
SOCIAL MEDIA USE, CHANGES IN READING /WRITING CULTURE, AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF UNDERGRADUATES IN THE NIGER DELTA UNIVERSITY, BAYELSA STATE

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Abstract

This study examined the impact of social media usage on the reading and writing culture of undergraduate students of Niger Delta University vis-a-vis the academic performance of the students. No doubt, the use of social media has brought significant changes to all aspects of human lives within the past decade. Despite this, there is a dearth of empirical studies analysing the change it has brought to reading and writing culture of undergraduate students in Nigeria. Uses and gratification theory was adopted as framework for the study, while a survey research design was employed. The Niger Delta University was purposively selected as the research locale based on its lack of empirical analysis on the subject matter. The university was clustered into faculties and a sample of 392 respondents was drawn using Yamane (1967) formula. Simple random sampling was used to proportionately administer a structured questionnaire on students. Descriptive statistics and Multiple Linear Regression at $P < 0.05$ were applied to analyse Data. The average age of the respondents was 21.29 ± 2.49 years. The majority used WhatsApp (100.0%) and Facebook (30.9%) to study or write as undergraduate students. They also used these platforms to read journal articles (47.2%), academic books (85.7%) and watch movies (99.0%) among others. These activities, however, jointly predicted academic performance at ($R=0.895$, $R^2=0.801$, $Adj. R^2=0.797$, $F_{(8, 383)}=192.854$). Using the social media to read Journal articles ($\beta=0.112$), academic books ($\beta=-0.308$), magazines ($\beta=-0.123$), newspapers ($\beta=-0.265$), watch movies ($\beta=0.107$), pictures ($\beta=-0.496$) and advertisement ($\beta=-0.974$) correlated student academic performance. The study recommended that, students academic reading materials be distributed on social media platforms following the students' level of trend and addiction to social media.

Keywords: Social media, Reading and writing culture, Academic performance, WhatsApp, Facebook

Introduction

Social media is not just a booming tech trend for young minds but remains the most significant technological eruption in the computer and technology industries. (Kaplan & Haenlin, 2010) defined social media as a collection of internet-based applications that builds on the philosophical and technological underpinnings of the web and permits the creation and exchange of user-generated content. The digital website focuses on developing and maintaining social connections between those who have similar interests or pursuits. This is undeniable as statistics shows that millions of individuals connect and interact round the globe through the use of social media for variety of reasons especially with the globalisation of the Internet since the 1990s and the appearance of social networking sites in 1994 and beyond (Daluba & Maxwell, 2013).

Drawing from the 1990s and early 2000s, the use of social media has significantly increased on a global scale as early websites with membership numbers in the low millions included Classmates.com, were launched in 1995, and SixDegrees.com, also launched in 1997. For instance, in 2002, Classmates.com had 55 million users, and SixDegrees.com in its early years had over a million users (Barker et al., 2012). Friendster.com, launched in 2002 and made available to the public in 2003, was once extremely popular, and numerous other social media sites replicated it in an effort to profit from it. Friendster had 115 million users at the time MOL Global purchased it (Fiegerman, 2014). Most sites in the early social media

technology landscape targeted to privileged customers and had trouble retaining users. These techniques had not yet been as deeply embedded in our culture as they are now.

Popular social media platforms today have memberships between the high millions and low billions. As of September 2016, Facebook, for instance, reported 1.79 billion active monthly users (Facebook, 2016). 500 million tweets sent per day by 313 million active monthly users on Twitter (Twitter, 2016). Similar statistics may be found on even more recent websites like Instagram, which went live in late 2010. It boasts 500 million monthly active users, more than 95 million daily image and video shares, and 4.2 billion daily likes (Instagram, 2016).

Additionally, Technext (2020) reported that 289 million people connected to the online communities in 2019 alone, skyrocketing the world-wide internet adoption on new heights. Thus, about 4.54 billion individuals now have access to the internet globally. This number does not include about 3.2 billion people, or 40% global population, who are still not online. The average internet user is currently estimated to spend about 6 hours and 43 minutes per day on social media platforms, according to a survey by The Next Web (TNW) [2020]. Social media users were predicted to spend a total of 100 days online annually in 2020, according to estimates.

Although users of social media extents across various age groups yet research indicates that more young people especially university students (Onuoha & Saheed, 2011; Dahlstrom et al., 2011; Al-Rahmi et al., 2014). Majority of the students however use it to share thoughts, emotions, private information, images, and videos (Loving & Ochoa, 2010), whereas others use it for daily updates on current events, entertainments from online skits and basically to keep in touch with family and friends regardless of distance then occasionally for academic purposes.

In considering the positive aspect of social media, Lusk (2010) averred that online learning can help undergraduates with their academic supports. Therefore, social media offers simple access to a virtual world that university students can explore with friends who have comparable academic needs. Blogs and other interactive web tools offer university students a satisfying platform to communicate their thoughts when they may be unwilling to do so in class (Brydolf, 2007). Even though it has been highlighted that students do not utilise social media in a gender-sensitive manner, certain research has found that gender interests in social media activities vary. As a result, gender appears to be a significant predictor of social media use, with girls being 1.6 times more likely than men to utilise social media platforms (Peter & Valkenburg, 2009). As a result, Loving and Ochoa (2010) asserted that whereas boys use Facebook more frequently, girls are more likely to form new relationships, pursue academic interests, follow agendas, and maintain existing relationships than the boys. However, Loving and Ochoa (2010) stated that both genders utilised social media to maintain relationships with friends and family irrespective of distance, location and time, and for academic purposes.

According to a study by Wang et al. (2011), social media has an effect proceeding university students. According to their study, social media use is linked inadvertently to poor reading and academic achievement. A third of university students using the social media platforms were observed while in class reading. This multitasking activities enhance distraction and impair students' reading and writing skills. Similarly, Kalpidon et al. (2011) argued that while social networking sites like Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter grew in popularity, they also became riskier since they gave students ways to put off reading and other assignments. As a result, it is undeniable that the increased usage of social media among university students has had negative impact on students reading and writing habits.

On this note, there is widespread concerns about how social media may affect students' reading habits in higher institutions. Many parents worry that their children are wasting too much time on social networking sites like WhatsApp, PalmChat, Telegram, Instagram etc. These, in their opinion, deprive them of the time needed to read or focus on their academics. Thus, it has recently become extremely worrisome that more and more university students are using the internet for social rather than strictly academic goals. Loving and Ochoa (2010) studies found out that social media has become an addictive behaviour among higher institution students who are likely to commit significant hours of their restricted study time to chat, uphold

frivolous social acquaintances, and establish irrelevant contacts throughout their study years. This increased usage of social media thus substantially reduces the time spent studying and doing class assignments (Ofuani & Gberedio, 2009).

According to Obi et al. (2012), the use of English and grammar by students' is impacted by their use of these social networking platforms. Since they are accustomed to using abbreviations in chat rooms, students often fail to avoid doing so in classwork, tests, and exams. For instance, they substitute terms like "4" instead of "for," "U" for "You," "D" for "The," etc. According to reports from several examining bodies across Nigeria, this incidence appears to have had an impact on their learning methods. For instance, the National Mirror of 16 Nov 2015, reported that spelling errors and poor command of English were among the leading causes of mass failure by Nigerian students in the West African Examination Council (WAEC) exams in recent times. In fact, with the introduction of social media sites in the 1990s, students' academic performance has coincidentally diminished sharply due to the endless hours spent by students' surfing, commenting, liking, sharing posts on these SNS at the expense of their studies (Obi et al, 2012). Thus, reading books for knowledge and enjoyment is an antiquated idea. In the light of this, this study was designed to examine empirically, the use of the social media, its changes in the reading and writing culture of undergraduates, of the Niger Delta University in Bayelsa State.

Theoretical Framework

This study, hinges its theoretical frame work on an influential media research theory known as *Uses and Gratification theory*. The Uses and gratification theory was developed by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler, and Micahel Gurevitch in 1974. It explains the enormous appeal of particular media contents to a group of persons and served as the foundation for the approach's first conception. Thus, the theory asks questions like: Why do individuals use the social media, and what for? (McQuail, 2010). This question arises from the fundamental premise that spectators are aware of social media contents and which social media platform they can utilise to satisfy their own needs.

The uses and gratifications model place the responsibility for connecting audience members' needs and media preferences squarely on their shoulders in the process of mass communication. It implies that people's demands have an impact on the media they choose, how they utilise certain media, and the satisfactions the media provide.

The theory stresses social media consumers' choice by evaluating their justifications for utilising a particular medium, to the exclusion of others, as well as the varied pleasures they derive from it, based on personal social and psychological needs (Severin & Tankard, 2001). It offers a context for comprehending the procedures by which social media consumers seek information or content carefully, in accordance with their needs and interests (Katz et al., 1974). The content is then incorporated by audience members to meet their requirements or pique their interests (Lowery & Nabila, 1983).

The uses and gratification theory noted that "the mass media have a direct, immediate and influential effect upon audiences by 'injecting' information into the consciousness of the masses" (Watson & Hill, 1997). The uses and gratifications model place a focus on audience members' motivations and self-perceived requirements. Individuals can utilise the same communication message for quite diverse objectives, according to Blumler and Katz's (1974) analysis. The same media content may satisfy various demands for various people. People use media in many different ways. On the other hand, there are just as many reasons to utilise the media as there are media consumers (Blumler & Katz, 1974).

People's perceptions of their wants from the social media and which social media best satisfy their requirements are influenced by their basic needs, societal circumstances, personal backgrounds including experience, interests, and education. In other words, spectators' followers are aware of and able to articulate their own motivations and rewards for using various social media. In order to categorise four significant media gratifications, McQuail et al. (2010) suggested a model of "media-person interactions": (i) Diversion (ii) Companionship (iii) Personal identity, and (4) Surveillance.

In applying this theory to our study, we can deduce that the advent of the social media has changed drastically the traditional use and means of communication cum interaction. Knowledge building is no longer the primary aim of the use of the media. Young people have changed its use to that of social interaction and informal use for self-gratifications. This has immediate and influential effect upon the young people's reading and writing culture which has changed from academic improvement to a less educative venture by injecting information into the consciousness of their mind.

Materials and Methods

This study employed a survey research design, which entails the collection of quantitative data from a pool of respondents. The study area is the Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island, Bayelsa State. The university is located at Wilberforce Island, Amassoma, Bayelsa State. Historically, it was established in 2000. The university is a Bayelsa State Government funded university which is located in Wilberforce Island about 30 kilometers from Yenagoa – Bayelsa State capital. The study population for this research comprises all the students in the university. The sample size for this study was generated using Taro Yamane (1967) sample size determination formula which yielded a sample size of 392 subjects.

The sampling techniques for this research was multi-stage sampling utilising both probabilistic. At the first stage, the university was clustered into faculties as they exist in the institution. In the second stage, the simple random sampling technique was used to select respondents across all the faculties. This research is purely quantitative in its approach. Thus, a structured questionnaire was used as the research instrument to gather relevant information from the respondents in their respective faculties. However, the design of the structured questionnaire was based on the specific objectives of the research which were made to be varied by sections.

The instrument used in the research was validated through face validity where the key variables in each measure were examined by the supervisor and tested with respondents in one of the faculties before the administration of the actual instrument. The inter-item reliability coefficient was $\alpha=0.83$, which suggests that the measures were highly reliable.

The method of data analysis was based on the quantitative approach adopted for the study. Hence, the analysis of the study data was carried out using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. While the descriptive statistics adopted the simple percentage distribution tables and the mean for the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents among others, the inferential statistics employed Chi Square and Multiple Linear regression model at $p<0.05$ level of significance.

To fulfil the ethical aspects of this research, permission was sought from each of the respondents before the administration of the instrument after telling them the purpose of the study. Additionally, in the course of this study, the following ethical aspects were also adhered: Confidentiality, Non-maleficence, Justice etc.

Results

Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Table1 shows the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. It revealed that approximately half of the respondents (51.3%) were female. The mean age of the respondents was 21.3 years as the highest proportion of the respondents were between 20 – 23 years (41.1%). On the level of respondents, the highest percentage of them were in 100 level (37.2%) followed by those in 400 level (30.1%). Almost all the respondents were adherents of the Christian religion (99.5%). On ethnic affiliation, it was revealed that the majority of the respondents were from the Ijo (89.0%) ethnic group. Furthermore, nearly all the respondents were single (98.7%).

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Variables	Variable categories	Frequency (n=392)	Percentage (%)
Sex	Male	191	48.7
	Female	201	51.3
Age Mean age=21.29±2.49 years	16 – 19	115	29.3
	20 – 23	161	41.1
	24 – 27	116	29.6
	100 Level	146	37.2
Level	200 Level	68	17.3
	300 Level	59	15.1
	400 Level	118	30.1
	500 Level	1	0.3
	Christianity	390	99.5
Religion	Islam	2	0.5
	Traditionalist	-	-
	Ijo/Ogbia/Nembe, etc.	349	89.0
Ethnicity	Isoko/Urhobo	8	2.0
	Igbo	30	7.7
	Yoruba	2	0.5
	Hausa	3	0.8
Marital Status	Single	387	98.7
	Married	5	1.3
Types of Family	Monogamous	361	92.1
	Polygamous	31	7.9
Types of programme/admission status	Full time	364	92.9
	Part time	28	7.1
	Less than N20000	25	6.4
Monthly stipends	N20000 – N39999	164	41.8
	N40000 – N59999	203	51.8
	Agriculture	45	11.5
Faculty	Arts	29	7.4
	Basic Medicine	39	9.9
	Management Sciences	67	17.1
	Nursing	15	3.8
	Technology	37	9.4
	Pharmacy	40	10.2
	Sciences	53	13.5
Social Sciences	67	17.1	

On the type of family of the respondents, it was found that the majority were from monogamous family (92.9%). Still, the majority of the respondents were full time (92.1%) students, with more than half of the respondents receiving a monthly stipend of N40000 – N59999 (51.8%) from their parents. The highest respondents were from the faculties of management sciences (17.1%) and social sciences (17.1%).

Social media network is mostly used by undergraduate students

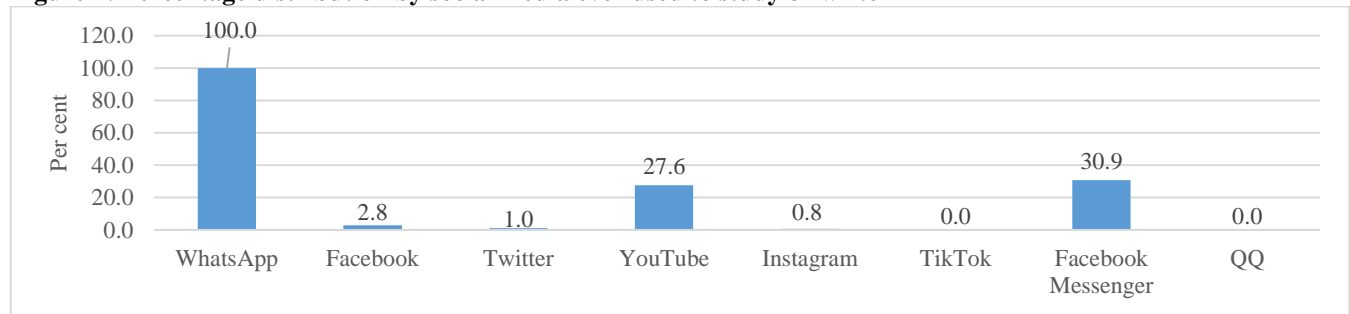
The social media network mostly used by undergraduate students were explored in the study. Table 2 displayed the distribution of the respondents by the social media platforms on respondents' phone in a multiple response. According to the highest number of cases of the platforms used on phone by the respondents, it was revealed that the highest proportion of the respondents had WhatsApp (34.0%), Facebook (34.0%), Instagram (19.0%), Facebook Messenger (8.5%) and Twitter (1.6%) among others.

Table 2: Distribution by social media platforms on respondents' phone

Social media platforms on phone	Number of cases	Percent (%)
WhatsApp	392	34.0
Facebook	392	34.0
Instagram	219	19.0
Facebook Messenger	98	8.5
Twitter	18	1.6
YouTube	15	1.3
QQ	11	1.0
Tik Tok	9	0.8
Total	1154	100.0

The percentage distribution of the respondents by social media ever used to study or write as undergraduate students is presented in Figure 1. It was revealed that the majority used WhatsApp (100.0%) to study and write followed by those who used Facebook Messenger (30.9%) and YouTube (27.6%) among others.

Figure 1: Percentage distribution by social media ever used to study or write



Reading and Writing Culture of Undergraduates on the Social Media

The reading and writing culture of undergraduate students on social media platforms was explored. The respondents were first asked the materials they usually read with social media platforms. Table 3 reports that the majority usually watch movies (99.0%) using their social media applications, this was followed by those who indicated reading academic books (85.7%), journal articles (47.5%) and viewing pictures (23.0%) among others.

Table 3: Distribution of respondents by materials read on the social media as undergraduate

Materials read with social media platforms	Frequency (n=392)	Percentage (%)
Journal articles	207	47.2
Academic books	336	85.7
Magazines	7	1.8
Newspapers	15	3.8
Pictures	90	23.0
Movies	388	99.0
Motivational books	11	2.8
Advertisement	55	14.0

Things written on social media were also explored. Table 4 shows that they wrote/submitted assignment (100.0%), sent/posted pictures (99.2%), did academic presentations (96.4%) using social media as well as other uses (51.5%).

Table 4: Distribution of respondents by things written on social media

Things written on social media	Frequency (n=392)	Percentage (%)
Send/posting of pictures	389	99.2
Write/submission of assignment	392	100.0
Academic group discussion	381	97.2
Advertisement	28	7.1
Academic presentation	378	96.4
Other uses	202	51.5

Social Media Reading/Writing Culture of Undergraduates and Academic Performance

Table 5 shows the model summary of the predictors of academic performance with the use of social media as reading aids. It was revealed that $R=0.895$, $R^2=0.801$ and $Adj. R^2=0.797$. This is suggesting that there is 89.5% variation that provided explanation on the predictors of academic performance with the use of social media as reading aids.

Table 5: Table showing the model summary of the predictors of academic performance with the use of social media as reading aids

Model Summary						
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
1	.895 ^a	.801	.797	.515		

a. Predictors: (Constant), Advertisement, Movies, Magazines, Pictures, Newspapers, Motivational books, Journal articles, Academic books

Table 6 shows the ANOVA table for the predictors of academic performance with the use of social media as reading aid. It was found that the F ratio is equal 192.854 with the DF = 8, 383.

Table 6: The ANOVA table for the predictors of academic performance with the use of social media as reading aid

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	408.899	8	51.112	192.854	.000 ^b
	Residual	101.507	383	.265		
	Total	510.406	391			

a. Dependent Variable: Academic performance when using social media for reading and writing

b. Predictors: (Constant), Advertisement, Movies, Magazines, Pictures, Newspapers, Motivational books, Journal articles, Academic books

Table 7 displays the multiple linear regression showing the predictors of academic performance when using social media for reading in various ways. Regarding the joint prediction of academic performance, it was found that reading journal articles, academic books, magazines, newspapers, pictures, movies, motivational books and advertisement using social media jointly predicted academic performance at ($R=0.895$, $R^2=0.801$, $Adj. R^2=0.797$, $F_{(8, 383)}=192.854$).

Table 7: Multiple linear regression showing the predictors of academic performance when using social media for reading

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	
1	(Constant)	8.055	.285		28.307	.000
	Journal articles	.257	.113	.112	2.262	.024
	Academic books	-1.005	.184	-.308	-5.459	.000
	Magazines	-1.061	.235	-.123	-4.526	.000
	Newspapers	-1.574	.169	-.265	-9.295	.000
	Pictures	-1.345	.119	-.496	-11.328	.000
	Movies	1.213	.284	.107	4.274	.000
	Motivational books	-.204	.201	-.030	-1.014	.311
	Advertisement	-3.201	.192	-.974	-16.668	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Academic performance when using social media for reading and writing

In their independent prediction of academic performance, reading of journal articles ($\beta=0.112$) and watching of movies ($\beta=0.107$) positively predicted academic performance, while other activities such as reading academic books ($\beta=-0.308$), magazines ($\beta=-0.123$), newspapers ($\beta=-0.265$), watching pictures ($\beta=-0.496$) and reading advertisement ($\beta=-0.974$) were negatively associated with academic performance of students.

Discussion of Findings

The study mainly focused on social media use and its changes in reading and writing culture of undergraduate students in Niger Delta University. However, the discussion of findings will be done in line with the objectives set out to achieve.

Findings from the study, revealed that they used WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Facebook Messenger and Twitter among others. It was further discovered that the most widely used social media to study or write as undergraduate students were mainly WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger and YouTube. This corroborates Lakhali (2021) and Yunus and Salehi's (2012) work which revealed that WhatsApp comes at the top of the list with 50.2% followed by 37% of those who used Facebook among the students.

Findings on the current reading and writing culture of understanding after the advent of social media platforms showed that the over two-third of the respondents watched movies and read academic books on their phones at the same time. However, a smaller amount of the respondents indicated that they read journal articles with their phones. Other things which they used phones for on social media revealed that they wrote/submitted assignment, sent/posted pictures and did academic presentations among others uses.

Despite the use of social media by the students in aiding the submission and completion of assignment and reading books, only reading of journal articles and watching of movies positively predicted academic

performance, while other activities such as reading academic books, magazines, newspapers, watching pictures and reading advertisement were negatively predicted. This finding is consistent with Ibrahim (2015) study in Ghana that social media have both positive and negative effects on their youths.

Furthermore, this finding aligns with Lowery and Nabila's (1983) study that audience member incorporates the content of the media to fulfil their needs or to satisfy their interests. This means that while the advent of social media improves the reading and writing culture of some students, it resulted into deteriorating their reading and writing culture for other students based on self-gratification. In other words, the reading and writing culture of students' vis-à-vis academic performance of students seemingly depends on the usage of the social media, which are also determined by individual students.

Conclusion

The study examined social media use and its change in the reading and writing culture of undergraduate students in Niger Delta University. Findings from the study suggest that although various activities could be carried out on social media to advance reading and writing regarding academic performance, not all students use the social media platforms maximally to advance their reading and writing culture. Indeed, while some of the activities they perform on social media have caused a change in their reading and writing culture so as to positively influence academic performance, other activities they perform negatively influence academic performance. This implies the need for sensitization by all stakeholders in education to undergraduate students in order to cause a positive influence on the use of social media for academic excellence.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from the study, the following recommendations were formulated:

First and foremost, since, students are now so used to the social media, lecturers should be encouraged to be distributing academic reading materials via social media platforms, instead of using hardcopies of reading materials that students will never read. Also, undergraduate students should be shown how social media platforms can also be a veritable tool of academic excellence. This can be done by lecturers encouraging their students to follow important academic pages, journals and study groups on twitter, Facebook etc., as these pages highlight important academic findings that are very useful to students.

Furthermore, social media platforms that might not be relevant to academic pursuit can be censored by the Nigeria Communication Commission (NCC) to allow only those of certain ages (e.g. 21 years) to access these social media platforms. This is necessary as it would prevent undergraduate students from accessing contents that might not be relevant to their studies. Finally, the use of social media platforms in learning by lecturers should be encouraged and incorporated in academic programmes such as submission of assignments via social media, teaching via social media, etc.

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