



GENDER-BASED DISPARITIES IN THE UTILISATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES: A CASE STUDY OF UNDERGRADUATES IN ONDO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Social media platforms have become prominent tools for communication, collaboration, and access to educational resources among undergraduates. Despite their growing relevance, questions remain whether male and female students differ in the way these platforms are used for learning. This study examined gender-based disparities in social media utilisation for academic purposes among undergraduates in Ondo State, Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population comprised 360 undergraduate students drawn from three universities representing the three senatorial districts of Ondo State: Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko; Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo; and Olusegun Agagu University of Science and Technology, Okitipupa. A multistage sampling technique was used to select 120 respondents from each institution. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire (GDSMUQ). The reliability coefficient of the instrument ($r = 0.80$) was analysed using descriptive statistics and an independent t-test at the 0.05 level of significance. Findings showed that undergraduates use social media considerably for academic purposes, such as sharing lecture materials, participating in group discussions, sourcing learning resources, and preparing for examinations. WhatsApp and YouTube emerged as the most frequently used platforms. The study further revealed that there was no statistically significant difference between male and female undergraduates in the use of social media for academic purposes. The study concluded that social media has become a common academic resource among students irrespective of their gender. The study recommended that universities' management should promote structured academic use of social media, improve internet facilities, and strengthen students' digital literacy skills.

Keywords: Academic purposes, Digital learning Gender discrepancy, social media utilisation, undergraduates,



Introduction

The integration of digital technologies into higher education has significantly reshaped the landscape of teaching and learning across the globe. Social media platforms have become powerful tools that help people learn outside of the classroom. These platforms include WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Telegram, among others. They are no longer used solely for social interaction; they now serve as informal yet powerful channels for academic engagement, information exchange, and collaborative learning (Chen & Wang, 2021). Recently, undergraduates' students have increasingly relied on these platforms to access course materials, participate in discussions, and interact with peers and lecturers. This shift reflects a broader transformation in the nature of learning, where knowledge is constructed through continuous interaction within digital spaces rather than confined to traditional lecture environment (Ting et al., 2023).

The educational relevance of social media lies in its capacity to facilitate communication, collaboration, and access to diverse learning resources. Students can share lecture notes, watch instructional videos, join academic forums, and ask questions about difficult subjects on social media sites. These platforms support both synchronous and asynchronous learning, enabling students to engage with academic content at their own convenience, timing, and pace. Garba & Naziru (2025) observed that social media enhances students' participation in learning activities and promotes knowledge sharing among peers, thereby contributing to improved academic engagement.

In higher education, the use of social media for academic purposes has become increasingly widespread. Undergraduates, who are typically active users of digital technologies, often integrate social media into their daily learning routines. For many students, these platforms serve as accessible and convenient tools for academic support, particularly in environments where institutional learning management systems may be limited or underused. Social media groups created for academic purposes allow students to exchange ideas, collaborate on assignments, and maintain communication with lecturers outside formal classroom settings. This development has transformed social media into a supplementary learning environment that complements traditional instructional methods.

Despite the growing adoption of social media for educational purposes, concerns persist regarding how effectively students utilise these platforms for academic engagement. Whereas some students use social media to enhance their learning experiences, others may engage primarily in non-academic activities such as entertainment, social interaction, and content consumption. Studies have indicated that excessive or unregulated use of social media can negatively affect students' academic performance by reducing study time and concentration (Taufic et al., 2024). These contrasting patterns highlight the need to examine not only the extent of social media use but also the purposes for which it is utilised.

An important dimension in the study of social media utilisation is the role of gender. Gender differences in technology use have long been a subject of interest in educational research, particularly in relation to access, attitudes, and patterns of engagement. In digital learning environments, gender may influence how students interact with technology, the types of platforms they prefer, and the purposes for which they use these platforms (Ayite et al., 2022). Understanding these differences is essential for developing inclusive educational strategies that ensure equitable participation in technology-enhanced learning. Studies have revealed mixed findings regarding gender differences in social media utilisation for academic purposes. Some studies suggest that male students have greater access to digital technologies and are more likely to engage with technical aspects of digital platforms (Muhammad & Ijaz, 2024). For instance, a study conducted among undergraduates in southwestern Nigeria found a significant difference in access to social media for learning based on gender, with male students demonstrating higher access levels (Yahya & Ogunlade, 2023). This finding has been attributed to factors such as differential exposure to technology, societal expectations, and varying levels of digital confidence.

Conversely, other studies indicate that female students may utilise social media more effectively for academic purposes. A study also examining patterns of social media utilisation has shown that female students often demonstrate higher levels of engagement in communication-based and collaborative learning activities (Fazel & Sayaf, 2025). They are more likely to participate in group discussions, share academic resources, and seek clarification on academic issues through social media platforms.

These mixed findings suggest that gender differences in social media utilisation are complex and context-dependent. Rather than reflecting a simple dichotomy, such differences are shaped by a combination of cultural, social, and technological factors (Karatsoli & Nathanail, 2020). In many societies, gender roles and expectations influence how individuals interact with digital technologies. For example, male students may be encouraged to explore technical aspects of digital tools, while female students may be more inclined toward communication-oriented uses of technology. These patterns can influence how each group engages with social media for academic purposes.

Gender disparity in digital technology utilisation remains a critical issue in many developing countries, including Nigeria. Although both male and female students increasingly use social media, differences may exist in the frequency, purpose, and intensity of usage. These disparities can affect students' ability to benefit from digital learning opportunities. For instance, if one gender is more inclined to use social media for academic purposes, it could lead to differences in academic engagement and performance. Understanding these patterns is therefore essential for promoting equitable access to educational resources and opportunities. Another factor influencing social media utilisation among undergraduates is digital literacy. Digital literacy encompasses the skills required to effectively access, evaluate, and utilise information in digital environments. Students with higher levels of digital literacy are more likely to use social media productively for academic purposes, while those with limited skills may struggle to navigate digital learning environments effectively (Maxwell & Maxwell, 2014). Gender differences in digital literacy may therefore contribute to variations in social media utilisation for academic engagement.

The significance of this study is further reinforced by the evolving nature of digital learning in the post-pandemic era. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of online and mobile learning platforms, highlighting the importance of digital technologies in ensuring continuity of education (Oyarinde & Komolafe, 2020). During this period, social media platforms played a crucial role in facilitating communication between the students and their lecturers. This experience has led to increased recognition of the potential of social media as a tool for academic engagement. However, it has also exposed existing inequalities in digital access and usage, including those related to gender. Consequently, understanding ways gender shapes social media utilisation, educators can design interventions that would promote gender equity in education and digital participation. As societies increasingly rely on digital technologies for communication, learning, and economic activities, ensuring equal access and participation becomes essential. Addressing gender disparities in digital learning environments can contribute to the development of more inclusive educational systems that support the diverse learner's needs. In light of these considerations, the present paper examines gender-based disparities in social media utilisation for academic purposes among undergraduates in Ondo State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

The integration of social media into higher education has created new opportunities for academic engagement, yet it has also introduced complexities regarding how students utilise these platforms for learning. While social media is widely accessible among undergraduates, its academic utilization varies considerably across individuals. One of the key concerns emerging in recent research is the presence of gender-based differences in the utilisation of social media for educational purposes.

Despite increasing access to digital technologies, evidence suggests that male and female students may not benefit equally from social media as a learning resource. Some studies report that female students are more inclined toward collaborative and academically oriented usage of social media, whereas male students tend to explore multiple platforms but may not always utilise them for academic purposes. Conversely, other findings indicate minimal or inconsistent gender differences, suggesting that the issue remains inconclusive and context-dependent.

In Nigerian universities, the rapid growth of mobile technology has led to widespread utilisation of social media among the students. Although several studies have examined social media utilisation among students in tertiary institutions, there is limited study specifically on gender disparities in social media utilisation for academic purposes among undergraduates in Ondo State. Most previous studies have concentrated on general usage patterns, academic performance, or students in other states of the country, with little or no attention given to comparing male and female undergraduates within the universities located across the three senatorial districts of Ondo State. Therefore,

there is a need to examine how gender influences the use of social media for academic purposes among undergraduates in Ondo State.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives are to:

- Determine the extent to which undergraduates utilise social media for academic purposes.
- Examine the types of social media platforms commonly used by undergraduates for learning.
- Investigate gender differences in the frequency of social media use for academic activities.

Research Questions

The study will provide answers to the following questions:

- To what extent do undergraduate students in Ondo State utilise social media for academic purposes?
- What types of social media platforms are commonly used for academic activities among undergraduates?
- Are there differences between male and female students in the frequency of social media use for academic purposes?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses will be tested at 0.05 level of significance:

H1: There is no significant difference between male and female undergraduates in the use of social media for academic purposes.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to examine gender discrepancy in social media utilisation for academic purposes among undergraduates in Ondo State, Nigeria. The descriptive survey design was considered suitable because it allows the researcher to gather information from respondents on existing conditions, opinions, and behaviours without manipulating any variable. The population of the study comprised 360 undergraduate students drawn from selected universities in Ondo State. Ondo State is divided into three senatorial districts: Ondo North, Ondo Central, and Ondo South. In order to ensure fair representation of the state, one university was selected from each senatorial district. The selected institutions were Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko; Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo; and Olusegun Agagu University of Science and Technology, Okitipupa. A multistage sampling technique was employed for the selection of respondents. At the first stage, a stratified sampling technique was used to classify the state into the three senatorial districts. At the second stage, purposive sampling was used to select one university from each district based on institutional relevance and accessibility. At the third stage, a simple random sampling technique was used to select 120 undergraduate students from each university, making a total sample size of 360 respondents. Efforts were made to ensure adequate representation of both male and female students across faculties and levels of study. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled Gender Discrepancy in Social Media Utilisation Questionnaire (GDSMUQ). The questionnaire consisted of two sections. Section A sought demographic data such as gender, age, institution, and level of study. Section B contained items on extent of use, preferred platforms, frequency of use, and social media for learning. The items were structured on a four-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. The instrument was validated by experts in the Educational Technology and Evaluation and Measurement departments to ensure face and content validity. A pilot test was conducted using students outside the sampled institutions, and a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.80 was obtained. Data collected were analysed using frequency counts, mean, and standard deviation, while a t-test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question 1: To what extent do undergraduates in Ondo State utilise social media for academic purposes?

**Table 1:** Extent of Social Media Utilisation for Academic Purposes.

Item	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std. D	Remarks
I use social media to obtain academic materials frequently.	150	130	50	20	3.11	0.71	Accepted
Social media help me in the completion of my assignment quickly.	142	138	38	32	3.06	0.67	Accepted
I participate in academic discussions through social media frequently.	145	125	55	35	3.08	0.48	Accepted
I use social media regularly for examination preparation.	138	132	54	36	3.03	0.64	Accepted
Weighted Average					3.07		

Key; *SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, A = Agree, SA= Strongly Agree,*

Key; SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, A = Agree, SA= Strongly Agree,

Decision Value: Not Accepted = 0.00-2.44, Accepted = 2.45 – 4.00

Table 1 shows the extent of social media utilisation among undergraduates in Ondo State for academic purposes. The table shows that the undergraduates agreed with the following: ‘I use social media to obtain academic materials frequently’ ($\bar{x} = 3.11$); ‘I participate in academic discussions through social media frequently’ ($\bar{x} = 3.08$); ‘Social media help me in the completion of my assignment quickly’ ($\bar{x} = 3.06$) and ‘I use social media regularly for examination preparation’ ($\bar{x} = 3.03$). Based on the value of the weighted average (3.07 out of 4.00 maximum values obtainable), which falls within the decision value for positive. The analysis indicates that undergraduates in Ondo State utilise social media for academic purposes to a high extent.

Research Question 2: What types of social media platforms are commonly used for academic activities among undergraduates?

Table 2: Types of Social Media Platforms Commonly Used

Platforms	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std. D	Remarks
WhatsApp is commonly used for academic purposes.	190	120	30	20	3.33	0.70	Accepted
YouTube is used for learning activities.	170	125	40	25	3.22	0.65	Accepted
Telegram is used for academic interaction.	130	140	55	35	3.01	0.48	Accepted
Facebook is used for educational purposes.	110	135	70	45	2.86	0.64	Accepted
Instagram is used for learning purposes.	90	120	90	60	2.67	0.82	Accepted
Weighted Average					3.02		

Key; *SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, A = Agree, SA= Strongly Agree,*

Decision Value: Not Accepted = 0.00-2.44, Accepted = 2.45 – 4.00



Table 2 shows the types of social media platforms commonly used for academic purposes among undergraduates in Ondo State. The table shows that the undergraduates utilised the following platforms: ‘WhatsApp is commonly used for academic purposes’ ($\bar{x} = 3.33$); ‘YouTube is used for learning activities’ ($\bar{x} = 3.22$); ‘Telegram is used for academic interaction’ ($\bar{x} = 3.01$); ‘Facebook is used for educational purposes’ ($\bar{x} = 2.86$) and ‘Instagram is used for learning purposes’ ($\bar{x} = 2.67$). Based on the value of the weighted average (3.02 out of 4.00 maximum values obtainable), which falls within the decision value for the average. The analysis indicates a moderate level, though; WhatsApp and YouTube emerged as the most commonly used platforms for academic activities among undergraduates in Ondo State.

Research Question 3: Are there differences between male and female students in the frequency of social media use for academic purposes?

Table 3: Gender difference in frequency of use

Item	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std. D	Remarks
Male student frequently use social media for academics purposes.	145	130	50	35	3.07	0.76	Accepted
Female student frequently use social media for academic purposes.	150	128	48	34	3.09	0.79	Accepted
Weighted Average					3.08		

Key; *SD* = Strongly Disagree, *D* = Disagree, *A* = Agree, *SA* = Strongly Agree,

Decision Value: *Not Accepted* = 0.00-2.44, *Accepted* = 2.45 – 4.00

Table 3 shows the frequent use of the social media for academic purposes among undergraduate male and female students in Ondo State. The table shows that the undergraduates frequently utilised social media: ‘Female student frequently use social media for academic purposes’ ($\bar{x} = 3.09$) and ‘Male student frequently use social media for academic purposes’ ($\bar{x} = 3.07$). Based on the value of the weighted average (3.08 out of 4.00 maximum values obtainable), which falls within the decision value for the average. The analysis indicates that both male and female students frequently use social media for academic purposes, with only slight differences.

Hypotheses Testing

H1: There is no significant difference between male and female undergraduates in the use of social media for academic purposes.

Table 4: Summary of t-test showing the difference between male and female Undergraduates use social media for academic purposes.

Gender	N	Mean	Std. D	Df	T	Sig(p)	Remark
Male	180	3.14	0.61	358	1.96	.263	Not Significant
Female	180	3.12	0.58				

Table 4 shows the difference in male and female undergraduates' utilisation of social media for academic purposes. The table shows the mean score from male students is ($\bar{x} = 3.14$) while that of the female students is ($\bar{x} = 3.12$). The values of the mean scores do not reveal an appreciable difference. Therefore, there is no significant difference between male and female undergraduates in the use of social media for academic purposes ($t = 1.69$; $P > 0.05$). Hence, hypothesis 1 is accepted.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study revealed that there is no statistically significant difference between male and female undergraduates in the use of social media for academic purposes. This suggests that both genders are actively engaged in the academic use of social media platforms such as WhatsApp, YouTube, Telegram, Facebook, and Instagram. This may be attributed to the increasing availability of smartphones, internet access, and the widespread integration of digital communication tools into university learning environments. The result is in support of findings by Hossain & Prodhan (2020), Karatsoli & Nathanail (2020), Fazel & Sayaf (2025), which reported that gender no longer serves as a major determinant of students' use of social networking tools for educational engagement. Studies have shown that both male and female undergraduates rely on social media for sharing lecture notes, participating in academic discussions, sourcing learning materials, and maintaining communication with peers and lecturers. The result also aligns with findings by Yahya & Ogunlade (2023), who found no significant gender difference in educational use of social media among university students. It was observed that both genders have similar access to technology; infrastructural opportunities are similar.

Besides, findings from the hypothesis revealed that there is no significant difference between male and female undergraduate students in the use of social media for academic purposes. The study explained that when digital tools become embedded in routine academic activities, students tend to adopt them based on usefulness rather than gender identity. This means that both male and female students use social media with similar regularity for academic purposes. The finding suggests that undergraduates in Ondo State have embraced social media as part of their normal learning routine regardless of gender disparity. This finding is consistent with the studies of Oyeniyi et al. (2021) and Dike et al. (2024), showing that undergraduate students commonly access social media daily for academic interaction, assignment coordination, and information exchange. Researchers have noted that the portability of smartphones and low-cost messaging applications make regular use of social media attractive to all students. Since academic groups, departmental updates, and class discussions often take place on these platforms, both male and female students are compelled to participate regularly.

Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that social media has the potential to enhance academic interaction, flexible learning, and collaborative knowledge sharing among university students when properly guided and integrated into instructional practices. The findings revealed that social media has become an important component of students' academic experiences, serving as a medium for communication, collaboration, access to learning resources, and academic engagement. The study further established that there was no statistically significant difference between male and female undergraduate students in the use of social media for academic purposes. These findings indicate that both male and female students have embraced social media as a shared academic resource and are benefiting from its educational opportunities in comparable ways. Higher institutions that seek to improve students' learning experiences should focus on creating enabling digital environments that promote responsible and purposeful use of social media for academic development.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

- Lecturers should deliberately integrate social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Telegram, and YouTube into teaching and learning activities to enhance communication, resource sharing, and collaborative learning.
- Universities should organise regular training programmes and workshops for students on how to use social media effectively, responsibly, and productively for academic purposes.



- Management of tertiary institutions should provide affordable and reliable internet services on campus to encourage students' continuous engagement with digital learning platforms.
- Efforts should be made to ensure that both male and female students have equal access to smartphones, laptops, and other digital tools required for academic participation.
- Lecturers should be trained on innovative ways of using social media for instruction, student engagement, online mentoring, and formative assessment.

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