

**THE ACADEMIC USE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE IN MICHAEL OKPARA UNIVERSITY OF AGRICULTURE, UMUDIKE**

**BY**

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**Abstract**

This study investigates the academic use of social networks among undergraduate students in the Library and Information Science (LIS) department at Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike. The research explores students' awareness of social networking sites, their purposes for using these platforms, the predominant platforms used, challenges faced, and potential solutions. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics. Findings reveal low awareness of social networking sites among students, with Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, and TikTok being the most used platforms for academic and social purposes. Challenges include misinformation, balancing social and academic interactions, and maintaining professional decorum. The study recommends digital literacy programs, structured integration of social media into academic activities, and workshops on professional communication to enhance students' academic and professional development.

**Keywords:** Social networks, academic use, Library and Information Science, undergraduate students, digital literacy

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**Introduction**

Social networks have become integral to modern communication and collaboration, transcending personal interactions to play a significant role in academic settings. According to Boyd and Ellison (2007), social networks are collaborative platforms designed to facilitate engagement within shared spaces centered around common interests, needs, and goals. These platforms support both virtual and real social interactions, fostering positive interactions among various stakeholders in the educational domain (Mazer, Murphy, & Simonds, 2007).

The use of social media has surged globally, with schools and universities increasingly incorporating these platforms into their teaching methodologies. Undergraduate students, particularly those in Library and Information Science (LIS), are leveraging social networks for academic purposes, including resource sharing, collaborative learning, and professional networking (Madge et al., 2009; Selwyn, 2008). However, the extent to which these platforms are utilized for academic purposes, especially in Nigerian universities, remains underexplored. This study focuses on undergraduate LIS students at Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, to understand their awareness, usage patterns, challenges, and potential solutions related to the academic use of social networks.

## Literature Review

Social networking refers to the use of online platforms to connect with others, build relationships, and share information through various communication tools such as posts, messages, and comments. These platforms facilitate interaction, collaboration, and the exchange of multimedia content, forming digital communities where users stay informed and engaged. Popular social networking sites include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram, each offering unique features tailored to different aspects of social interaction.

In Nigeria, social networking platforms have gained significant popularity as tools for both interpersonal and public communication. Ekeh, Emekwu, and Odoh (2014) describe social networks as interactive platforms enabled by information and communication technology (ICT), allowing users to connect and share experiences, ideas, and multimedia content. Since their inception, platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, 2go, MySpace, and Skype have become integral to daily activities for millions of users.

Asemah and Edegoh (2013) define a social network as a structure comprising individuals or organizations ("nodes") connected by various types of interdependencies, including friendship, common interests, financial exchange, or shared beliefs. This perspective highlights the complexity of social relationships and the diverse connections that shape social networking dynamics. Similarly, Okereke and Oghenetega (2014) emphasize that social networking sites provide two-way communication, fostering feedback mechanisms and

enabling users to engage in interactive discussions through blogs, group postings, and message boards.

William (2009), as cited in Helou and Rahim (2014), defines a social network as an online community where Internet users connect based on mutual interests. This definition underscores the role of social networking in fostering digital connections and discourse within shared interest spheres. Ultimately, social networks serve as virtual spaces that facilitate interaction, collaboration, and engagement across different domains of interest.

Social networking involves the use of online platforms to connect with others, build relationships, and share information through various communication tools such as posts, messages, and comments. These platforms enable interaction, collaboration, and the exchange of multimedia content, creating digital communities where users stay informed and engaged. Popular social networking sites include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram, each offering distinct features suited to different aspects of social interaction.

In Nigeria, social networking platforms have become vital tools for both personal and public communication. Ekeh, Emekwu, and Odoh (2014) describe social networks as interactive platforms facilitated by information and communication technology (ICT), enabling users to connect and share experiences, ideas, and multimedia content. Over time, platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, 2go, MySpace, and Skype have become embedded in users' daily activities.

Asemah and Edegoh (2013) define a social network as a structure consisting of individuals or organizations ("nodes") connected through various interdependencies, such as friendship, shared interests, financial exchanges, or common beliefs. This view highlights the diverse and complex nature of social networking relationships. Similarly, Okereke and Oghenetega (2014) emphasize that social networking sites support two-way communication, fostering feedback and enabling users to engage in discussions through blogs, group postings, and message boards.

According to William (2009), as cited in Helou and Rahim (2014), social networks function as online communities where users connect based on mutual interests. This perspective

underscores the role of social networking in facilitating digital connections and discussions within shared interest groups. Ultimately, social networks serve as dynamic virtual spaces that enhance interaction, collaboration, and engagement across various domains.

Students of Library and Information Science (LIS) utilize social networking sites (SNS) to enhance their educational experiences, facilitate academic collaboration, and engage in professional networking. These platforms enable students to work on group projects, share resources, and communicate with peers and instructors, fostering a collaborative learning environment (Mansour, 2015). Popular SNS such as Facebook and WhatsApp support study groups and discussions, allowing students to exchange ideas and problem-solve collectively. Moreover, LIS students use SNS to access and share academic resources, including articles and databases, improving their research capabilities. Professional networking is another significant aspect, as students connect with experts, join industry groups, and stay updated on job opportunities through platforms like LinkedIn (Badshah, Jalal, Rehman, Zubair, & Umar, 2021; Kipruto, Kitetu, & Ongus, 2021). SNS also facilitate scholarly communication, enabling students and researchers to share findings, seek feedback, and participate in academic discussions, fostering a culture of open collaboration in research (Samad, Nilashi, & Ibrahim, 2019).

Beyond academics, SNS contribute to LIS students' professional growth and engagement by supporting participation in webinars, workshops, and conferences, with platforms aiding in event organization and discussions (Badshah et al., 2021). The user-friendly nature, interactivity, and low communication costs of SNS make them attractive tools for learning and professional development (Safko, 2010). Social media platforms help break communication barriers, providing contextual engagement that benefits LIS postgraduate students in knowledge exchange and content creation. Mutula (2012) identified various educational applications of social media, including digital literacy training, online discussions, and virtual campus tours, demonstrating the role of ICTs in facilitating teaching and learning. With the increasing awareness of social media's role in LIS education, many institutions incorporate Web 2.0 technologies into their curriculum (Jain, 2014; Hyldegard, 2014). Universities also create online discussion forums for coursework, fostering engagement through collaborative tools (Ogunleye, 2015). Ultimately, social media platforms

serve as essential tools for LIS students, bridging communication gaps and promoting academic and professional development.

Social networking sites (SNS) have increasingly become valuable tools for academic engagement, offering students opportunities for collaborative learning, resource sharing, and knowledge exchange. Mazman and Usluel (2010), as cited in Subramani (2015), highlight the educational benefits of SNS, particularly Facebook, emphasizing their role in facilitating intentional and spontaneous learning. These platforms support collaborative learning, enhance critical thinking, and improve communication and writing skills by allowing users to engage in discussions, share information, and collaborate in personalized digital environments. As pedagogical tools, SNS enable connectivity, social support, content creation, and knowledge aggregation, making them essential for modern education. According to Zhong, Islam, and Mun (2014), students spend around 40 to 50 minutes daily browsing Facebook, utilizing it for both leisure and academic purposes. Similarly, López, Hartmann, and Apaolaza (2019) note that students use social media for personal socialization as well as meaningful discussions, further integrating digital platforms into education.

The use of SNS in academic settings significantly enhances student performance and involvement. Research has shown that these platforms enable collaborative studying, effective communication, and group discussions, ultimately leading to better comprehension and retention of course materials (Eng, Mohamed, & Lam, 2021). Additionally, SNS provide access to vast academic resources and networking opportunities, allowing students to connect with peers, professionals, and scholars through platforms such as LinkedIn, Academia.edu, and ResearchGate (Rigby & Rankin, 2019). These platforms help students conduct research more efficiently and stay updated with developments in their fields. The integration of social networking into education has reinforced its role as an essential tool for academic success, enabling students to learn more effectively while expanding their professional and academic networks.

Library and Information Science (LIS) undergraduate students face several challenges when using social networks for academic purposes, with distraction being a major concern. Social media platforms, primarily designed for social interactions, often lead students to spend

excessive time on non-academic activities, which can negatively impact their academic performance (Zachos et al., 2018). Karpinski et al. (2013) found a negative correlation between Facebook use and students' academic success, as excessive time spent on social networks diverts attention away from studies. Additionally, the credibility and reliability of information shared on these platforms pose a challenge. Since social networks lack rigorous content moderation, students may encounter misleading or inaccurate academic resources, potentially compromising the quality of their research and assignments (Kumar & Kumar, 2013). Another critical issue is privacy and security. Many students are unaware of the importance of privacy settings, which can expose them to data breaches and online exploitation (Madden et al., 2013). Furthermore, cyberbullying is an increasing concern, as the anonymity provided by social networks can facilitate harassment, negatively affecting students' mental well-being (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010).

Apart from these concerns, digital literacy gaps further hinder the effective academic use of social networks. Not all students possess the necessary skills to navigate and utilize these platforms for academic purposes, leading to disparities in their benefits (Gikas & Grant, 2013). Institutional support is also lacking, as many educational institutions have not fully integrated social media into their learning strategies, leaving students without formal guidance on how to leverage these platforms effectively (Zachos et al., 2018). Additionally, the overuse of social networks has been linked to mental health challenges. Primack et al. (2019) found a strong association between excessive social media use and depression among young adults, often resulting from constant peer comparison and exposure to idealized online personas. Social media addiction is another growing concern, affecting students' time management and ability to meet academic deadlines (Andreassen et al., 2017). Furthermore, inappropriate online behavior can have long-term consequences, as unprofessional digital footprints may impact students' future career prospects (Van den Heuvel & Demerouti, 2017). Given these challenges, there is a need for increased awareness, institutional support, and digital literacy training to help LIS students optimize the use of social networks for academic and professional growth.

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## **Methodology**

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design, targeting undergraduate LIS students at Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike. A sample size of 160 students was selected using random sampling, representing 20% of the total population. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire, and responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency counts and mean scores. The Likert 4-point scale was used to determine the degree of agreement or disagreement with each item.

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## **Results and Discussion**

### **1. Awareness of Social Networking Sites**

The study found that students have low awareness of social networking sites, particularly through traditional media like television and radio. Awareness was higher through word-of-mouth and internet browsing. Students recognized the usefulness of social networks for sharing academic resources but had limited awareness of their value for collaborative learning and group projects. Additionally, students were unfamiliar with the features, functionalities, privacy settings, and potential risks associated with these platforms (Livingstone et al., 2020).

### **2. Purposes for Using Social Networking Sites**

Students primarily used social networking sites to connect with classmates and discuss academic topics, with a mean score of 3.37. Collaborative learning and group project coordination also received high acceptance (mean=3.25). However, students were less likely to use these platforms for professional development, such as following updates from educational institutions, participating in professional groups, or job searching (Al-Daihani et al., 2021).

### **3. Predominantly Used Social Networking Sites**

Facebook was the most used platform for both academic and social purposes (mean=2.60),

followed by WhatsApp for group discussions and resource sharing (mean=2.58). YouTube was popular for accessing educational videos (mean=2.58), and TikTok was accepted for short educational content (mean=2.54). Platforms like Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Pinterest, and Snapchat were less commonly used for academic purposes.

#### **4. Challenges Faced by Students**

Students did not perceive social networking sites as significantly distracting from academic tasks (mean=2.36). However, challenges such as misinformation (mean=2.54), balancing social and academic interactions (mean=2.53), and maintaining professional decorum (mean=2.85) were acknowledged. Privacy and security concerns were not seen as major issues (mean=2.48).

#### **5. Proposed Solutions**

Promoting critical thinking skills (mean=2.54), establishing specific time slots for social media use (mean=2.53), and developing guidelines for identifying academic content (mean=2.59) were recognized as effective solutions. Training on collaboration tools (mean=2.52) and workshops on professional communication (mean=2.85) were also seen as beneficial.

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### **Conclusion**

The study concludes that while undergraduate LIS students at Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, use social networking sites for academic purposes, their awareness of these platforms is limited. Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, and TikTok are the most used platforms, primarily for academic discussions and resource sharing. Challenges such as misinformation and balancing social and academic interactions need to be addressed through digital literacy programs, structured integration of social media into academic activities, and workshops on professional communication.

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### **Recommendations**

1. **Digital Literacy Programs:** Educational institutions should implement comprehensive digital literacy programs to teach students how to effectively use social networking platforms for academic purposes.
2. **Structured Integration of Social Media:** Universities should integrate social media tools like Google Docs and Slack into coursework to encourage collaborative learning.
3. **Professional Networking Workshops:** Workshops on platforms like LinkedIn should be provided to help students build professional profiles and network with industry professionals.
4. **Critical Thinking Workshops:** Institutions should promote workshops that focus on critical thinking and source evaluation skills to help students identify reliable academic content on social media.
5. **Time Management Strategies:** Universities should provide time management workshops or productivity apps to help students balance social media use and academic tasks.

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