



Digital Distractions and Learning: A Study of Social Media Impact on Tertiary Students in Gombe

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of social media on the academic performance of Nigeria students. The study finds that over-utilization of the media affects the performance of the students negatively. The study utilizes mixed-method research that includes qualitative and quantitative research that examines the complaints of students and the effect of a platform like WhatsApp and Facebook on students and their marks. A stratified random sample of 300 students in different tertiary institutions within Gombe state was selected. With the help of SLT and CLT, this research sought to define the association between social media usage and academic performance. The traditional learning theory studies the effects of social media on student capability and peer interactions. The cognitive load theory studies how overloaded cognitive processing as a result of too much social media use has a detrimental effect on concentration and learning ability. To collect data, researchers used questionnaires. Both qualitative and quantitative data were received regarding the use of social media, favourite platforms and its impact on academic performance. Frequencies and percentages were used to examine the data. The findings suggest that while social media is beneficial for communication and access to learning resources, overuse causes serious distractions whereby students lose focus in their lecture and studying sessions. The social media should be used by one and all in a reasonable way. Thus it will not affect academic performance.

Keyword: WatsApp, Cognitive theory, Social learning, Digital distraction.

Introduction

The education landscape has changed drastically thanks to social media, especially for college students. Although students benefit from learning through these platforms, they harm their mood, time management, and involvement in their education (Olebara et al., 2021). Also, the research seeks to identify what steps students, teachers and institutions can take to make the most of positive effects of social media for education and lessen the negative effects (Zamir & Mujeeb, 2022). Many university students' academic challenges reportedly start from their secondary school days. As social media is reportedly becoming a focus of everyday life, this issue should be investigated further (Mbativga, 2020).

By targeting tertiary institutions in Gombe State, Nigeria, a largely neglected part of the world (Zamir & Mujeeb, 2022), the current research contributes to the localization of global phenomenon. This study analyzed how time spent, frequency of visit and number of social media connections affect academic performance using case studies which will help to achieve deeper insight (Ebiraj, 2023; Paul & Paul, 2024). The study aims to investigate how self-regulation and digital literacy can affect how social media use relates to academic performance (Boahene et al., 2019). The project also assessed the role of parents and teachers in promoting responsible digital citizenship and how social media can be used in pedagogy, so that these platforms enhance learning instead of distracting students (Hasan et al. 2022). Nwaka-Nwandu and others (2024) and Amin and others (2019) are framing to maximize the positive impact of social media on the performance of students and minimize the negative impact. The study used to examine how social media may promote collective learning and sharing of educational resources and its risk for mental health-related distractions that obstruct education (Shahzad et al., 2024).

Moreover, this research analyzed the importance of artificial intelligence and smart learning paradigms utilizing social media to further academic performance and mental health. This paper will offer a theoretical and qualitative contribution to knowledge (Shahzad et al., 2024). The major aim is to help us understand how digitised learning, enabled by evolving technology, can affect the academic experience of students in tertiary institutions in Gombe State. The study used Bandura's Social Learning Theory and Sweller's Cognitive Load Theory to examine the impact of social media on the learning and performance of students. In particular, we examined how the engaging and interaction-prompting social media content aligns with or contradicts principles of 'observational learning' and 'efficiency of cognitive processing' (Opara et al., 2025). These theories will be used to

find out how students' self-efficacy beliefs and social acceptance via online networking will impact their learning outcome (Yu, 2022).

This research will provide crucial information for teachers, policymakers, and students regarding how social media affect academic performance in a certain region based on evidence. The objective of the study is to help us understand the damage due to social media and its many forms.

Understanding how social media affects academic performance will help develop strategies for education that uses social media as a learning platform, and manage its adverse impact. This research will help policy-makers understand how important social media is in education and how it will help students learn better.

Together with Bandura's Social Learning Theory Sweller's Cognitive Load Theory has been used in this study. The theories help us understand the impact of social media on students' learning and academic performance. The theory of social learning states that we learn through modelling and imitating behaviour. The interactive nature of social media makes this theory particularly useful for observational learning since one observes the learning and imitates (Adenubi et al., 2013). According to Rana et al. (2023), this study will make use of this in observing the effect of social networking on students' self-efficacy beliefs and social acceptance which impact academic performance.

In addition, it explores how students collaborate to construct knowledge in online communities that enhance their academic engagement and skills (Du & Wang, 2024; Mosharrafa et al., 2024). The role that social media plays in student learning can be understood through the lens of Social Learning Theory (Boahene et al., 2019). This framework increasingly emphasizes the importance of motivational factors (or personal characteristics), contextual factors (environment), and behavioral factors. These include the ecological perspectives linked to greater objectives, student objectives and self-regulatory skills, and peer type and quantity.

According to Sweller's Cognitive Load Theory, working memory can only manage information to a certain extent. So, whether teaching helps the learning or the opposite totally depends on the management of intrinsic, extraneous and germane cognitive load. (Astleitner & Schlick, 2024) Excessive educational social media use, or use with poorly-structured pedagogy, has potential negative effects according to this theory (Sarwar et al. 2022). relates this to cognitive overload, which occurs when too much information or badly structured tasks overwhelms cognitive capacity.

Our comprehension of how cognitive load caused by social media affects adaptability will be guided by the theory. Having this framework could help us reduce extraneous cognitive load and enhance

germane load. Using these principles in teaching could help the students use social media for learning without overloading them cognitively (Perez et al., 2023). Social media can sometimes have the extreme effect of multitasking, notifications, and even more, it drains the cognitive load and impairs the attention mechanism. which hampers deeper learning (Sapci et al. 2021; Joshi et al. 2020).

Studies show that social media is an integral element in student life nowadays. However, it often acts as a distraction and sometimes becomes an educational tool used by teachers. Most studies concentrate on the effects of social media on academic performance Anjum et al. (2024) and Ebiraj (2023). However, no study has focused on the socio-cultural and educational context of Gombe State.

Furthermore, the existing literature is silent on the social media platforms students in the region prefer (Popoola, 2020). The varying effects of social media on academic achievement remain obscure. That is, it is unclear to what extent different social media can positively or negatively influence academic performance. This study aims to fill this gap.

Objectives of the Study

The study;

- I. Examine the reasons why students use social networking sites.
- II. Investigate how social media impacts students' grades and academic success.
- III. Analyze patterns of time spent on social media by students.
- IV. Determine the most commonly used social media platforms among students in Gombe State.

Research Questions

- I. What are the primary reasons students use social networking sites?
- II. How does social media impact the academic success and grades of students?
- III. How much time do students spend on social media, and how does it affect their academic performance?
- IV. Which social media platforms are most commonly used by students in Gombe State, and what is their impact on academic engagement?
- V. What strategies do students from Gombe State adopt to manage distractions caused by social media on their academic activities.

Methodology

The researcher used a structured questionnaire to collect data. The survey was designed to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data on social media usage, its frequency, its purposes (academic or social), and its perceived impact on students' academic performance.

The study population consisted of 102,443 students of public tertiary institutions in Gombe State. For this population, a sample of 300 respondents has been selected through stratified random sampling technique. Each college in the institutions was represented in the sample. This technique has made it possible to analyse the impact of social media on academic performance. The primary data collection tool for this study was a self-constructed questionnaire, designed to capture both quantitative and qualitative data regarding the usage of social media by students in Gombe State's tertiary institutions. The questionnaire was structured to assess various dimensions of social media engagement, such as the frequency of use, the purpose of use, its impact on academic performance, and strategies for managing distractions. It included questions on how often students engage with social media platforms and the amount of time they spend daily. Additionally, students were asked to identify the main reasons for their use of social media, including academic purposes, social interaction, or entertainment. The instrument also explored students' perceptions of how social media affects their academic engagement, concentration, study habits, and overall academic performance, addressing both positive and negative impacts, such as distractions during study time and class sessions. Furthermore, the questionnaire gathered data on the strategies students employ to manage distractions caused by social media during academic activities.

The questionnaire combined multiple-choice, Likert-scale, and open-ended questions. Likert-scale items were used to measure students' attitudes and perceptions of social media's impact on academic performance, with response options ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree." Multiple-choice questions allowed respondents to identify the social media platforms they most frequently use, while open-ended questions offered insights into how students cope with social media distractions. This instrument was developed to provide comprehensive data that could address the research objectives effectively.

Results and Discussions

The analysis was done on social media usage and academic performance. The results were Tabulated. The results are expressed in frequency distribution and percentage. They show the percentage of students using social media and its effect on their in-class engagement and academic performance.

Table 1: Purpose for Engaging in Social Networking

VARIABLE	Frequency	Percentage %
Building and maintaining social connection.	46	13
Accessing Academic Resources	58	19
Staying connected with peers	54	17
All of the above	118	49
Others	29	2
Total	300	100

Source field survey, 2025

In this regard, we note that on social media, a small number of students are either using it for a single reason, such as staying in touch through Facebook for a friend request (19 per cent) or searching for Revolut (17 per cent). Nevertheless, nearly half (49 per cent) of respondents are using social media for all other purposes. Words social networking (of the students) confirms that it is not only a means to stay socially active but also a means to engage educationally. This two-pronged use is a good argument for socially meaningful learning using social media.

Table 2: Academic Benefits of Social Networking

VARIABLE	Frequency	Percentage %
Notified of class changes or updates	59	19.5
Discuss academic matters with classmates	45	12.5
Discuss academic matters with classmates	49	14.5
Research or browse educational content	54	17
All of the above	93	36.5
OTHERS	-	-
Total	300	100

Source field survey, 2025

Data reveals social networking is positively related to students' academic life. More than one-third of the respondents (36.5%) acknowledged benefiting from all the above academic uses like receiving information about classes, talking academically, sending assignments and searching contents which are basically academic. Social media platforms are currently used in universities for learning where WhatsApp groups and Facebook pages are used. Even though less than half of the people use such platforms for individual use, whatever they do at least benefits the people. Thus, social media and technology are useful even when they are used for educational purposes.

Table 3: time spent on social media

VARIABLE	Frequency	Percentage %
1 to 5 hours	56	18%
6 to 10 hours	71	25.7%
11 to 15 hours	70	25%
16 to 20 hours	69	24.7%
21 to 25 hours	34	6.6%
Total	300	100%

Source field survey, 2025

According to this table, most of the students are spending 6 to 20 hours on social media per day. In fact, the largest group spending 6 to 10 hours features as much as 25.5% of the total. Shockingly, there was a 7% who spend almost the whole day (21 to 24 hours) online. These numbers show that whatever the purpose whether academic, social or entertainment, social media are deeply integrated into daily life. The level of use gives rise to concerns about time spent online and whether these distractions limit schoolwork and negatively impact wellbeing.

Table 4: Students' Most Frequently Used Social Platforms

VARIABLE	Frequency	Percentage %
Facebook	93	31
Instagram	09	3
Linkedin	05	1.7
WatsApp	146	48.7

Pinterst	03	1
Snapchat	14	4.7
Tiktok	11	3.7
Twitter	11	3.7
Others	8	2.7
Total	300	100

Source field survey, 2025

The table indicates that almost half (48.5 percent) of the students prefer WhatsApp the most for social networking. Facebook follows at 31%, still showing strong relevance. Other platforms which like Instagram, TikTok, and Youtube had small usage percentages, perhaps due to limited data, the lower capacity of smartphones, and app preferences in the region. The simple, cheap, and popular availability of WhatsApp and Facebook makes them the most preferred apps for communication as well as academic purpose.

Table 6: How Students Manage Distraction from Social Media.

VARIABLE	Frequency	Percentage %
Switching off phones when reading.	60	20%
Stay offline.	120	40%
Distastance self from phone.	83	27.7 %
All of the above.	27	9%
Others.	10	3.3%
Total	300	100%

Source field survey, 2025

Students created different ways to prevent social networking distractions. Approximately 40 percent of the participants follow the most common method of offline studying. Some people choose to keep their devices 1m away (27.5%) or switch-off the mobile phone (20%). Just a small handful make use of more than one strategy or opt for less disruptive tactics. This shows that many students know social media can be distracting, but they all cope with it and self-discipline in different ways.

Table 7: Reported Negative Impact on Academic Focus

VARIABLE	Frequency	Percentage %
Loss of concentration while studying	114	38%
Distraction during class sessions	90	30%
Both study-time and class distractions reported	96	32%
Other effects or none reported	-	-
Total	300	100%

Source field survey, 2025

According to the above Table 7, the use of social media can be distracting especially in studies.

Paraphrase this (19 words):

More than one-third of students (38%) indicated studying distractions while 30% reported trouble concentrating in class. Even more interestingly, 32% acknowledged that they experienced both. Lastick argumentas las pruebas de que las implicaciones sociopolíticas del uso excesivo de las redes sociales y la falta de disciplina académica. The study shows that posting on social media may have benefits but students find it hard to balance both.

Table 7: Effect of time spent on social media on academics performance

VARIABLE	Frequency	Percentage %
Negetive	80	26.7%
Positive	84	28%
Positive and Negetive	136	45.3%
Total	300	100%

Source field survey, 2025

Many students think social media is a distraction while others think otherwise. The 2021-2022 data show 26.7% of students think it has a positive impact on their academic performance maybe due to accessing educational content or engaging in discussions with peers. Further, 28% feel it has a negative impact maybe due to distractions and spending lesser time studying. Most students (45.5%)

accept both benefits and drawbacks of social criticism. Social networking can help students develop or hamper their academic progress depending on how it is managed, as the social networking project report would show you.

Conclusion

The research focused on how the use of social media affect students' academic performance in Tertiary Institution in Gomba State. Gombe state students engage with desktop and mobile applications like WhatsApp and Facebook to communicate, court, develop relationships as well as source materials, like their global counterparts. Communication has become effortless with the presence of the social media platform for sharing lectures, announcements, and discussions.

The study found that students' time on social media, especially after those lectures, permits them to undertake social agency and it will also help them catch-up on it. Social media can be a productive tool when used correctly, but there are both merits and demerits of using social media for studies, one just needs to chase it rightly.

Recommendations

- I. It's a good idea for schools to organize seminars or workshops for students regarding the negative impact of social media on students education. In the light of this discussion, social media has a lot of negative effects. These initiatives help students understand that homework or assignments are more important than social media.
- II. Further research on social media addiction, the study recommends further investigation on the social media addiction of students and its impact on academic performance. Future studies should evaluate the long-term effects of social media on learners' educational achievements.

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