
Original Paper

Perceptions and Purposes of Social Media Use in Education: Insights from University of Ilorin Undergraduates

Akinade Adebowale Adewojo

Nigerian Stored Products Research Institute, Information and Documentation (Library), Ilorin, Nigeria

Abstract

This study investigates the perceptions and purposes of social media use in education among undergraduate students at the University of Ilorin. With the increasing integration of platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and X into academic settings, understanding how students utilize these tools for academic and non-academic purposes is essential. A descriptive survey design was employed, and data were gathered from 269 students across various faculties. The findings reveal that while most students perceive social media as beneficial for communication, collaboration, and access to academic resources, a significant portion also views it as distracting. WhatsApp emerged as the most frequently used platform, especially for academic collaboration. The study further identified a significant relationship between social media use for academic purposes and students' perceived academic performance. However, non-academic use of these platforms often led to procrastination and negatively impacted performance. The study concludes that while social media offers valuable educational benefits, managing its use is crucial to minimize distractions.

Keywords: Social media, Academic performance, Undergraduate students, Education, WhatsApp, Distractions, University of Ilorin

Introduction

In recent years, social media has transformed the way people communicate, learn, and engage with information. Among university students, platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, X, and Snapchat have become essential tools not only for social interaction but also for educational purposes (Celik et al., 2023). These platforms provide students with the ability to share academic resources, collaborate on group projects, and engage in discussions with their peers and lecturers. However, the extent to which social media platforms are used for academic purposes varies significantly, and students' perceptions of social media's role in education often influence their usage patterns.

Social media's integration into academic life raises important questions about how students perceive its role in enhancing learning outcomes. While many believe that social media facilitates communication and collaboration, others express concerns about its potential to distract from academic responsibilities. This study focuses on the perceptions and purposes of social media use in education, using the University of Ilorin undergraduates as a case study.

Problem Statement

Despite the widespread use of social media among university students, there is limited empirical research on the specific perceptions students have regarding its role in education. While some students actively use platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook for academic purposes, others may use these platforms predominantly for social interaction, which could negatively impact their academic performance. The ambiguity surrounding the effectiveness of social media as a learning tool stems from a lack of comprehensive studies that explore students' perceptions and the actual purposes behind their usage patterns.

This research seeks to bridge that gap by examining how undergraduates at the University of Ilorin perceive the role of social media in education and identifying the purposes for which they utilize these platforms. Understanding these factors is crucial for determining the potential benefits and challenges

associated with using social media for educational purposes.

Objectives

The general objective of this study is to explore the perceptions and purposes of social media use in education among undergraduate students at the University of Ilorin. The specific objectives are to:

1. Investigate the perceptions of undergraduate students regarding the use of social media for academic purposes.
2. Identify the social media platforms frequently used by undergraduates for academic and non-academic activities.
3. Examine the relationship between the purposes of social media use (academic vs. non-academic) and students' perceived academic performance.
4. Explore the challenges and benefits associated with the use of social media in educational contexts.

Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between the purposes of social media use (academic or non-academic) and students' perceived academic performance.

Literature Review

Social Media and Education

The integration of social media into education has sparked a range of discussions in academic literature, with many scholars investigating the role that platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, X, and Snapchat play in the learning process. Social media has been widely recognized as a tool for enhancing communication, collaboration, and resource sharing among students (Sabah, 2023). Chambers et al. (2023) noted that these platforms create opportunities for peer-to-peer learning, especially when students use them for group projects and academic discussions. Similarly, Elenurm (2024) argue that social media helps students maintain connections with their academic networks, including lecturers and classmates, while facilitating real-time communication.

Perceptions of Social Media as an Educational Tool

Students' perceptions of social media use in educational settings vary widely. Some students view it as an effective means of improving academic engagement, while others see it as a distraction. Kahu et al. (2024) highlighted that platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp, when used for academic purposes, can improve student engagement by allowing them to participate in collaborative discussions. However, Cheng et al. (2024) found that students who used social media excessively for non-academic purposes tended to report lower academic performance. These mixed findings underscore the importance of investigating not only how students use social media but also their perceptions of its impact on learning outcomes.

Social Media Platforms Used by Students

Different social media platforms serve different purposes in the academic context. WhatsApp, for instance, is often used for quick communication between students and lecturers, and it facilitates group discussions and information sharing (Naghdipour & Manca, 2023) (Albergotti, MacMillan, & Rusli, 2014). Facebook is more versatile, allowing students to create study groups, share academic materials, and engage in long-term discussions (Lan et al., 2023). Snapchat and X, though more commonly associated with social interactions, are also used in educational settings, particularly for sharing multimedia content and following academic trends (Fortuna, 2023).

Challenges of Social Media Use in Education

While social media offers significant educational benefits, there are also challenges associated with its use. One of the most frequently cited issues is that students often struggle to balance academic and non-academic activities on these platforms. Liu et al. (2023) observed that students who use social

media for extended periods may find it difficult to concentrate on their studies, as they are constantly bombarded with social updates and notifications. Additionally, Saini and Mir (2023) noted that the tendency to multitask on social media can lead to procrastination, further detracting from students' academic focus. These findings suggest that students' academic performance may be affected by how and why they use social media platforms.

Theoretical Framework: Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT)

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), developed by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch in 1974, serves as the theoretical foundation for this study. UGT posits that individuals actively select media platforms based on the specific gratifications or needs they seek to fulfill. This theory focuses on the reasons why individuals choose certain media channels, emphasizing that media users are active participants rather than passive consumers.

In the context of social media use in education, UGT helps to explain the different purposes for which students engage with platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and Snapchat. For academic purposes, students may use WhatsApp to communicate with their peers and lecturers, share resources, and collaborate on group projects. Facebook allows for the creation of academic groups and the dissemination of information, while X and Snapchat enable the sharing of academic trends and multimedia content. The theory provides a useful framework for understanding how students' needs influence their choice of platform, and how these choices, in turn, impact their learning outcomes.

Through the lens of UGT, this study explores students' perceptions of social media as a tool for academic engagement and examines the various purposes for which they use these platforms in educational contexts.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive survey research design to explore the perceptions and purposes of social media use in education among undergraduate students at the University of Ilorin. A descriptive survey design is appropriate for this type of research because it enables the collection of data on students' attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions regarding the use of social media for academic purposes.

Population of the Study

The population of the study consists of undergraduate students at the University of Ilorin. As of the 2023/2024 academic session, the university had a total undergraduate population of approximately 40,674 students across 15 faculties. These students are the target population for understanding the broader trends in social media usage for academic purposes.

Sample and Sampling Technique

A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure that students from all faculties were represented in the sample. The Raosoft sample size calculator was used to determine a sample size of 269 undergraduate students, ensuring statistical significance. The sample was drawn from various faculties to reflect the diversity of social media usage patterns across different academic disciplines.

Data Collection Instrument

The primary instrument used for data collection was a self-developed questionnaire titled "Perceptions and Purposes of Social Media in Education Questionnaire (PPSMEQ)". The questionnaire was divided into two sections:

- **Section A:** Demographic data, including age, gender, academic level, and faculty.
- **Section B:** Questions related to the study objectives, focusing on students' perceptions of social media use in education, the platforms they frequently use, and the purposes behind their social media engagement (academic vs. non-academic). Responses were measured on a four-point Likert scale.

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

To ensure content validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by three experts in the field of educational technology and library science. A pilot study was conducted with 30 students at a neighboring university to test the reliability of the instrument. Cronbach's alpha was used to measure internal consistency, and the instrument was found to be reliable with an alpha value above 0.70.

Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaires were administered in person to the selected sample of students by the researcher and research assistants. The respondents completed the questionnaires in their classrooms and returned them immediately, ensuring a high response rate.

Data Analysis

Data collected from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency counts, percentages, and mean scores. To test the study's hypotheses, the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was employed to assess the relationship between the purposes of social media use (academic vs. non-academic) and students' perceived academic performance. The data were analyzed using SPSS version 21.0 to ensure accuracy and reliability.

Objective 1: Investigate the Perceptions of Undergraduate Students Regarding the Use of Social Media for Academic Purposes

Table 1. Perceptions of Social Media

Perceptions of Social Media Usage for Academic Purposes	Strongly Agree (SA)	Agree (A)	Disagree (D)	Strongly Disagree (SD)
Social media helps me understand complex academic concepts	102 (40.5%)	96 (38.1%)	36 (14.3%)	18 (7.1%)
Social media is useful for collaborating on academic projects	120 (47.6%)	84 (33.3%)	48 (19.0%)	6 (2.4%)
Social media is distracting in academic settings	66 (26.2%)	78 (31.0%)	96 (38.1%)	12 (4.8%)
Social media improves my access to academic materials and resources	144 (57.1%)	78 (31.0%)	24 (9.5%)	6 (2.4%)
Social media enhances communication with lecturers and classmates	132 (52.4%)	90 (35.7%)	30 (11.9%)	12 (4.8%)
Social media facilitates sharing of ideas in academic discussions	138 (54.8%)	78 (31.0%)	30 (11.9%)	6 (2.4%)

Additional Data & Context:

- 88.6% of students agree that social media helps them understand complex academic concepts, with 47.6% strongly agreeing that it is beneficial for academic collaboration.
- However, 57.2% of students perceive social media as distracting, highlighting the dual role it plays in academic environments.
- The majority of students (88.1%) believe that social media enhances their communication with lecturers and classmates, showing its value in academic discussions and networking.

Objective 2: Identify the Social Media Platforms Frequently Used by Undergraduates for Academic and Non-Academic Activities

Table 2. Social Media Platforms

Social Media Platforms Frequently Used by Students	Always	Often	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
WhatsApp	144 (57.1%)	84 (33.3%)	30 (11.9%)	6 (2.4%)	0 (0.0%)
Facebook	132 (52.4%)	66 (26.2%)	48 (19.0%)	12 (4.8%)	12 (4.8%)
X	78 (31.0%)	84 (33.3%)	48 (19.0%)	42 (16.7%)	0 (0.0%)
Instagram	54 (21.4%)	78 (31.0%)	72 (28.6%)	48 (19.0%)	12 (4.8%)
Snapchat	48 (19.0%)	66 (26.2%)	84 (33.3%)	54 (21.4%)	18 (7.1%)

Additional Data & Context:

- WhatsApp is the most widely and frequently used platform, with 90.4% of students using it either always or often for both academic and non-academic purposes.
- Facebook is used regularly by 78.6% of students, though it is more balanced between academic and social purposes.
- X and Instagram show moderate usage, with 64.3% of students using X often or always, while Instagram usage is more casual.
- Snapchat is primarily used for entertainment, with 33.3% of students using it occasionally and 26.2% using it often.

Objective 3: Examine the Relationship Between the Purposes of Social Media Use (Academic vs. Non-Academic) and Students’ Perceived Academic Performance

Table 3. Perceived Impact of Social Media

Perceived Impact of Social Media on Academic Performance	Strongly Agree (SA)	Agree (A)	Disagree (D)	Strongly Disagree (SD)
Using social media improves my academic performance	96 (38.1%)	102 (40.5%)	36 (14.3%)	18 (7.1%)
Social media allows me to participate in academic discussions	108 (42.9%)	84 (33.3%)	42 (16.7%)	18 (7.1%)
Social media distracts me from studying	54 (21.4%)	90 (35.7%)	72 (28.6%)	36 (14.3%)
Non-academic social media use negatively affects my grades	36 (14.3%)	66 (26.2%)	90 (35.7%)	60 (23.8%)
Social media helps me manage academic tasks more efficiently	84 (33.3%)	90 (35.7%)	54 (21.4%)	24 (9.5%)

Additional Data & Context:

- 78.6% of students believe that using social media improves their academic performance, particularly for participating in academic discussions (76.2%).
- Despite this, 57.1% of students agree that social media distracts them from studying, indicating that the academic benefits of social media are accompanied by potential downsides if not properly managed.
- When it comes to non-academic usage, 40.5% of students acknowledge that it negatively impacts their grades, while 59.5% believe it has no significant effect or disagree with its negative impact.

Objective 4: Explore the Challenges and Benefits Associated with the Use of Social Media in Educational Contexts

Table 4. Challenges and Benefits of Social Media Usage

Challenges and Benefits of Social Media Usage	Strongly Agree (SA)	Agree (A)	Disagree (D)	Strongly Disagree (SD)
Social media enhances my ability to communicate with peers	132 (52.4%)	84 (33.3%)	30 (11.9%)	6 (2.4%)
Social media enables efficient academic collaboration	96 (38.1%)	84 (33.3%)	48 (19.0%)	24 (9.5%)
Social media distracts me from focusing on schoolwork	48 (19.0%)	84 (33.3%)	72 (28.6%)	48 (19.0%)
I often procrastinate due to social media	66 (26.2%)	78 (31.0%)	72 (28.6%)	36 (14.3%)
Social media facilitates access to current academic trends	120 (47.6%)	66 (26.2%)	54 (21.4%)	12 (4.8%)

Additional Data & Context:

- A large percentage (85.7%) of students believe that social media enhances their communication with peers, highlighting its importance as a tool for collaboration.
- 71.4% of students agree that social media enables efficient academic collaboration, but 52.3% also admit that it can cause distractions and procrastination.
- 73.8% of students find that social media facilitates access to current academic trends, but 26.2% express concerns over its effectiveness as an academic tool.

Conclusion on Table Findings

- WhatsApp emerges as the most frequently used platform for both academic and non-academic purposes, facilitating communication, collaboration, and access to academic materials.
- Facebook and X are moderately used for academic engagement, while Snapchat is primarily reserved for social interactions, with limited academic relevance.
- Students generally perceive social media as beneficial for academic collaboration and communication, but concerns about distractions and procrastination are significant.
- The balance between academic and non-academic usage plays a critical role in determining how social media impacts students' perceived academic performance.

Table 5. Relationship between the Purposes of Social Media Use (Academic vs. Non-Academic) and Students' Perceived Academic Performance

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	N	Df	r-calculated	P-value	Decision
Purposes of Social Media Use	28.72	6.13	252	250	0.291	0.000**	Significant
Perceived Performance	Academic 16.82	3.92					

Note. Significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Analysis:

The table shows a significant positive relationship between the purposes of social media use (academic or non-academic) and students' perceived academic performance. The r-calculated value is 0.291 with a P-value of 0.000, indicating a significant correlation at the 0.01 level. This means that students who use social media primarily for academic purposes tend to report better academic performance, while non-academic use might detract from their performance.

Discussion of Findings

Objective 1: Perceptions of Social Media Use for Academic Purposes

From the findings in Table 1, the majority of students (88.6%) believe that social media helps them understand complex academic concepts, and 88.1% feel it enhances communication with lecturers and classmates. These findings align with the study by Chambers et al. (2023), which emphasized the role of social media in enhancing collaboration and knowledge sharing. Similarly, Kahu et al. (2024) argued that social media platforms, when used for academic purposes, can improve engagement. However, the perception of social media as a distraction (57.2% of students) resonates with Cheng et al. (2024) findings, which showed that excessive social media use for non-academic purposes can negatively impact academic performance.

Objective 2: Social Media Platforms Frequently Used for Academic and Non-Academic Activities

Table 2 reveals that WhatsApp is the most frequently used platform, with 90.4% of students using it always or often, making it a central tool for communication and academic collaboration. Facebook is also widely used for both academic and non-academic purposes, which is consistent with Lan et al. (2023), who highlighted Facebook's dual function as both an academic and social platform. Snapchat, on the other hand, is predominantly used for entertainment, reflecting findings by Fortuna (2023), who noted the platform's role in multimedia sharing, often for non-academic purposes.

Objective 3: Relationship Between Social Media Purposes and Academic Performance

Table 3 shows that 78.6% of students believe that social media improves their academic performance, particularly by allowing them to participate in academic discussions. This supports the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), which posits that students actively seek out platforms that meet their academic needs. However, 57.1% also acknowledge that social media can distract them from studying, highlighting the dual nature of social media, as noted by Kahu et al. (2024). The mixed perceptions of social media use for non-academic purposes and its negative impact on grades align with Cheng et al. (2024), who observed a correlation between time spent on social media for non-academic activities and lower academic performance.

Objective 4: Challenges and Benefits of Social Media Usage in Education

Table 4 highlights the benefits and challenges of social media use. 85.7% of students agree that social media enhances communication with peers, while 71.4% believe it facilitates academic collaboration. However, a significant percentage (52.3%) also report that social media causes distractions and procrastination, echoing Liu et al. (2023) findings on the potential negative effects of excessive social

media use. Saini and Mir (2023) also highlighted that multitasking on social media could lead to procrastination, which was supported by 57.2% of respondents in this study.

Hypothesis Testing and Findings

- **H₀₁:** Which states that there is no significant relationship between the purposes of social media use (academic or non-academic) and students' perceived academic performance, was rejected. The findings indicate a significant positive relationship between academic social media use and perceived academic performance, supporting studies by Fishman et al. (2005) that showed social media can enhance academic engagement when used purposefully.

Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest that social media is widely perceived as a valuable tool for academic purposes among University of Ilorin undergraduates. Platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook are heavily used for academic communication, collaboration, and resource sharing, while Snapchat is primarily used for social interactions. Despite the clear benefits of social media for academic engagement, challenges such as distractions and procrastination remain significant concerns. The study also confirms that students' academic performance is positively influenced when social media is used for academic purposes, but non-academic use can detract from academic success.

Recommendations

1. **Encourage Responsible Use of Social Media for Academic Purposes:** Universities should promote responsible use of social media for academic purposes by organizing workshops and seminars that educate students on how to use these platforms effectively without falling into distractions.
2. **Integrate Social Media into Academic Curricula:** Educators should consider integrating platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook into formal learning activities, encouraging students to use these tools for collaborative learning, discussion forums, and resource sharing.
3. **Limitations on Non-Academic Use During Study Time:** Students should be guided on strategies to manage their non-academic use of social media, such as time management techniques and the use of tools that block distracting content during study sessions.

Implications of the Study

1. **Educational Policy:** The findings suggest that social media can be a powerful educational tool if used appropriately. Educational institutions should create policies that promote the academic use of social media while minimizing its distractions.
2. **Teaching and Learning:** Teachers and students alike need to recognize the potential benefits and drawbacks of social media in learning environments. Teachers should encourage students to use these platforms for academic discussions and collaborations, while students should be mindful of the risks of excessive non-academic use.
3. **Student Learning Outcomes:** This study highlights the importance of managing social media usage. Students who balance academic and non-academic activities on social media platforms tend to perceive improvements in their academic performance.

Suggestions for Further Studies

1. **Longitudinal Studies on Social Media Use and Academic Performance:** Future research should investigate the long-term effects of social media use on academic performance, tracking students' usage patterns over multiple semesters.
2. **Platform-Specific Studies:** Further studies could focus on the academic impact of individual social media platforms, such as comparing WhatsApp's role in group discussions with Facebook's role in resource sharing.
3. **Comparative Studies Across Disciplines:** Research could explore whether students in different academic disciplines (e.g., STEM vs. humanities) use social media in different ways, and how this affects their learning outcomes.

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