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airjournals@gmail.com; enquiry@airjournal.org

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Evaluating the Influence of Social Media on the Reading Culture of Students in Selected Tertiary Institutions in Anambra State

Ike, Peace Adaobi[1], Nwankwo, Ifeoma Roseline[2], Ufoaroh, Ebele Theresa[3], Egbuna, Amaka Evelyn[1], Abana, Helen[1]

[1]*General Studies Unit, Anambra State Polytechnic, Mgbakwu*
[2]*Department of Educational Foundations, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka*
[3]*Department of Cooperative Economics and Management, Anambra State Polytechnic, Mgbakwu*

Abstract

This study examined how social media use relates to the reading culture of students in selected tertiary institutions in Anambra State. Three research questions guided the investigation, and two null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 significance level. A correlational research design was employed. The population comprised 7,000 undergraduate students from four tertiary institutions in Anambra State, while 202 students were selected through a multistage sampling procedure. Data were gathered with the Evaluating the Impact of Social Media on Students' Reading Culture Questionnaire (EISMSRCQ). Cronbach's alpha was used to assess reliability, producing a reported coefficient of .514. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation was used to address the first research question, while linear regression was applied to the second and third questions and to test the hypotheses. The findings indicated that social media significantly predicted students' reading culture. Social media scores accounted for 7.4% of the variance in reading culture. The study recommended that tertiary institutions teach students to use social media responsibly for learning while preventing it from disrupting their reading activities.

Keywords	*Social Media, Undergraduate Students, Reading culture, Tertiary institutions*
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Introduction

Social media has changed how people communicate, obtain information and participate in learning. Platforms including Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), TikTok and YouTube are now part of many students' everyday routines. They can support collaboration, the exchange of knowledge and academic networking. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) describe social media as internet-based platforms through which users create, share and interact with content and with one another in virtual spaces. However, concerns have been raised about how these platforms affect students' reading habits, particularly in tertiary education, where sustained reading is important for academic achievement (Adeleke et al., 2024).

Reading culture is the regular practice of reading to gain knowledge, develop personally and achieve academic goals. Students with strong reading habits can strengthen their critical-thinking abilities, expand their vocabulary, communicate more effectively and improve their academic performance. However, the widespread availability of social media has changed how students spend their time. Some devote more attention to online browsing than to textbooks, journals and other academic resources (Anyira & Udem, 2020).

In Nigeria, improved internet access and the increasing use of smartphones have expanded social media use among university, polytechnic and college students. These platforms can support education by providing access to learning materials, academic conversations and online learning communities. Nevertheless, excessive or poorly managed use may take time away from concentrated reading and study. Anyira (2023) noted that students' frequent, lengthy engagement with social networking platforms can leave less time for extensive reading and library activities.

A study of tertiary institutions in Osun State found that students commonly used social media to communicate about academic matters, yet many respondents felt that it reduced the time they spent reading and visiting libraries. The researchers concluded that excessive social networking may weaken reading habits unless its use is managed and connected to educational activities (Adeleke et al., 2024). Similar concerns arise in Nigerian tertiary institutions, where entertainment, messaging and multimedia content can take priority over sustained academic reading. Lecturers and other education stakeholders have therefore raised concerns about weaker reading habits, comprehension difficulties and academic outcomes associated with excessive use. At the same time, social media offers access to e-books, online journals, educational videos and collaborative learning spaces. Its influence can consequently be beneficial or harmful, depending on why and how long students use it (Musa & Emmanuel, 2017).

Social media use has become increasingly common among students in Anambra State, which is home to institutions such as Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Federal Polytechnic Oko, Anambra State Polytechnic, Mgbakwu, and Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe. However, there is limited empirical evidence specifically addressing its relationship with reading culture in these institutions. This study therefore examines students' social media use, their reading practices and the relationship between these two factors in selected tertiary institutions in Anambra State. The results may help students, lecturers, administrators, policymakers and researchers identify ways to use social media to support reading and academic achievement rather than undermine them.

Review of Literature

A number of Nigerian studies have explored how social media relates to students' reading habits in tertiary education. In general, they suggest that these platforms offer learning opportunities but that excessive use can reduce the time allocated to academic reading. Anyira and Udem (2020) studied social media addiction and reading culture among Nigerian higher-education students during the COVID-19 lockdown. Their online survey covered 1,300 students from different institutions. Facebook, WhatsApp and YouTube were among the most commonly used platforms, and more than 75% of respondents accessed social media daily on mobile phones. The study found that heavy use was associated with less reading time, weaker concentration and lower interest in academic materials. The authors recommended digital-literacy and self-regulation programmes to encourage balanced use. Musa and Emmanuel (2017) examined students at Kaduna Polytechnic using a descriptive survey. Questionnaire responses suggested that students spent considerable time on social networking, leaving fewer hours for academic reading. The researchers reported negative effects on reading habits and academic performance, while noting that social media could be useful if deliberately incorporated into teaching and learning.

Adeleke et al. (2024) explored social media use and its perceived influence on reading culture among students in selected tertiary institutions in Osun State. Their correlational survey included 266 respondents from three institutions. Facebook was the preferred platform, and students used social media daily for academic, commercial and social purposes. Nevertheless, over three-quarters said that it reduced the time they devoted to reading and library visits. The researchers recommended educating students about responsible use and encouraging academic engagement through institutional online platforms. Anyira (2023) studied polytechnic students in Edo and Delta States using a descriptive survey. Although students understood the value of reading, many spent more time on social networks than on textbooks and scholarly resources. Extended use was associated with less frequent reading, poor concentration and declining interest in lengthy texts. The study recommended awareness programmes promoting time management and responsible social media habits.

Michael-Olomu and Uzobo (2023) investigated social media use, reading and writing habits, and academic performance among undergraduates at Niger Delta University. Their findings suggested that excessive use affected reading and writing by reducing the time available for academic work. However, when students used these platforms to find learning resources and collaborate with classmates, social media supported their academic experiences. The authors concluded that its effect depends largely on the purpose and length of use.

Okpalike (2022) examined whether smartphone addiction predicted reading culture among students in three public tertiary institutions in Anambra State. Based on responses from 552 undergraduates, the study found a significant association between high smartphone addiction and weaker reading culture. Students who spent excessive time on their phones read less frequently and showed less commitment to academic reading than students who used their devices more moderately. The study recommended promoting responsible smartphone use and introducing initiatives to strengthen reading habits.

Taken together, Nigerian studies indicate that social media provides educational information, digital resources and online learning communities, but uncontrolled use can harm reading culture by reducing time spent reading, discouraging library use and creating distractions. The evidence points to the importance of encouraging balanced and academically focused use.

Research from other countries has also explored the connection between social media and students' reading culture. Although social platforms can support learning, many studies suggest that excessive engagement may negatively affect reading habits, concentration and academic involvement.

Junco (2012) examined social media use and academic engagement among university students in the United States through a survey. The study found that students who spent too much time on Facebook devoted less time to studying and academic reading. Frequent use was linked to reduced academic engagement and study time, although using social media moderately for educational purposes could support communication and collaboration. The study suggested that the consequences depend on students' patterns of use rather than on the technology alone.

Liu (2005) studied how reading behaviour was changing in digital environments using survey and observational approaches. The findings suggested that digital media encouraged screen reading, scanning and browsing rather than prolonged, focused reading. Students tended to favour short online content over lengthy academic texts, which could limit comprehension and critical analysis. The study concluded that digital technologies had shifted reading towards more fragmented practices. Mizrachi and colleagues (2018) conducted the Academic Reading Format International Study, involving 10,293 university students across 21 countries. Although students used digital devices and online platforms to access learning materials, most preferred printed texts for serious academic reading because they supported concentration, comprehension and retention. The researchers argued that digital tools should complement, rather than replace, conventional reading methods.

Wu and colleagues (2021) investigated social media use, self-regulated learning and digital reading literacy using data from more than 105,000 students who participated in the Programme for International Student Assessment across 15 countries. Their findings showed that social media use did not necessarily lower reading ability. Students who managed their learning effectively and used social media for educational purposes demonstrated stronger digital reading literacy, while excessive recreational use was associated with poorer reading outcomes. The researchers concluded that the purpose of use and students' ability to regulate their activities influence the

outcome. Abdillah (2017) explored social media as a learning resource among university students in Indonesia. The descriptive study found that Facebook and WordPress supported blended learning by enabling class discussions, sharing course materials and encouraging interaction. When included in classroom instruction, these platforms helped increase participation and reading of course-related content. The study recommended incorporating social networking tools into education where appropriate.

Overall, international research suggests that social media can have both positive and negative effects on reading culture. It broadens access to digital learning resources, supports collaboration and improves communication. However, excessive recreational use may reduce academic reading time, encourage superficial reading and weaken concentration. The impact therefore depends on students' ability to manage their online activities and use these platforms purposefully for learning.

Theoretical Review

This study draws on two communication theories to explain students' use of social media and its possible influence on reading culture: Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) and Media Dependency Theory (MDT).

Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT)

Uses and Gratifications Theory was developed by Elihu Katz, Jay G. Blumler and Michael Gurevitch in 1973. It proposes that audiences actively select media to meet particular personal, social, educational and psychological needs. Rather than treating people as passive receivers of information, the theory holds that users choose media for purposes such as gaining information, entertainment, social interaction, relaxation and self-expression.

In relation to social media, the theory helps explain why students use Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, X and YouTube. They may visit these platforms to communicate with classmates, obtain learning materials, exchange academic resources, follow current events or relax. The effect on reading culture may depend on the need being satisfied. Students who use social media mainly for academic purposes may strengthen their reading practices, whereas those who focus primarily on entertainment may spend less time with textbooks and other scholarly materials.

This theory is useful to the present study because it highlights the reasons students choose to use social media and the ways those motives may shape reading behaviour. It helps explain whether these platforms function as tools for academic growth or distractions from sustained reading.

Media Dependency Theory (MDT)

Sandra Ball-Rokeach and Melvin L. DeFleur developed Media Dependency Theory in 1976. The theory argues that media influence tends to increase when people depend on them to meet informational, educational and social needs. Media can therefore have a stronger effect on attitudes, behaviour and decisions when individuals regard them as important sources of information and communication.

Applied to this research, the theory suggests that students who rely heavily on social media for information, learning and interaction may experience changes in their reading habits. Dependence on the platforms for educational resources, online journals and academic discussions may support reading. By contrast, relying on them mainly for entertainment, gossip or leisure may reduce the time available for academic reading, library visits and independent study.

Media Dependency Theory is relevant because it explains how students' degree of reliance on social media may shape reading practices and academic performance. It emphasizes that the consequences depend not only on access to media but also on the reasons and manner in which students use it.

Relevance of the Theories to the Study

The two theories offer complementary explanations of social media's relationship with students' reading culture. Uses and Gratifications Theory explains the reasons students choose particular platforms, while Media Dependency Theory considers how reliance on media can influence behaviour. Together, they provide a framework for examining

social media use and reading culture in selected tertiary institutions in Anambra State. The study was guided by three research questions:

1. What relationship exists between social media use and students' reading culture in the selected tertiary institutions?
2. To what extent does social media use predict the reading culture of undergraduates in the selected institutions?
3. What is the nature of students' reading culture in the selected tertiary institutions?

The following null hypotheses were tested at the 5% level of significance:

H_{o1}: There is no significant relationship between social media use and students' reading culture in the selected tertiary institutions.

H_{o2}: Social media use does not significantly predict undergraduates' reading culture in the selected tertiary institutions.

Research Method

The study used a descriptive survey approach and a correlational research design. This design makes it possible to describe existing conditions, attitudes and behaviours without manipulating the variables. The research took place in selected public and private tertiary institutions in Anambra State, Nigeria: Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka; Paul's Theological College, Awka; Anambra State Polytechnic, Mgbakwu; and Paul's University, Awka. The sample comprised 202 respondents, selected using Taro Yamane's (1967) formula for determining sample size and a multistage sampling procedure. The institutions were first chosen purposively. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled "Evaluating the Impact of Social Media on Students' Reading Culture Questionnaire" (EISMSRCQ). Pearson correlation and simple linear regression were used for statistical analysis.

Analysis Result and Discussion

The data were analysed and the results are presented in Tables 1–5 according to the research questions and hypotheses.

Research Question One: What kind of relationship exists between social media use and students' reading culture in the selected tertiary institutions in Anambra State?

Table 1: Pearson's Correlation between social-media and Undergraduate Students' reading culture with (202)

S/N	Variables		1	2
1	social-media	R	1	.272
2	Students' reading culture	R	.272	1

The Pearson correlation results in Table 1 indicate a positive relationship between social media use and undergraduates' reading culture, with a coefficient of r = .272. This finding is consistent with Wu and colleagues (2021), who reported that social media does not automatically reduce reading ability. Students who used self-regulated learning strategies and accessed social media for educational purposes showed better digital reading literacy, whereas excessive recreational use was associated with weaker outcomes.

Research Question Two: Does social media use predict undergraduates' reading culture in the selected tertiary institutions in Anambra State?

Table 2*:* Model Summary of Variance of Undergraduate Students' reading culture Contributed by the Variance in social media Scores (n=202)

Model	R	R^2	adjusted R^2	% of variance	Std. Error
1	.272	.074	.069	6.9	2.296

The regression summary in Table 2 shows a coefficient of .272 for social media use as a predictor of undergraduates' reading culture. The R^2 value indicates that social media scores explain 7.4% of the variance in reading culture. The results therefore show a positive predictive relationship. The study reports that social media significantly predicted reading culture. Students who use social media excessively for non-academic activities may become less interested in reading, reducing their reading habits. This is broadly consistent with Okpalike (2022), who linked smartphone addiction with less frequent reading and weaker commitment to academic materials. It also reflects Musa and Emmanuel's (2017) observation that social media can provide e-books, online journals, educational videos and collaborative learning opportunities. Its influence may be positive or negative depending on the purpose and duration of use.

Research Question Three: What regression equation can be used to predict undergraduates' reading culture from social media use?

Table 3: Coefficient of Equation for Predicting Undergraduates' Students' reading culture using Students' social-media usage (202)

Model	Unstandardized *B*	SE	Standardized β
Constant	13.196	1.191	
Reading culture	.191	.048	.272

Table 3 presents the model used to predict students' reading culture from social media use. The unstandardized coefficient is .191, while the standardized beta coefficient is .272. The equation reported from the model is:

RC = 13.196 + 0.272SM, where RC represents reading culture and SM represents social media use.

According to the unstandardized coefficient, a one-unit increase in the social media score corresponds to a .191-unit increase in the reading-culture score, as reported in Table 3.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant relationship between social media use and students' reading culture in the selected tertiary institutions

Table 4: Test of Significance of the relationship between social media and reading culture.

Model	Unstandardized B	S.E	B	T	P-value	Decision
Constant	13.196	1.191		11.078	.000	Significant
social media	.191	.048	.272	3.990	.000	Significant

The test results in Table 4 show a statistically significant relationship between social media use and reading culture (β = .272, t = 3.990, reported p = .000). The null hypothesis is therefore rejected. The result suggests a meaningful association between the variables. The study interprets this to mean that using social media for academic purposes while limiting unrelated use may support reading culture. This is consistent with Junco (2012), who found that excessive Facebook use was linked to less time spent on academic reading and study, while moderate educational use could support communication and collaborative learning.

Hypothesis Two: Social media use does not significantly predict undergraduates' reading culture in the selected tertiary institutions

Table 5: Test of Significance of Unique Contribution of social media Scores to Undergraduate Students' reading culture (202)

Model	Unstandardized B	S.E	β	t	P-value	Decision
Constant	13.196	1.191		11.078	.000	Significant
social media	.191	.048	.272	3.990	.000	Significant

Table 5 was used to test the second hypothesis. The regression results indicate that social media significantly predicts undergraduates' reading culture, $t(1,202) = 3.990$, $p < .001$. Because the reported p-value is below .05, the null hypothesis is rejected. The result indicates a relationship between social media use and reading culture, and it supports the concern that excessive smartphone and social media use may be associated with less frequent reading and lower commitment to academic materials (Okpalike, 2022).

Recommendations

1. Tertiary institutions should train students to use social media responsibly, showing them how to benefit from academic content without allowing online activity to disrupt reading.
2. Where suitable, lecturers should integrate educational activities on social media into teaching and learning so that students can benefit from these platforms while sustaining effective reading habits.
3. Parents, lecturers and school administrators should encourage students to follow consistent reading timetables, particularly at times when social media use becomes excessive.
4. Students should be encouraged to use social media for learning, including finding e-books, scholarly publications, educational videos, online library resources and academic discussion groups.

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