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SOCIAL MEDIA: A THREAT OR A BOOST TO ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS

[1]I. C. **KANU;** [2]O.C. **CHUKWUEMERIE;** [3]F.O. **EJIRO-MITAIRE**

[1-3]Department of Adult and Continuing Education, Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria

Corresponding Author: O.C. **CHUKWUEMERIE**; Department of Adult and Continuing Education, Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria
Email: oc.chukwuemerie@unizik.edu.ng, **Tel:** 08037728499

Abstract

Social media refers to interactive forms of media that allow users to interact with and publish to each other, generally by means of the internet. The study examined social media as a threat or a boost to Academic Performance of Students. This paper discusses this dichotomy with the intention of arriving at a balanced approach that will make for maximizing the benefits of the use of social media while reducing the distractions that lead to doom. The paper reviewed the meaning and types of social media, importance of social media, usage of social media among students, positive impacts of social media on academic performance, negative impacts of social media on academic performance, educational benefits of social media and balancing social media usage among students. The paper concludes that social media plays a complex role in students' academic lives but that while it offers valuable opportunities for communication, collaboration and access to educational resources, it also poses risks such as distraction and procrastination. It was recommended among other things that students should establish specific periods for social media use to prevent distractions during study sessions while educators should encourage students to prioritize tasks and manage their schedules effectively.

Key words: Social media, threat, boost, academic performance, students

Authors Biographies

I. C. Kanu; Department of Adult and Continuing Education, Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria
Innocent Chidera Kanu is a student in the Department of Adult and Continuing Education, Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Anambra state, Nigeria. He is majoring in economics option. He is a studious and determined to pursue his academic endeavors to the highest level.

O.C. Chukwuemerie; Department of Adult and Continuing Education, Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria
O.C. Chukwuemerie is a lecturer in the Department of Adult and Continuing Education, Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria. She majored in Adult Education and specialized in Community Development. She also holds LL.B (Hons), B.L., and a PGD in marketing. She is passionate about finding solution to the ever evolving problems of adults especially women. She has published many articles across themes like domestic violence, harmful traditional practices, climate change, cervical cancer awareness, and education during COVID-19, teaching methods for adult learners, various challenges faced by learners and facilitators in adult learning centers and issues around acceptance and utilization of ICTs, *inter alia*. ORCID ID: 0009-0007-6489-8410. Email: oc.chukwuemerie@unizik.edu.ng

Ejiro-Mitaire F.O; Department of Adult and Continuing Education, Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria
Faith O. Ejiro-Mitaire is a lecturer in the Department of Adult and Continuing Education, Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria. She holds a Master degree in Adult Education/ Community Development and is also currently pursuing her PhD in the same field. Faith is a prolific writer whose research interests span through issues in adult education and community development.

Introduction

In the digital age, social media has become an integral part of daily life, especially among students. With platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and TikTok, Social media offers avenues for communication, entertainment, and information sharing. While these platforms provide numerous benefits, including educational resources and peer support, concerns have been raised about their potential negative impact on academic performance (Manca & Ranieri, 2016). Researchers and educators are divided on whether social media acts as a threat or a boost to students' academic

achievements. Studies have shown that social media can enhance learning experiences by providing access to educational content and facilitating collaborative learning (Junco, 2012). For instance, students can join study groups, participate in academic discussions and access scholarly articles and tutorials. These activities can lead to improved understanding and retention of course material, thus positively influencing academic performance (Manca & Ranieri, 2016).

However, the frequent use of social media has also been linked to negative outcomes. Excessive engagement in social media activities can lead to procrastination, distraction, and reduced time for studying (Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010). This phenomenon, often referred to as "Facebook fatigue," highlights the potential for social media to detract from academic responsibilities, resulting in lower grades and decreased academic performance. The integration of social media in educational settings has been shown to provide several benefits that can enhance academic performance. Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, offer students opportunities to access educational content and resources that may not be readily available through traditional means. According to a study by Junco (2012), students who actively use social media for academic purposes, such as engaging in class discussions or accessing scholarly articles, demonstrate higher levels of academic engagement. This engagement is crucial for deep learning and understanding, as it encourages students to participate actively in their education. Social media facilitates collaborative learning and peer support. Online study groups and discussion forums allow students to share knowledge, clarify doubts, and work on projects collaboratively. This peer-to-peer interaction can lead to improved problem-solving skills and a better grasp of complex concepts. Manca & Ranieri (2016) noted that the use of social media in educational contexts

promotes active learning and critical thinking, which are essential components of academic success.

Despite the educational advantages, there are significant risks associated with social media use that can negatively impact academic performance. One major concern is the potential for distraction. Social media platforms are designed to capture users' attention through notifications, news feeds, adverts and other engaging features. This constant bombardment can divert students' focus from their studies, leading to reduced concentration and productivity. Kirschner & Karpinski (2010) found that students who frequently use Facebook tend to have lower Grade Point Averages (GPAs) and spend less time on academic activities. Procrastination is another issue linked to social media use. The immediate gratification and entertainment provided by social media can tempt students to delay their academic responsibilities. This procrastination can result in poor time management, rushed assignments, and inadequate preparation for exams, ultimately leading to lower academic performance (Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010). Moreover, excessive social media use can have adverse effects on students' mental health. The pressure to maintain a certain online image, constant comparison with peers, and exposure to negative content can contribute to anxiety, depression, and stress. These mental health issues can impair cognitive function and academic performance, making it challenging for students to focus on their studies and perform well academically (Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010). This paper canvasses that educators and students must work together to develop strategies that promote responsible and productive use of social media. This includes setting boundaries for social media use, incorporating it into educational activities, and providing training on digital literacy and time management. By doing so, students

can leverage the positive aspects of social media to enhance their learning experiences while avoiding the pitfalls that can detract from their academic performance.

Concept of Social Media and Academic Performance

According to Kaplan & Haenlein (2010), Social media refers to digital platforms and technologies that facilitate the creation, sharing, and exchange of information, ideas, and content among users. It encompasses a wide range of online platforms and tools, such as social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn), microblogging services (e.g., Twitter), photo and video sharing sites (e.g., Instagram, YouTube), and messaging apps; WhatsApp and Snapchat (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Social media allows individuals and organizations to communicate, interact, and engage with each other in real time or asynchronously. It has revolutionized how people connect, share personal and professional experiences, and consumes information. The concept also includes the use of algorithms to personalize content and the role of user-generated content in shaping public opinion and culture (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), social media is a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Boyd & Ellison (2017) describe social media as web-based services that allow individuals to; construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system

From the foregoing, social media has several functions in our everyday lives. Social media has become an integral part of daily life, offering several important uses such as:

- Communication and Connection: Social media platforms allow individuals to communicate with friends, family, and colleagues across the globe. They provide a means for staying connected, sharing updates, and maintaining relationships (Kietzmann *et al*., 2011).
- Information and News Dissemination: Social media serves as a significant source of news and information. Users can quickly access the latest news, updates on current events, and trending topics (Boyd & Ellison, 2017). Many organizations also use these platforms to disseminate information rapidly (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).
- Educational Resources: Social media platforms are increasingly used as educational tools. Educators and students can access a wide range of resources, join educational groups, and participate in discussions (Tess, 2013). Platforms like YouTube offer tutorials and lectures on various subjects (Khan, 2012).

However, the use of social media is said to affect academic performance, as it can be a significant distraction and lead to reduced focus and time for study.

Academic performance refers to the measurement of a student's achievement across various academic subjects. It encompasses a range of outcomes that reflect the extent to which a student has mastered the material presented in their educational curriculum. Academic performance is typically evaluated through various assessments, including exams, quizzes, assignments, projects, and participation in class activities (Miller, 2020). Miller defines academic performance as the extent to which a student, teacher, or institution has achieved their short or long-term educational goals. It is often measured through examinations or continuous assessment and is a key indicator of the effectiveness of educational programmes.

Accordingly, academic performance matters because it is a key indicator of student learning and understanding, helps gauge the effectiveness of educational institutions, and plays a crucial role in determining future educational and career opportunities. Good academic performance often correlates with better job prospects, higher earning potential and improved socio-economic status (Briggs, 2024). Benefits of good grades include enhanced career opportunities. Good grades often open doors to scholarships, prestigious colleges, and highly sought-after jobs, giving students a competitive edge in the job market. Good grades also engender increased confidence and self-esteem. Achieving good grades can boost a student's confidence, fostering a positive attitude towards learning and personal growth (Ormrod, 2016). Social media presents a paradox in the context of academic performance. On one hand, it can be a valuable educational tool, providing students with access to a vast array of resources, online tutorials and peer support. It fosters collaboration and can enhance learning experiences through interactive content and educational groups (Tess, 2013). On the other hand, excessive use of social media can be a distraction, leading to procrastination and reduced study time (Junco, 2012). It can also contribute to mental health issues like anxiety and depression, which negatively impact academic performance (Vannucci *et al*., 2017). The challenge lies in balancing the use of social media to harness its educational benefits while minimizing its potential drawbacks.

Overview of social media usage among students:

Social media has become an integral part of daily life, especially among students. The proliferation of platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp and TikTok has reshaped the way students communicate, access information, and engage with their peers and the broader world

(Boyd & Ellison, 2017). Below are some empirical reports on students' social media usages patterns, educational impact, social and psychological effects:

- Usage Patterns: Students predominantly use social media for communication and entertainment. According to a study by Smith & Anderson (2018), over 90% of college students use social media platforms daily. The ease of access through smartphones has significantly contributed to this trend, with students frequently checking their accounts multiple times a day (Pew Research Center, 2019).
- Educational Impact: Social media also plays a role in the educational experiences of students. Platforms like YouTube and LinkedIn are increasingly being used for educational purposes, providing access to tutorials, lectures, and professional networking opportunities. A study by Greenhow & Lewin (2016) found that social media can enhance learning by fostering collaborative and interactive environments, although it can also be a source of distraction.
- Social and Psychological Effects: While social media offers opportunities for connection and learning, it also has potential negative effects on students' mental health. Excessive use has been linked to issues such as anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. A longitudinal study by Kross et al., (2013) highlighted that higher social media usage was associated with declines in overall well-being among young adults.

The foregoing depicts the contradictory effects of social media. This paper therefore explores the use of social media as a threat or boost to academic performance of students in order to highlight

a balanced approach that will make for the optimization of the gains of social media for enhanced academic performance.

Positive Impacts of Social Media on Academic Performance

In recent years, social media has transformed from a mere social networking platform to a vital educational tool. Contrary to the common belief that social media distracts students and hampers their academic performance; there is a growing body of evidence highlighting its positive impacts. This portion explores how social media can enhance academic performance by fostering collaboration, providing access to educational resources and facilitating communication between students and educators, thus:

- Fostering collaboration: One of the significant benefits of social media in academia is its ability to foster collaboration among students. Platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and LinkedIn offer features that allow students to form study groups, share notes, and work on group projects. A study by Manca & Ranieri (2016) found that social media facilitates collaborative learning, enabling students to engage in meaningful discussions and share diverse perspectives. These collaborative efforts often lead to a deeper understanding of the subject matter, which can enhance academic performance.
- Access to educational resources: Social media platforms are rich sources of educational content that can supplement traditional learning. Websites like YouTube, TED-Ed, and Khan Academy offer a plethora of instructional videos on a wide range of topics. According to Tess (2013), social media provides an avenue for accessing a vast array of educational materials, including tutorials, lectures, and articles, which can help students,

grasp complex concepts more easily. This easy access to quality educational resources can improve students' learning outcomes and academic success.

- Facilitation of communication: Social media enhances effective communication between students and educators for improved academic performance. Social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram allow educators to share announcements, updates, and additional resources in real-time. Additionally, platforms like Edmodo and Google Classroom enable a seamless flow of information between teachers and students. According to Al-Rahmi & Othman (2013), social media enhances student-teacher interaction, making it easier for students to seek clarification and receive feedback. This continuous communication can significantly improve students' understanding and performance.
- Enhancing digital literacy: In today's digital age, being proficient in using digital tools is essential. Social media helps students develop important digital literacy skills, including information literacy, communication skills, and technical proficiency. These skills are not only beneficial for academic purposes but are also crucial for future employment. According to Greenhow & Lewin (2016), social media use in educational contexts can help students become more adept at using technology, thus preparing them for the demands of the modern workforce.

Negative Impacts of Social Media on Academic Performance

Social media platforms have become ubiquitous in modern society, significantly influencing various aspects of daily life, including education. Despite their benefits in facilitating communication and information sharing, social media usage has been associated with several

detrimental effects on academic performance. Some of the negative impacts are discussed below and they include:

- Sleep disruption: The use of social media, particularly before bedtime, has been linked to sleep disturbances among students. Research indicates that excessive screen time and late-night social media engagement can disrupt sleep patterns, leading to fatigue and decreased cognitive function during daytime activities, including academic pursuits (Levensonet al., 2016).
- Negative impact on learning and information retention: Studies suggest that frequent use of social media may impair learning and information retention. Constant multitasking between social networking sites and academic tasks can compromise the depth of learning and the ability to concentrate effectively on educational content (Junco & Cotten, 2012). This phenomenon is exacerbated when students attempt to study while concurrently checking social media updates.
- Psychological effects and stress: The use of social media has also been associated with increased levels of stress and anxiety among students. Comparison with peers' achievements and social activities portrayed on social platforms can lead to feelings of inadequacy and lower self-esteem (Woods & Scott, 2016). These negative emotional experiences can further impact academic performance by affecting motivation and mental well-being.

Educational Benefits of Social Media

Some of the educational benefits of social media include:

- Enhanced collaborative learning: Social media platforms facilitate group discussions and collaborative projects, allowing students to work together and learn from each other. This collective effort often leads to a deeper understanding of the material (Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012).
- Increased Access to Diverse Educational Resources: Students can access a vast array of instructional videos, articles, tutorials, and lectures through platforms like YouTube, TED-Ed, and Khan Academy. This wealth of resources enables students to explore topics more thoroughly and grasp complex concepts more easily (Gonzalez & Bouhnik, 2016).
- Improved communication and feedback: Social media enables continuous communication between students and educators. Real-time updates and announcements, as well as easy access to feedback and clarifications, help students stay informed and engaged with their coursework.
- Development of digital literacy skills: Engaging with social media for educational purposes helps students build essential digital skills, such as information literacy, online communication, and technical proficiency. These skills are crucial for academic success and future career prospects (Hague & Payton, 2010).

Balancing Social Media Usage among Students

Social media has become an integral part of modern life, offering numerous benefits such as connectivity, information sharing, and entertainment. However, excessive use can lead to negative consequences, including decreased mental well-being, reduced productivity, and disrupted sleep patterns (Kross et al., 2013). The strategies for balanced usage of social media among others

include setting time limits. Establishing specific time boundaries for social media use can help prevent excessive engagement. Tools and apps that track and limit usage can assist in maintaining these boundaries. Additionally, being mindful of engagement in social media is a vital strategy for balanced usage. This implies that being intentional about when and why you use social media can foster healthier habits. This includes avoiding mindless scrolling and focusing on content that is genuinely interesting or beneficial (Rosen *et al*., 2013). Another balanced strategy is digital detox. Periodically taking breaks from social media can help reset habits and reduce dependency. This might involve setting aside specific days or times when social media use is minimized or eliminated (Hunt *et al*., 2018). Furthermore, periodically denying some social media apps access to data and Wi-Fi has helped one of the researchers of this paper to limit the distractions they bring through their distracting notifications, so students can also do same.

Implications of the Study

The study has far reaching implications for educational strategies and policies thus, the following are implications of the study:

- Integration into curriculum: The positive aspects of social media, such as access to educational resources and opportunities for collaborative learning, suggest that these platforms can be effectively integrated into the curriculum. Educators might develop assignments or projects that utilize social media for academic discussions, resource sharing, and group work.
- Digital literacy education: There is a need to teach students digital literacy skills, including critical evaluation of online content, privacy management, and effective communication.

These skills are crucial for navigating the vast amount of information available on social media.

- Time management and focus: There is need to encouraging self-regulation in the use of social media. Given the potential for distraction and procrastination, students should be encouraged to develop self-regulation strategies. This could include setting specific times for social media use and using productivity tools to minimize interruptions during study periods.
- Balancing academic and social media use: Students need guidance on balancing academic responsibilities with social media use. Workshops or counseling sessions on time management could help students prioritize their academic tasks.
- Mental health well-being of students: The study highlights that excessive social media use can contribute to mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. Educational institutions should provide mental health support services and promote awareness about the impact of social media on well-being. Healthy online behaviors, such as limiting exposure to negative content and avoiding constant comparison with others, should be encouraged to help mitigate some of the adverse mental health effects associated with social media.

Conclusion

The paper concludes that social media plays a complex role in students' academic lives but that while it offers valuable opportunities for communication, collaboration and access to educational resources, it also poses risks such as distraction and procrastination. The balance between these

positive and negative impacts is crucial. By implementing strategies for responsible use, students can harness the benefits of social media to enhance their learning experiences while mitigating potential drawbacks. Ultimately, fostering digital literacy and time management skills will enable students to navigate the digital landscape effectively, promoting academic success and well-being.

Recommendations

Based on the foregoing discussions and conclusions the following recommendations are made:

- Set Time Limits: Students should establish specific periods for social media use to prevent distractions during study sessions.
- Promote Effective Time Management: Educators should encourage students to prioritize tasks and manage their schedules effectively.
- Encourage Educational Use: Students should Integrate social media into academic activities, like study groups or discussions, to enhance learning.
- Monitor Well-being: Students and educators should be vigilant about the effects of social media on mental health and provide resources for support.

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