Original Article

Impact of social media on students' writing skills in Federal College of Forestry, Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Social media has emerged as one of the most vital communication means but the time spent chatting has significantly affected the way; many students write in the school environment. This study is aimed at investigating the impact of social media on students' writing skills in the Federal College of Forestry, Jos, Plateau State situated in the North Central geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Consequently, the objectives are to identify the social media networks; students are more exposed to and the hours spent, determine the words that students often used in writing on social media, and determine how social media affects students your writing skills. The research design is descriptive and utilized structured questionnaires and observation techniques to obtain primary data from eighty-nine (89) students from the national diploma (ND) and higher ND departments in the college as sample size for the study. Findings revealed that students who invest more energy in online networking are liable to write poorly in their scholarly exercises than the individuals who do not. The study recommends that students should stop the use of abbreviations and wrongly spelled words while typing and chatting on social media so they can write proper spellings of words.

Keywords: Environment, skills, social media, students, writing

INTRODUCTION

Social media has emerged to be one of the most vital means of electronic communication on the Internet. It exists to ease communication among people regardless of the expanse, making it open to people to easily share information, files, pictures and videos; create blogs and send messages; and conduct real-time conversations. These systems are referred to as social, simply because they allow communication with friends, coursemates, teachers, project supervisors, lecturers, etc. so easily and effectively. According to Kim *et al.*,[1] "social media are the emerging digital communication channels which create a user-oriented information sharing ground where any people can generate or subscribe information content as both information provider and consumer."

According to Andreas and Micheal[2] and Brown[3] through social media, individuals can with no much of stress trade profitable information which can enhance their profession,

interest, thoughts, and so on. It additionally helps in sending pictorial outlines of thoughts. The emergence of social media has increased interactivity among people, making them to be producers and consumers of information in a simultaneous manner.[4] For example, there is the use of computers in classrooms in place of chalkboards, the use of projectors in interactive classrooms, online tutoring like the one made available in the National Open University of Nigeria, and other distant learning programs. In addition, a large number of students use smartphones as complementary notebooks and get free online books and Internet-based learning.

In many parts of the world, students' academic performance has faced a series of challenges and neglects due to the initiation of social media[5-8] and submits that scholars are expressing concern about how social media language is affecting Nigerian students' usage in formal contexts, especially in written essays. As posited by Freeman[9] from classroom observation, social media language is infiltrating students' formal writing exercises

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and impacting it negatively. During classroom interaction with students, one finds that most of the students write using incorrect spelling, grammar, and punctuation marks. The use of capital letters to begin names is non-existent.

Acronyms such as lol (Laugh out loud), gd 9t (Good night), and Tgif (Thank God it's Friday) are many abbreviations used profusely, while others have formed the habit of using text speak. This affects the structure of sentences used as well as their spellings. This in turn does not go well for students' vocabulary acquisition.[10] According to Selwyn,[11] she observed that her students "writing changed as their social media use increased and she claims to have noticed the use of abbreviated text spelling in her students" writing. She asserts that her English language development students are more likely to write phrases that they see in text messages, such as "smthng" or "smbdy" rather than learn to spell the word correctly.

The theory selected for this study is the use and gratification theory developed in 1974 by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch. Basically, the theory places more emphasis on "what people do with media" rather than "what media do to people."[12] It is the study of the gratifications or benefits that attract and hold audiences to various types of media and the types of content that satisfy their social and psychological needs. This hypothesis specifically puts power in the hands of the crowd. Instead of expecting that media messages have immediate, uniform impacts on the individuals who devour them, the uses and gratifications point of view suggest that beneficiaries make planned, purposeful choices about the media messages they open themselves to and at what recurrence taking into account individual needs and cravings independent of its impact on them - positive or negative.[13,14]

Relating this theory to this present study, it shows that students use social networking sites such as Facebook, WhatsApp, 2go, and Twitter just to satisfy their needs - which may either be physical or psychological - irrespective of the direction of its influence on their academic performance. Besides, it offers explanations to suggest that students use this site for various reasons. In other words, users select media based on how well each one helps them meet specific needs or goals. Hence, this study tries to find how this uses and gratifications derived from the use of social media by students of the Federal College of Forestry, Jos, Plateau state, impact on their writing skills.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of social media in students writing skills in Federal College of Forestry, Jos, with a view to improve students' academic performance. This study sought to fulfill the following objectives to (1) identify the social media networks; students are more exposed to and the hours spent, (2) determine how often students surf the Internet, (3) examine the words that students often use in writing on social media, and (4) determine how social media affects student's writing skills.

The following research questions guided the study:
1. What are the social media networks students are more exposed to and how many hours do they spend?
2. How often do students surf the Internet?
3. What words do students often use in writing on social media?
4. How has social media affected student's writing skills?

METHODOLOGY

Study Area
The Federal College of Forestry, Jos, is an important educational center in Nigeria and one of the seven colleges owned by the Forestry Research Institute of Nigeria, Ibadan, which is a parastatal of the Federal Ministry of Environment. It was established in 1958. Geographically, it is located at latitudes 09° 56'N and 09° 48'N and longitudes 08° 53'E and 08° 34'E of the Greenwich meridian. The category of students includes pre-national diploma (ND), ND, higher ND (HND), and Vocational students. Besides its educational facilities, there is numerous number of micro-open spaces, a greenhouse, plant nursery, and standard football pitch.[15]

Research Design
This study adopted descriptive survey research design which was used to determine the adequacy and frequency of the use of social media as they affect the performance of students in the Federal College of Forestry, Jos. Survey research methods were adopted as it is appropriate for this study because it enables the researcher to collect and analyzed data from students considered as a fair representation of the group (random sampling) so that the findings can be generalized on the entire population.

Population and Sample Size
The population of this study is the HND and ND students of Federal College of Forestry, Jos, comprising seven hundred and fifty nine (759) in number admitted for the 2021/2022 academic year.[16] To determine the sample of this study, the Taro Yamane's formula[17] was adopted as follows:

$$N = \frac{N}{1 + N\,(e)^2}$$

Where: N=sample size sought
e=Level of error (0.10) [2]
N=Population size 759

$$N = \frac{759}{1 + 759(0.10)^2}$$

$$N = \frac{759}{8.59}$$

N=89.

Therefore, the sample for this study is 89 respondents who were randomly selected from the total population of students in the Federal College of Forestry, Jos, Plateau state.

Instrument for Data Collection

A self-constructed questionnaire was designed to elicit the necessary information from respondents. The questionnaire was divided into four sections. The first part was on the demographic characteristics of the respondents, while the second part elicits information on social media networks; students are more exposed to and the hours spent. The third part gathers that information on the extent students surf the Internet. The last section elicits information from the words commonly used by students in writing that was gotten from social media and how it affects writing skills.

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

To determine the reliability of the instrument, a pilot test was conducted at Plateau State Polytechnic, Jos Campus, which is outside the study area to ensure that the instrument was consistent. A test-retest method was employed within 2-week interval with[18] recommendation. The result of the test was correlated. Using Pearson product-moment correlation, the reliability coefficient (r) was found to be 0.78 which shows that the instrument is reliable and was used for data collection in the study.

Data Collection and Analysis

In this study, the researchers made use of the Statistical Package for Social Science Software version 25.0 to analyze data collected. Data obtained from the field were presented through the use of frequency tables, simple percentages, and charts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socioeconomic Characteristics of Respondents

The socioeconomic result shows that out of the 89 respondents that participated in this exercise, 48.00 were females while 41.00 were males. It shows clearly that more females' respondents took part than male respondents.

Age of Respondents

The results for age distribution revealed that 42 students were above 25 years of age, 31 students are between the age bracket of 22–24 years, 14 between 19 and 21 years, and 2 between 15 and 18 years old.

Department of Respondents

The study revealed that the pest management technology (PMT) department had the highest (14) respondents followed by crop production technology and forestry technology with (13) each,

computer science (12), science laboratory technology (10), agricultural technology (9), Statistics (8), while horticulture and landscape technology (7) and agricultural extension and management (3) had the least respondents, respectively.

Program of Respondents

Furthermore, 49 student respondents were ND students and 40 were HND students. This suggests that there were more ND students in the college than HND students.

What are the Social Media Networks Students are More Exposed to and the Hours Spent?

The results of Table 1 revealed that the majority of the respondents 39 (43.82%) are more exposed to WhatsApp than any other networking site, while 19 (21.35%) agreed to Facebook as the most exposed networking site to them, while 16 (17.98%) out of the 89 respondents are more exposed to Twitter, 7 (7.86) are most exposed to Instagram whereas, only 5 (5.61%) are exposed to Tiktok. This implies that most of the respondents are more exposed to WhatsApp and Facebook than any other form of networking sites.

While results in Table 2 reveal that majority of the respondents 25 (28.09%) spend 6 h and above and 4–5 h, respectively, surfing the Internet, 21 (23.59%) spend 2–3 h online daily, 9 (10.11%) spend 3–4 h, while 8 (8.99%) spend only 1 h or less online. This implies that most of the respondents spend a lot of time online.

How Often do Students Surf the Internet?

Findings in Table 3 revealed that the majority of the respondents 35 (39.33%) agreed that they surf the Internet very

Table 1: Social media networks students are more exposed to and hours spent

Item	Frequency	Percentage
(a) 2go	0	0
(b) Instagram	7	7.87
(c) Facebook	19	21.35
(d) Twitter	16	17.98
(e) WhatsApp	39	43.82
(f) Tiktok	5	5.61
Total	89	100

Source: Field survey, 2023

Table 2: Hours respondents spend on the Internet

Item	Frequency	Percentage
(a) 6 h and above	25	28.09
(b) 4–5 h	25	28.09
(c) 3–4 h	9	10.11
(d) 2–3 h	21	23.59
(e) 1 h or less	8	8.99
Total	89	100

Source: Field survey, 2023

often, 23 (25.84%) surf the Internet often, while 20 (22.47%) go online not very often and 12 (13.48%) not often. This implies that most of the respondents go online very often. That is, there is a high frequency of respondents going online.

What are the Words that Students Often Used in Writing on Social Media?

Table 4 shows the frequency of words used in writing by the respondents, with tnx at (83.15/16.85%) been the most frequently used word, followed by hw and ur (82.02/17.98%), and then, we have dat (80.89/19.10%), gr8 (76, 40/23.59%), lol (75.28/24.72%), ait (70.79/29.21%), ni (69.66/30.33%), cul (60.67/39.32%), all of the above (34.83/65.17%), and others (14.61/85.39%), respectively. This implies that the use of social media has greatly influenced students' writing habit.

What Aspect has Social Media Affected Your Writing Skills?

Table 5 revealed that majority of the respondents 25 (28.09%) are affected when writing examination, 23 (25.84%) are affected when writing letters, 21 (23.59%) are affected while copying notes while 20 (22.47%) are affected when sending SMS. Furthermore, 39 (43.82%) of the students are affected negatively by social media when writing, 28 (31.46%) are not affected while only 22 (24.72%) are affected positively. This implies that more attention needs to be given to the writing habits of students and use of social media.

The bulk of the surveyed population were females, with 42 students above 25 years of age. The ND student was the most sampled with department of PMT having highest number of respondents. Most of the respondents are more exposed to WhatsApp and Facebook than any other form of networking sites. This study also corroborates the view of Asemah *et al*. (2013) of Nigeria which reveals that Facebook is the most used social media by undergraduate students of Kogi State University. This study also reveals that the majority of students of Federal College of Forestry, Jos, spend at least 6 h and above surfing the Internet. This shows that most of them go online very often as revealed in the study. These findings are in line with Seyi (2012), whose study seriously criticized the obsessive attitude of Nigeria youths toward social media. It pointed out that the rate at which youths devote their quality time in chatting calls for urgent attention.

Furthermore, this study reveals that majority of the students are affected negatively when it comes to writing in their examinations, taking lecture notes and even in writing formal letters. This shows that students of the college write poorly because of the use of abbreviated or wrongly spelled words on social media. The results of the survey on some of the words commonly used on social media by student in writing showed that in all the words, more than 50% of the students agreed that they know those words and often used them when writing.

Table 3: Frequency of respondents surfing the Internet

Item	Frequency	Percentage
(a) Very often	35	39.33
(b) Often	23	25.84
(c) Not very often	20	22.47
(d) Not often	12	13.48
Total	89	100

Source: Field survey, 2023

Table 4: Words that students often used in writing on social media

Item	Frequency	Percentage
(a) lol	67/22	75.28/24.72
(b) ait	63/26	70.79/29.21
(c) dat	72/17	80.89/19.10
(d) hw	73/16	82.02/17.98
(e) ur	73/16	82.02/17.98
(f) skul	70/19	78.65/21.34
(g) ni	62/27	69.66/30.33
(h) tnx	74/15	83.15/16.85
(i) gr8	68/21	76.40/23.59
(j) cul	54/35	60.67/39.32
(k) all of the above	31/58	34.83/65.17
(l) others	13/76	14.61/85.39

Source: Field survey, 2023

Table 5: The aspect social media has affected students' writing skills

Item	Frequency	Percentage
(a) Examination	25	28.09
(b) Writing letters	23	25.84
(c) Copying notes	21	23.59
(d) SMS	20	22.47
Total	89	100

Source: Field survey, 2023

CONCLUSION

It has been established in this study that students who invest more energy in online networking are liable to write poorly in their scholarly exercises than the individuals who do not; this is because of an extraordinary number of time spent on long-range informal communication exercises and the writing skills of students endure misfortunes which could prompt poor execution in their studies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

i.   The government should consider the possibility of evolving a policy on teenagers' exposure to social media
ii.   Lecturers should advise students to reduce their use of abbreviated and wrongly spelled words adopted from social media and give careful consideration to proper writing skills
iii. Lecturers should mark students down who wrongly spell words in examinations and scripts should be returned to the students so they can see the corrections made by the lecturer.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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