

Proceedings of the Annual Conference of the Agricultural Extension Society of Nigeria

Number: Twenty-Ninth Annual Conference

Theme: Leveraging the Dynamics of Agricultural Extension Policies and Practices for Sustainable Development

Date: 21-24 April 2024

Venue: Federal University of Technology Akure, Nigeria

ISSN: 1595 – 1421.

Website: <https://info@ajol.org>,

Email: agricultural.extension.nigeria@gmail.com ; editorinchief@aesonigeria.org

Tertiary Agricultural Students' Perception of Social Media Use during the COVID-19 Pandemic Era in Oyo State, Nigeria

<https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/jae.v29i1.9S>

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Abstract

This study investigated tertiary agricultural Students' perception of Social Media Use during the COVID-19 Pandemic Era in Oyo State, Nigeria. A total of 210 students were selected using a multi-stage sampling procedure. Data on respondents' perceptions, benefits, predisposing factors, and constraints to use SM were collected through a questionnaire. Data were analysed using frequency counts, percentages, and mean. Most respondents (68.0%) had a positive perception of SM, while 74.5% derived high benefits from the use of SM during the COVID-19 pandemic. The quest for agricultural information ($\bar{x}=1.82$) constituted the most predisposing factor to use SM, while the high cost of devices ($\bar{x}=1.74$) was the most constraint to use SM. The students were favourably disposed to SM during COVID-19 pandemic era in Oyo State, Nigeria. Educators should consider integrating SM as a digital platform into their teaching strategies, providing training and resources to students to ensure that they are using social media in a responsible and effective manner.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, social media, tertiary agricultural students.

Introduction

Globally, the COVID-19 epidemic has upended established educational systems, necessitating an abrupt switch to remote learning and the deployment of lockdown procedures (Adedoyin, and Soykan, 2020). The Corona virus pandemic widened the inadequacies in the worldwide education system. The Corona virus pandemic is novel and mankind suffered from its negative repercussions. It has caused interruptions in schooling and raised issues with global health that have proven extremely challenging for international health institutions to handle (Onyema, et al., 2020).

The impact in Nigeria has been significant, especially for postsecondary institutions that had to switch to digital platforms to continue offering instruction during lockdowns (Adeoye, Adanikin, and Adanikin, 2020). The federal government of Nigeria issued an order completely closing all schools. In addition, the National University Commission

(NUC), the agency in charge of regulating all university educational institutions in Nigeria, issued a directive to all the universities to close. Social gatherings were also prohibited by the government, and employees of the institutions were instructed to work from home (Onyema, et al., 2020).

A UNESCO study states that over 91% of students worldwide have been harmed by educational institution closures due to the disruption of classes following the declaration of the Corona virus pandemic as a public health emergency. This pandemic has affected teachers as well as students in elementary, secondary, college, and university settings (UNESCO, 2020). The realization that some of these institutions were in the middle of many educational processes (getting ready for a test, admitting fresh students, or starting a new semester) shocked a lot of students and teachers. Adeoye et al., (2020) stressed that universities throughout the world, especially those in Africa, were searching for strategies to deal with and adjust to the changes in academia brought about by this epidemic.

Given the underlying circumstance, learning has undergone a global paradigm change. Virtual learning is replacing traditional face-to-face instruction in most educational institutions, with the majority of students enrolled in different educational institutions switching from traditional classroom instruction to online learning using Web 2.0 instruments such as social media for multitasking and engagement. According to Sobaih, Hasanein, and Abu-Elnasr (2020), social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp provide crucial features for virtual learning, such as instant messaging, video lectures and discussion boards to institutions. These platforms provide useful tools for agricultural science students, including research papers, hands-on tutorials, and webinars led by subject matter experts (Khan et al., 2020).

Given that the agricultural industry significantly contributes about 24% to the GDP, and employment in Nigeria (National Bureau for Statistics -NBS, 2021), agricultural education is very important. In Oyo State, tertiary educations have responsible to produce future agricultural experts. Thus, it is crucial to comprehend how agricultural students perceive the use of social media for their education during the pandemic to improve teaching and make appropriate use of technology. In addition, although studies have investigated students' perception of online learning (Nassoura, 2020; Biswas et al., 2020; Khan et al., 2020), few have explored their perception of the use of SM particularly in Oyo State during the pandemic. Hence, this study investigated tertiary Agricultural students' perceptions of SM usage during the pandemic era in Oyo State, Nigeria. Specifically, the objectives of the study were to:

- (i) examine the perceived benefits of social media to the respondents during the COVID-19 period;
- (ii) identify factors that predispose students to using SM for agriculture knowledge generation and sharing during the COVID-19 period;
- (iii) identify the respondents' constraints to SM use; and
- (iv) ascertain the respondents' perceptions of social media use.

Methodology

The study was conducted in Oyo State, an inland southwestern Nigerian state with 33 Local Government Areas and a projected population of 7,976,100 in 2022 (National

Population Census, 2022). It lies between latitude 8.1574⁰N and longitude 3.6147⁰E (Oyelami, 2024). Oyo State is home to the first Nigerian university, the University of Ibadan, established in 1948 as a college of the University of London and later became an autonomous university in 1962 (www.ui.edu.ng). The population of the study include all tertiary agricultural students in the State. A multi-stage sampling procedure was used. The first stage was a purposive selection of 4 agricultural tertiary institutions in Oyo State given the large presence of agricultural students. The institutions included the University of Ibadan (UI), Ladoke Akintola University of Technology (LAUTECH), the Federal College of Animal Health and Production Technology (FCAH&PT), and the Federal College of Agriculture, Ibadan (FCA). The second stage involved random selection of 50% of departments from the selected institutions. The last stage was the random selection of 10% of students in penultimate and final years from the list of registered students in the selected departments, giving a total number of 210 students. Primary data was collected using a questionnaire and analysed using percentage and mean.

The study measured respondents' perceptions of social media using a 5-point Likert type scale of "Strongly Agree (SA)", "Agree (A)", "Undecided (U)", "Disagree (D)", and "Strongly Disagree (SD)" with assigned scores of 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1, respectively to positively worded statements, and the reverse order to negatively worded statements. The mean score was used as a benchmark to categorize the respondents into positive and negative perceptions. Respondents with scores below the mean value were categorized as having a negative perception, while those with scores equal to or above the mean were regarded as having a positive perception of the use of SM during the pandemic era.

Results and Discussion

Benefits derived from the use of social media during the COVID-19 pandemic era

Table 1 depicts the results of the benefits derived by the respondents during the COVID-19 pandemic. It shows that the respondents perceived all the listed benefits of social media use to be of benefit during the pandemic. The majority (88.5%) opined that SM provides room to participate in social discussion, 87.5% use SM to facilitate their research and learning abilities, 86.5% use it to share ideas and opinions, and 86.1% perceived that SM offers distance learning opportunities, increased their level of creativity, allowed for virtual meeting with colleagues, and helps them to manage boredom and stress. This suggests that social media can serve as an effective means of communication, discussion, and collaboration for students, particularly in times of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic. This is supported by Manca (2020) who opined that social media has become one of the most potent tools for potentially improving students' learning, allowing students to communicate with classmates and teachers. In addition, this finding also aligns with that of Yekinni, et al. (2024) that network facilitation was the most benefits derived by the respondents in the use of ICTs in southwestern Nigeria.

Table 1 further reveals that 74.5% of the respondents had a high benefit in using social media during the pandemic era. This implies that SM played a crucial role in helping the students cope with the challenges of the pandemic, thus giving its benefits, SM can be leveraged in future crises. Past studies have found that as a result of the COVID-19 epidemic, there is now a greater dependence on technology in education,

and social media is even more crucial for distance learning and information exchange. Particularly, Maiti, Mukherjee, and Chakrabarti (2021) stated that SM has become even more applicable and helpful during the COVID-19 epidemic for educational reasons.

Table 1: Respondents' benefit derived from the use of social media during COVID-19

Benefits of Using SM During COVID-19 Era	Yes Percentage
SM used to share ideas and opinions	86.5
Social media helps me to express myself	82.2
SM used to improve my digital literacy	83.2
SM allows me to have virtual meetings with colleagues	86.1
SM used to increase my circle of friends and maintain contacts	85.6
Using SM has increased my level of creativity	86.1
SM provides room to participate in social discussion	88.5
SM use facilitates my research and learning abilities	87.5
SM facilitates the timely dissemination of relevant information	83.7
SM saves the cost of accessing information	81.7
SM used to build brands and create professional opportunities	82.2
SM used to distribute articles and content (videos, photographs etc.)	83.7
SM used for knowledge exchange	85.1
SM provides viable and affordable internet promotion of goods and services	82.2
SM encourages me to collaborate with others	84.1
SM helps my personal development	83.2
SM encourages me to integrate culturally with others	78.8
SM has saved me the cost of purchasing books	78.8
SM helps me to manage boredom and stress	86.1
SM improves my social and communication skills	84.1
SM offers me distance learning opportunities	86.1
Level of SM use	
High	74.5
Low	25.5

Source: Field survey, 2023

Factors that Predispose Students to Use Social Media for Agriculture Knowledge Generation and Sharing

The result from Table 2 indicates that the most predisposing factor to use of social media for knowledge generation and sharing among the respondents was the quest for agricultural information ($\bar{x}=1.82$), followed by the quest for further education ($\bar{x}=1.79$); and fun for an easy and creative way of learning ($\bar{x}=1.79$) that ranked 2nd respectively; and student support learning ($\bar{x}= 1.78$), that ranked 4th. Meanwhile, lack of current literature ($\bar{x}=1.33$) and poor access to textbooks and journals ($\bar{x}=1.27$) were the least factors, as they ranked 14th and 15th, respectively. These findings imply that users of social media in higher education are motivated by the desire to access

agricultural information, further their education, and learn in a fun and creative way. These findings suggest that social media has the potential to provide an alternative source of information and education for students who may face challenges accessing traditional resources such as textbooks and journals. This is in line with Khan et al. (2020) who found that 79.9% of students use e-learning as a learning tool; 85.3% use it to stay up to date on changes to their subject matter and stay aware of them; and 86.9% used e-learning as a free educational resource.

Table 2: Factors that predispose the use of social media for agriculture knowledge generation and sharing

Predisposing factors	Mean
Quest for agricultural information	1.82
Quest for further education	1.79
Fun and easy creative way of learning	1.79
Student support learning	1.78
Peer group studying/collaboration	1.75
Self-learning opportunities	1.73
For conducting vocational training	1.67
For conducting agricultural seminars	1.63
Conducive learning environment	1.61
Social media as a complement to traditional teaching method	1.52
Re-branding agriculture in schools	1.43
Inadequate libraries	1.41
Restrictions on physical learning	1.40
Lack of current literature	1.33
Poor access to textbooks and journals	1.27

Source: Field source, 2023

Perceived Constraints to the Use of Social Media among Respondents

The results in Table 3 show that among all the items perceived to be constraints to the use of SM among the respondents, the high cost of devices ($\bar{x}=1.74$) was ranked as the most constraint. Other significant constraints to the use of SM among the respondents were the high cost of internet subscriptions ($\bar{x}=1.72$) and poor network coverage ($\bar{x}=1.63$) which ranked 2nd and 3rd, respectively. However, inadequate digital skills ($\bar{x}=1.00$); and age limit of student ($\bar{x}=0.95$) were the least constraints to the respondents' use of SM. This finding implies that the cost of devices and internet subscriptions remain significant barriers to the use of social media for knowledge generation and sharing among the respondents. This could be particularly challenging for individuals from low-income backgrounds who may not have access to the necessary technology to fully utilize social media for educational purposes. This aligns with Yakubu et al. (2023) who found that the high cost of data bundles with as constraint to the use of social media among agricultural undergraduates in North-West Nigeria. Additionally, Onyema et al. (2020) reported that during the COVID-19 pandemic school closures, the main obstacles to online education were inadequate facilities, lack of funding, resistance to change, poor digital skills, school policies, the digital divide, poor electricity supply, network issues, and inadequate facilities.

Table 3: Perceived constraints to social media use among respondents

Constraint	Mean
High cost of devices	1.74
High cost of internet subscription	1.72
Poor network coverage	1.63
Erratic power supply	1.61
Distraction	1.57
Fake news	1.48
Time-consuming	1.44
Limited income	1.42
Internet addiction	1.41
Poor judgment of content	1.39
Exposure to indecent sites	1.38
Cyberbullying	1.38
Space consumption of some SM apps	1.32
Privacy intrusion (lack of privacy)	1.28
Unfavourable government policies	1.27
Information on SM is often generalized	1.24
Fake lifestyle of users	1.19
Inadequate time for students	1.16
Inadequate digital skills	1.00
Age limit of student	0.95

Source: Field survey, 2023

Perceptions of the Use of Social Media

Table 4 illustrates the respondents' perceptions about the use of social media. The findings reveal that the respondents strongly agreed that SM is used for active teaching and learning engagement ($\bar{x}=4.64$), social media is better enjoyed when there is a strong network ($\bar{x}=4.61$) and use of SM supplements what they are being taught in class ($\bar{x}=4.52$). Meanwhile, the students disagreed that SM is not effective in improving learning outcomes ($\bar{x}=2.24$). This implies that social media can be used as a tool to enhance the learning experience and promote engagement among students via interactive discussions, resource sharing and prompt feedback in real time. Onyema et al. (2020) stated that technology plays a crucial role in facilitating student-teacher contact during times of isolation, quarantine, and lockdown due to health crises or emergencies. Similarly, Khan et al. (2021) in their study of students' perception towards E-Learning during COVID-19 Pandemic in India noted students readily obtain the required knowledge with an e-learning system.

Furthermore, the findings from Table 4 show that the majority of the respondents (68.0%) had a positive perception of the use of social media. This suggests strong support for the use of SM in educational settings, giving room for educational institutions to integrate it into their teaching strategies. The finding could also imply that students show a positive attitude towards social media due to its benefit in their academics. This finding is supported by Yakubu et al. (2023) who noted that the main purpose of SM use among students is to obtain useful information for academic activities including assignments, projects and lecture notes. In addition, the findings are in congruent with Aladesusi et al. (2021) who found that students had a positive attitude towards the use of SM in learning.

Table 4: Distribution of respondents based on their perception of the use of social media

Perception statements	Mean
SM is used for active teaching and learning engagement	4.64
SM is better enjoyed when there is a strong network	4.61
Use of SM supplements what I am being taught in class	4.52
Can acquire a lot of soft skills through SM	4.49
SM is an effective means of knowledge transfer	4.44
SM provides educational games that can relieve boredom and loneliness	4.41
Effective use of SM can improve my communication skills	4.37
Can learn new things every day from SM	4.36
Prefer to use SM to send messages rather than the normal text message app	4.35
There are lots of fraudsters in the social media space	4.34
Using SM can reduce the cost of purchasing books	4.25
Creating a SM account for social learning is fast and simple	4.23
SM is an effective means of expressing my opinions	4.21
SM helps me to perform my class works	4.19
SM is used to exploit unsuspecting victims	4.02
SM if utilized effectively, can improve my writing skills	3.96
Frequently using SM can distract my attention from my studies	3.89
Prefer having a meeting physically rather than via SM	3.87
SM could save on the cost of learning and communication	3.83
Frequent use of SM makes me lazy in my studies	3.60
Social media helps me to send large files to others at no cost	3.71
Prefer to use SM to buy educational materials rather than make a physical purchase	3.29
SM is not readily available and accessible for use	2.62
Won't be bothered if I am restricted from using SM	2.49
SM is not effective in improving learning outcomes	2.24
Level of perception of SM use	%
High	68.0
Low	32.0

Source: Field survey, 2023

Conclusion and Recommendations

The respondents had a positive perception towards social media use during COVID-19 pandemic era in Oyo State, Nigeria. In addition, they derived high benefits from using SM although they were constrained by high cost of devices and internet subscriptions. Educators should consider integrating SM as a digital platform into their teaching strategies, providing training and resources to students to ensure that they are using social media in a responsible and effective manner. In addition, policy makers and the government should work to ensure that the cost of devices and data is subsidized for students to enable them maximize the use of SM.

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