus parent who would always constructively assess outcome. The lecturers seemed to be more objective, in their perceptions being the main recipient of students' disengagement in the class and the examiners who record their engagement performance (Okafor & Achukwu 2014).

Conclusion

The advancement in technology has made the world a global village. Foremost in the technological world is the use of social media by university students. The students from the South- East University Nigeria are almost addicted to social media. The students are glued to different social media sites where they snap chat, video call, paste pictures, ping, What Sapp, exchange banter and obtain study materials. The involvement of student in the different social applications has meaningful influence on their engagement as noted by lecturers. Student focus and concentration in class and other academic activities are hindered by their engrossment in social media.

The students are somewhat distracted, bungle their study time and would engage in negative chatting resulting in abuses such as cyber bullying, crime and online fraud. From the students' perspective, their involvement in social media could be useful to them in obtaining study material, making friends, pleasure seeking and boosting their interpersonal relations. Social media involvement by university students in the South-East could be concluded to be a threefold triangular trajectory. The foremost is its influence in hampering students' engagement followed by the fact finding trail for studying and the negative aspects of cyberbullying, hate speeches, crime and fraud.

Recommendations

The following practical resolve are proffered for hitch free practices of students regarding social media in the university:

1. Social media involvement by students cannot be stopped, but the excesses should be curtailed by the university through policy of hate-free social media practices for students.
2. The hate-free social media policy should be tackled administratively through censoring, programmes should be launched in the universities to monitor students' negative intended social media involvement.
3. Students' engagement is very crucial for their academic performance, the universities administrators must as a matter of administrative panache conduct periodic seminars on ills of addiction to social media to boost students' engagement.

4. Parents should be educated on the need to monitor their wards social media involvement to nib in the bud escalating effects in the university.
5. Lecturers should judiciously explore the instructional function of social media for teaching learning to divert students from concentrating only on the leisure aspect.
6. Negative social media practices such as hate post, cyber-crime, fraud, pornography and other perverse acts by students should be dealt with punitive sanctions as deterrent to others.

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