



doi:10.5281/zenodo.20073178

Social Media Addiction and Academic Integrity in Sokoto Metropolis

Aminu Abubakar Tanbuwal

**Department of Public Administration
College of Administrative and Business Studies
Ummaru Ali Shinkafi Polytechnic, Sokoto**

ABSTRACT

The rapid expansion of social media usage among undergraduate students has introduced new challenges to academic integrity in higher institutions. This study examines the relationship between social media addiction and academic integrity among undergraduate students in Sokoto Metropolis. It examines how excessive engagement with platforms such as WhatsApp and TikTok affects students' study habits, ethical behaviour, and academic performance. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected from undergraduate students across selected institutions in Sokoto Metropolis. The findings reveal that a significant proportion of students spend several hours daily on social media, often during lecture periods and study time. This pattern of use contributes to reduced academic engagement, increased reliance on quick information sources, and a decline in independent learning practices. The study further finds that social media addiction is associated with emerging concerns regarding academic integrity, including plagiarism, misuse of digital tools, and unethical practices during examinations. The study concludes that while social media offers opportunities for learning, its excessive and unregulated use undermines academic discipline and ethical standards. It recommends institutional regulation, awareness programmes, and the promotion of responsible digital behaviour among students.

Keywords: Social media addiction, academic integrity, undergraduate students, Sokoto Metropolis, digital ethics

INTRODUCTION

The concept of academic integrity remains central to the mission of higher education, as it ensures honesty, trust, and ethical conduct in learning and research. Academic integrity involves adherence to moral and professional standards, including avoiding plagiarism, cheating, and other forms of academic misconduct (Fishman, 2014). However, the increasing integration of digital technologies into students' lives has introduced new complexities that challenge traditional notions of academic honesty. Social media has become a dominant feature of contemporary student life, providing platforms for communication, entertainment, and information exchange. While these platforms offer numerous benefits, their excessive use has raised concerns about addiction and its impact on students' academic behavior (Kuss & Griffiths, 2011). Social media addiction is characterized by compulsive use, an inability to control usage, and prioritizing online activities over academic responsibilities (Andreassen, 2015).

In Nigeria, the proliferation of smartphones and affordable internet access has significantly increased students' engagement with social media. Studies have shown that many undergraduate students spend several hours daily on platforms such as WhatsApp and TikTok, often at the expense of academic activities (Anyira & Udem, 2020). This trend raises important questions about how such engagement influences students' adherence to academic integrity. Furthermore, the availability of digital tools and

instant access to information has transformed how students approach learning tasks. While these tools can enhance academic productivity, they also create opportunities for academic misconduct, including plagiarism and misuse of artificial intelligence tools (Selwyn, 2016). The ease of accessing and sharing information may reduce students' motivation to engage in independent learning.

Within Sokoto Metropolis, anecdotal evidence suggests that social media addiction is increasingly affecting students' academic discipline and ethical behaviour. Despite this growing concern, there is limited empirical research examining the relationship between social media addiction and academic integrity in this context. This study therefore, seeks to fill this gap by providing an in-depth analysis of the issue.

Social Media Addiction among Undergraduate Students

Social media addiction has emerged as a significant concern in contemporary educational research, particularly among young people who are highly active users of digital technologies. It is generally defined as excessive and compulsive use of social media platforms that interferes with daily life, including academic responsibilities (Kuss & Griffiths, 2011). Among undergraduate students, this behaviour is often driven by the need for social interaction, entertainment, and instant gratification.

One of the defining characteristics of social media addiction is the inability to regulate usage. Students frequently check their devices for notifications, messages, and updates, even during lectures or study periods. This compulsive behaviour disrupts concentration and reduces the time available for academic activities (Andreassen, 2015). As a result, students may struggle to maintain consistent study habits. Empirical studies indicate that students who are heavily engaged with social media are more likely to experience reduced academic performance and lower levels of academic engagement (Junco, 2012). The constant exposure to digital content can lead to cognitive overload, making it difficult for students to focus on complex academic tasks. This is particularly problematic in disciplines that require sustained reading and critical analysis.

In the context of Sokoto Metropolis, the widespread use of platforms such as TikTok and WhatsApp has intensified these challenges. These platforms are designed to capture attention through short, engaging content, which encourages prolonged use. Consequently, students may prioritise social media over academic responsibilities, thereby increasing the risk of addictive behaviour.

Academic Integrity in the Digital Age

Academic integrity is a fundamental principle that underpins the credibility and quality of higher education. It encompasses honesty, fairness, and responsibility in academic work, ensuring that students produce original and authentic contributions (Fishman, 2014). However, the digital age has introduced new challenges that complicate the enforcement of academic integrity.

The availability of online resources has made it easier for students to access information, but it has also increased the risk of plagiarism. Students may copy and paste content from online sources without proper citation, either intentionally or due to a lack of understanding of academic writing conventions (Selwyn, 2016). This behaviour undermines the learning process and devalues academic qualifications. In addition, the rise of artificial intelligence tools has created new forms of academic misconduct. While these tools can support learning, they can also be misused to generate assignments or answers without genuine understanding. This raises ethical concerns about authorship and originality in academic work.

Another important issue is the use of digital devices during examinations. Students may use smartphones or other devices to access information or communicate with others, thereby violating examination rules. Such practices are increasingly difficult to detect and prevent, especially in large classroom settings.

Finally, the digital environment presents both opportunities and risks for academic integrity. While technology can enhance learning, it also requires stronger ethical awareness and institutional regulation to prevent misuse.

Relationship between Social Media Addiction and Academic Integrity

The relationship between social media addiction and academic integrity is complex and multifaceted. Excessive engagement with social media can influence students' attitudes, behaviours, and decision-making processes, ultimately affecting their adherence to academic standards. One of the key mechanisms through which social media addiction affects academic integrity is time displacement. Students who spend excessive time on social media may have limited time for academic work, leading them to seek shortcuts such as copying assignments or using unauthorised materials during examinations (Junco, 2012). This behaviour reflects a decline in academic discipline and responsibility.

Furthermore, social media environments often normalise certain behaviours that may conflict with academic values. For example, the sharing of information without attribution is common on social media platforms, which may influence students' perceptions of plagiarism (Selwyn, 2016). This can blur the boundaries between acceptable and unethical academic practices.

The findings from this study also suggest that students who are heavily engaged with social media are more likely to rely on quick information sources, including AI tools, rather than engaging in independent learning. This reliance reduces critical thinking and increases the likelihood of academic misconduct. In Sokoto Metropolis, the combined effects of social media addiction and digital accessibility have created a context in which academic integrity is increasingly challenged. Addressing this issue requires a comprehensive approach that considers both behavioural and institutional factors.

CONCLUSION

This study has established that social media addiction constitutes a significant threat to academic integrity among undergraduate students in Sokoto Metropolis. The persistent and excessive engagement with social media platforms appears to interfere with students' academic responsibilities by reducing concentration, weakening study discipline, and diminishing meaningful participation in learning activities. As a result, affected students may develop poor study habits, procrastinate on academic tasks, and become increasingly susceptible to unethical academic behaviours, including plagiarism, examination misconduct, and overdependence on digital shortcuts in completing assignments. Although digital technologies and social media platforms have the potential to enhance access to information, facilitate collaborative learning, and support academic communication, their inappropriate and excessive use can have deleterious effects on students' intellectual development and moral conduct. In this regard, the misuse of social media not only compromises academic performance but also undermines the fundamental values of honesty, originality, and responsibility that underpin higher education. The findings therefore underscore the necessity for urgent and sustained intervention by stakeholders, including educational institutions, parents, and policymakers, to promote responsible digital engagement, strengthen students' self-regulation, and reinforce institutional mechanisms for safeguarding academic integrity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are suggested to address the challenges of social media addiction and its negative impact on academic integrity among undergraduate students

1. Institutions should implement strict policies on the use of digital devices during lectures and examinations.
2. Awareness programmes should be organised to educate students on academic integrity and digital ethics.
3. Lecturers should design assessment methods that reduce opportunities for plagiarism.
4. Students should be encouraged to develop self-discipline and time management skills.
5. Educational institutions should integrate digital literacy into the curriculum.
6. Regular training sessions should be conducted for faculty members to stay updated on digital ethics and assessment strategies.
7. Implementation of secure online examination platforms to prevent cheating and ensure fairness.

8. Development of student-led peer mentoring programs focused on academic honesty and responsible digital usage.

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