



# AFRICAN JOURNAL OF STUDIES IN **EDUCATION**

VOLUME 13, NUMBER 1,  
JUNE 2018

**I S S N : 0 1 8 9 - 2 4 1 X**

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# **AFRICAN JOURNAL OF STUDIES IN EDUCATION**



**Volume 13  
Number 1, June 2018**

**ISSN: 0189 – 241 X**

**AJOSIE is the Official Journal of  
Faculty of Education  
University of Benin  
Benin City, Nigeria**



# AFRICAN JOURNAL OF STUDIES IN EDUCATION

FACULTY OF EDUCATION,  
UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY, NIGERIA.

ISSN: 0189 – 241 X

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Printed in Nigeria by:



**AMBIK PRESS LTD.**

#4, Otike-Odibi Avenue, Isiohor,  
Via Ugbowo Old Lagos Road,  
P.O. Box 5027,  
Benin City, Edo State.

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# THE PERCEPTIONS AND PREFERENCES OF UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS DISTANCE EDUCATION SCIENCE STUDENTS ON THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

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## **Abstract**

*This paper examined the perceptions and preferences of University of Lagos Distance Education Science students on the influence of social networking on academic performance.*

*The study was conducted using qualitative and quantitative approaches. The population of the study comprised all the distance education science students while the sample size was 195 obtained using random sampling. Data was collected using structured questionnaire. Frequency table and percentages were the main descriptive statistics used to analyse and present the findings. The results indicated that University of Lagos Distance Learning Science Education Students frequently visit social network sites such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Skype, Instagram, LinkedIn, Snapchat, My Space, Classmate.com, Library Thing and My Opera. It has also been shown in this study that social networking sites had negative corresponding influence on their academic performance. Although, a substantial percentage of the respondents acknowledged that they use social network sites for academic purposes, they were fewer in number than those who admitted they use it for purposes other than academic. In all, the results showed that the respondents spent more time on Social Networking Sites than their course materials. Based on the findings, the study recommended that Open and Distance Learners should be educated on the danger of addiction to social networking sites, and the benefits of social networking when used to supplement their studies. Also, the school authorities and government should consider the possibility of enacting a policy to curtail learners' excessive usage of social network sites.*

**Keywords:** Social Networking, Open and Distance Learners, academic performance.



## Introduction

The term 'social media' or 'social networking site' is common in the lexicon of teenagers and youths; and it is increasingly becoming more popular among adults and is growing in its influence in our environment. Social media can be defined as a set of web based broadcast technologies that enable the democratization of content, giving people the ability to emerge from consumers of content to publishers. Another important description is that social network summarizes digital tools and activities that enable communication and sharing of ideas across the net. It is used in all areas of the society: business, politics, media, advertising, police and emerging services. It has also become a key tool for provoking thoughts, dialogue and action around particular social issues. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social network is a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of web 2.0, which allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Kuss and Griffiths (2011) described social networking sites as virtual communities where users can create public profiles, interact with real-life friends and meet other people based on shared interests. Arshin (2010) referred to social networking sites as virtual places where people find themselves and share information. These social networking sites have an open membership. As soon as one opens an account and uploads his or her data on the profile page, the person is entitled to create a network of friends. However, some social networking sites are specifically designed for mobile phones, some are accessed via computers and others could be accessed using both mobile phones and computers or other information communication technologies. These social networking sites are so numerous but a few would be mentioned, which include, Twitter, Skype Youtube, instagram, mychart, LinkedIn, 2go, friend wise, friend finder, e-buddy, Facebook, Facebook chat, Nimbuzz, Orbit, fubar, classmates, Naijapals, Netlog, Nigerian social network, blackberry messenger, friendster, MySpace, Whatsapp, and so on. There are no limitations or restriction as to which social networking sites one should belong; one can be a member of as many as possible. While the social networking sites have the same key aspects, the cultures and responses around them that become apparent are varied. Most sites help strangers connect with others based on shared personal interests, political and economic views, or simply recreational activities. Some sites accommodate distinct viewers, while others attract people based on similarities, such as common languages or shared racial, sexual, religious, or nationality-based identities. Nonetheless, social networking sites have only one common goal. It is to encourage new ways to communicate and share information. Social networking with its numerous benefits should not be allowed to divert the minds of students from academic pursuits and gains because therein lies the development of any nation.

## Statement of the Problem

Since the advent of social media sites in the 1990s, it has been assumed in some quarters that the academic performance of students is facing a lot of neglect and challenges. There is deviation, distraction and divided attention between social networking activities and their academic work. It is observed that students devote more attention to social media than their studies. Of the total social networking users, 70% are students (Ahmed & Qazi, 2011). These 70% students become distracted because of the amount of time and attention being devoted to social networking. Often times, they are observed using their mobile phones to communicate and do other social activities even during school hours when they are expected to be engaged in purely academic activities. Thus, this valuable time is frittered away on social networking, especially on activities that add no value to them. Therefore, this study is an effort to investigate the possible influence of social networking on the academic performance of the University of Lagos Distance Learning Science Education students.

## Research Questions

The following research questions have been formulated to guide this study.

1. Which of the social networks sites do the University of Lagos Distance Learning Science Education students frequently visit?
2. To what extent have social network sites influenced the academic performance of University of Lagos Distance Learning Science Education Student?
3. What is the purpose of using Social Networks Sites by the students?
4. What is the amount of time invested by the students in social networking?

## Theoretical Framework of the Study

The study hinges on the following theories: Social information processing theory and Klapper Reinforcement or Limited Effects Theory

### Social Information Processing Theory

This theory was developed by Joseph Walther in 1992. It is an interactive communication theory which suggests that online interpersonal relationship development might require more time to develop than face-to-face relationships, but when developed, it has the same influence as face-to-face communication. This shows that the more students use social media, the more they influence their disposition to studies, given the fact that friends from social media will begin to exert influence on each other.

## Assumptions of the Theories

Social Information Processing (SIP) researchers like Joseph Walther are fascinated by how identities are managed online and how relationships are able to



move from one of superficiality to one of intimacy. The few assumptions that are related to the SIP theory are:

- ❖ Computer-mediated communication provides unique opportunities to connect with people. This first assumption is based on the premise that computer-mediated communication is a unique opportunity to build interpersonal relationships with others. It offers an unparalleled opportunity to meet someone whom you would never meet face to face. The uniqueness of being able to cultivate online relationships with someone who is very far away cannot be ignored.
- ❖ Online communicators are motivated to form (favorable) impressions of themselves to others. This assumption suggests that impression management is essential in online relationships and participants undertake efforts to ensure particular impressions.
- ❖ Online interpersonal relationships require extended time and more accumulated messages to develop equivalent levels of intimacy seen in face to face interpersonal relationships. This third assumption states that different rates of information exchange and information buildup relationships. In addition, online comments are usually delivered rather quickly and efficiently.

### **Application of Social Information Processing Theory in online education**

Social information processing theory has been used to study learning in entirely online classes examining the ways that students develop relationships with their instructor and with each other. Dip Nandi, Margaret Hamilton, and James Harland from RMIT University carried out a research in 2015 on asynchronous discussion fora in fully online courses. The study focused on the online discussion process between the students and the instructors, as both senders and receivers, through the Computer-mediated communication (CMC) channel with the asynchronous nature. It was discovered that fully online courses are becoming progressively more popular because of their "anytime anywhere" learning flexibility. One of the ways students interacted with each other and with the instructors within fully online learning environments was via asynchronous discussion fora. Dip Nandi and his colleagues reported on the quality of discussion in fully online courses through analysis of discussion forum communication. The results revealed what students and instructors consider as quality interaction in fully online courses.

### **Klapper Reinforcement or Limited Effects Theory**

In 1960 Joseph Klapper at Colombia University was concerned about average people exaggeration of the power of media. He introduced what he called phenominist theory. He argued that media rarely have any direct effects and are relatively powerless when compared to other social and psychological factors such as social status, group membership, strongly held attitudes, education and so



forth. Instead of disrupting society and creating unexpected social change, media generally serve as agents of the status quo, giving people more reasons to go on believing and acting as they already do. He opined that there are simply too many barriers to media influence for drastic changes to occur except under very unusual circumstances.

## Literature Review

The world is constantly undergoing changes. It has transited from earlier ages to the highly technological world. Learning has changed from the traditional classroom methods to distance learning, and now to online learning. Classroom teaching has also changed from plain lectures to multimedia presentations. This development has now replaced traditional teaching by an evolving learning model which is created for user to share content through collaborative, non-formal learning environments allowing them to learn anytime and anywhere. An empirical study conducted by Idakwo (2011) examined the use of social media among Nigerian youths revealed that the use of social media as a means of communication has been adopted. Also in his study, Idakwo, among other things, discovered that most people use Facebook more than other social media channels in Nigeria. Folorunso, Vincent, Adekoyo and Ogunde, (2010) found that users of the social network sites often examine them and probably know the fulfillments they could derive from the media before accepting to use any of them. According to Apeanti and Danso (2014), students believed that it would be fun for their lecturers to use social media. Also, their grades would be better if they could contact lecturers through social media and lecturers could hold lecture hours on social media. Mehmood and Taswir (2013) stated that the use of technologies such as social media networks and the internet is one of the most important factors that can influence educational performance of students positively or adversely.

In another dimension, Brady, Holcomb and Smith (2010), as opposed to Social Networking Sites (SNSs), indicated that Learning Management Systems (LMSs) tend to be excessively structured and fail to provide the individual participation and network capacity provided by SNSs. For example, an instructor using a LMS can post a question on an online discussion board and each learner can send a response. However, this activity does not allow the learners to interact in real-time manner. Therefore, LMSs are not able to provide an adequate level of learner participation, communication, satisfaction and motivation (Thoms & Eryilmaz, 2014; Meishar-Tal, Kurtz & Pieterse, 2012; Rozac et al., 2012). It has been stated that learners rarely enter LMSs unless they need the information stored within them or they have an assignment that needs to be completed. In contrast, they spend most of their time on SNSs voluntarily which make some learners and instructors reluctant to use LMSs (Schroeder & Greenbowe, 2009).

Methodology

The descriptive survey research design was adopted through the use of questionnaire and oral interview. At the time of this research, the population of students of the University of Lagos Distance Learning Institute Science Education students was about 350 comprising all the students from the various cohorts from year one to year six. It also included males and females. The selected members of the population that were interviewed constituted the sample. The sample procedure for this study was carried out using the simple random sampling. Due to the nature of the research in which experience and the number of years spent in the institute are required; the sample size of this study was 195 students. The primary data generated for this study was obtained through the use of questionnaire administered to 195 students of the University of Lagos Science Distance Learning Institute Science Education. The questionnaire design was a combination of structured question with multiple choice answers for the respondents to choose from. The questions asked in the questionnaire were designed showing closed-ended questions- strongly agreed, agreed, strongly disagreed and disagreed responses 4 point-Likert Scale. The data was analysed using percentages.

Analysis of Data

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Gender	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Male	48	36.6
Female	83	63.4
Total	131	100.0
Age Group	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
20-25 years	53	40.5
25-30 years	39	29.8
30-35 years	19	14.5
Total	131	100.0
35 years and above	20	15.3
Marital Status	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Single	94	71.8
Married	37	28.2
Total	131	100.0
Level	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
300	68	51.9
400	20	15.3
500	29	22.1
600	14	10.7
Total	131	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2017

From table 1, the female respondents outnumbered their male counterparts. That is 63.4% against 36.6%. This could be attributed to the gender ratio in the



Nigerian universities where there is a record of higher frequency of admissions for female students compared to their male counterparts. However, the distribution shows that both genders were well represented and this eliminates gender bias among respondents in the survey. Based on the age distribution of the respondents, it shows that 40.5% of the respondents were within age 20-25 years, 29.8% of the respondents were within 25-30 years, 14.5% were within the age bracket of 30-35 years, while 15.2% were 35 years and above. Regardless of this disparity, the survey can be regarded as age-sensitive, since the data were collected from diverse age - group respondents. Therefore, the data can be regarded as comprehensive and reliable for the purpose of this study. This finding gives an impression that many of the respondents are adults in their youthful age. The finding on age reflects the admission policy that prohibits any student below the age of 21 years from being registered as students in Distance Learning Institute. The respondents' marital status, 71.8% were single, while 28.2% of the respondents were married. This implies that a majority of the respondents in the survey were single and energetic. The respondents' level showed that 51.9% of them were in 300 level, 15.3% were in 400 level, 22.1 percent were in 500 level while 10.7 percent were 600 level students. Therefore, the researcher was able to cover participants from 300-600 levels, and the majority of the respondents were in 300 level.

**1. Research Question One:** Which of the social networks sites do the University of Lagos Distance Learning Science Education students frequently visit?

**Table 1: Distribution of Respondents based on the Social Network sites they frequently visit.**

Marital Status	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Facebook	26	19.8
Whatsapp	37	28.2
Twitter	8	6.1
Skype	9	6.9
Instagram	12	10.7
LinkedIn	1	0.8
Snap chat	1	0.8
My Space	1	0.8
Classmate.com	3	2.3
Library Thing	4	3.1
My Opera	16	12.2
Total	131	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2017



Based on the respondents' responses on the social network sites they frequently visit, 19.8% indicated Facebook, 28.2% WhatsApp, 6.1% Twitter, 6.9 % were Skype users, 9.2 % were Instagram subscribers, 10.7 % were LinkedIn users, 0.8% indicated Snapchat, 0.8 % were familiar with My Space, 2.3% were Classmate.com users, 3.1% indicates Library Thing, while 12.2% were My Opera users.

## 2. Research Question Two: To what extent have social network sites influenced the academic performance of University of Lagos Distance Learning Science Education Student?

**Table 2: Respondents' views on the extent to which social network sites have influenced academic performance.**

S/N	ITEM	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
1	Social Network Sites like Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Skype, Instagram, LinkedIn, Snap chat, My Space, Classmate.com, Library Thing, My Opera have negatively affected my study time.	54 (41.2%)	31 (23.7%)	22 (16.8%)	24 (18.3%)
2	Social Network sites are mostly used for my academic activities and research.	25 (19.1%)	11 (8.4%)	45 (34.4%)	50 (38.2%)
3	Social networking sites are affecting how I write and speak.	54 (41.2%)	37 (28.2%)	18 (13.7%)	22 (16.8%)
4	Social networking sites are effective tools for my E- Learning program.	50 (38.2%)	44 (33.6%)	22 (16.8%)	15 (11.5%)
5	Social networking sites usually distract me during my lectures.	39 (29.3%)	17 (13.0%)	45 (34.4%)	30 (22.9%)
6	To improve my grades, I need to reduce my usage of social networking sites.	62 (47.3%)	34 (26.0%)	20 (15.3%)	15 (11.5%)
7	The use of social networking sites has negatively affected my academic grades	35 (26.7%)	39 (29.8%)	29 (22.1%)	28 (21.4%)
8	Without social networking sites my academic standing will be better than they are now?	48 (36.6%)	35 (26.7%)	25 (19.1%)	23 (17.6%)

Source: Field Survey, 2017

Table 2 shows the distribution of respondents according to the research question which focuses on 'to what extent has social network sites influenced the academic performance. Item 1 shows that 41.2% of the respondents strongly agreed that Social Network Sites like Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Skype, Instagram, LinkedIn, Snap chat, My Space, Classmate.com, Library Thing, My Opera have negatively affected their study time, 23.7 % agreed, 16.8% disagreed while 18.3% strongly disagreed respectively. Also, item 2 affirmed that 19.1% of the respondents strongly agreed that Social Network sites are mostly used for their academic activities and research, 8.4% agreed, 34.4% disagreed while 38.2% strongly disagreed. Therefore, respondents acknowledged that Social Network sites are often not used for their academic activities and research. Item 3 indicates that 41.2% of the respondents strongly agreed that social networking sites are affecting how they write and speak, 28.2% agreed, 13.7 percent disagreed while 16.8% strongly disagreed. This implies that social networking sites are affecting the way they write and speak.

Furthermore, item 4 reveals that 38.2% of the respondents strongly agreed that social networking sites are effective tools for their E-learning programme. 33.6% agreed, 16.0% disagreed while 11.5% strongly disagreed. Hence, from all indications, it was established by the respondents' opinion that Social networking sites are effective tools for their E-learning programme. Item 5 showed that 29.3% of the participants strongly agreed that Social networking sites usually distract them during their lectures, 13.0% agreed, 34.4% disagreed while 22.9% strongly disagreed with the statement. Therefore, a larger percentage of the respondents opposed the view that Social networking sites usually distract them during their lectures. Item 6 reveals that 47.3% strongly agreed that to improve their grades, they need to reduce their usage of social networking sites, 26.0% agreed, 15.3% disagreed while 11.5% strongly disagreed. This means that in order to improve their grades, they need to reduce their usage of social networking sites.

Item 7 shows that 26.7% of the respondents strongly agreed that the use of social networking sites has negatively affected their academic grades, 29.8% agreed, 22.1% disagreed while 22.4% strongly disagreed with the statement. Therefore, respondents were skeptical that the use of social networking sites has negatively affected their academic grades.

Finally, Item 8 indicates that 36.6% of the respondents strongly agreed that without social networking sites their academic standing will be better than they are now, 26.7 % agreed, 19.1% disagreed while 17.6% strongly disagreed. So, the highest percentage of respondents agreed that without social networking sites their academic standing will be better than they are now.



### 3. Research Question Three: What is the purpose of using Social Network Sites?

**Table 3: Respondents' view on the purpose of using Social Networks Sites**

S/N	ITEM	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
1	I usually use social networking sites for finding friends online	52 (39.7%)	43 (32.8%)	17 (13.0%)	19 (14.5%)
2	I use social network sites to find new dates and relationship by me.	28 (21.4%)	22 (16.8%)	42 (32.1%)	39 (29.8%)
3	I normally use Social networking sites for private chatting and updating profile details.	55 (42.0%)	39 (29.8%)	23 (17.6%)	14 (10.7%)
4	Social networking sites are used for watching movies by me.	19 (14.5%)	23 (17.6%)	39 (29.8%)	50 (38.2%)
5	I use social networking sites for discussing course works and assignments	64 (48.9%)	45 (34.4%)	20 (15.3%)	2 (1.5%)
6	Social networking sites are used for reading academic journals, articles and text books by me.	23 (17.6%)	22 (16.8%)	49 (37.4%)	37 (28.2%)
7	I mostly use materials received from blogging sites to complement what I was taught in class.	21 (16.0%)	16 (12.2%)	43 (32.8%)	51 (38.9%)

Source: Field Survey, 2017

Table 3 shows the distribution of respondents according to research question on the purpose of using social networks sites by the students. Item 1 in Table 3 shows that 39.7% of the respondents strongly agreed that they usually use social networking sites for finding friends online, 32.8% agreed, 13.0% disagreed while 14.5% strongly disagreed respectively. Also, item 2 showed that 21.4% of the respondents strongly agreed that Social network sites are used to find new dates and relationship by them, 16.8% agreed, 32.1% disagreed while 29.8% strongly disagreed. Therefore, a significant number of respondents indicated that Social network sites are not used to find new dates and relationship but used for their academic activities and research. Item 3 specifies that 42.0% of the respondents strongly agreed that they normally use Social networking sites for private chatting and updating profile details, 29.8% agreed, 17.6% disagreed while 10.7% strongly disagreed. This implies that respondents often use Social networking sites for private chatting and updating profile details.



Furthermore, item 4 reveals that 14.5% of the respondents strongly agreed that Social networking sites are used for watching movies by them, 17.6% agreed, 29.8% disagreed while 38.2% strongly disagreed. Hence, respondents shy away from this statement that Social networking sites are used for watching movies by them. Item 5 shows that 48.9% of the respondents strongly agreed that they use social networking sites for discussing course works and assignments, 34.4% agreed, 15.3% disagreed while 1.5% strongly disagreed. Thus, it was recognized that respondents use social networking sites for discussing course works and assignments. Item 6 reveals that 17.6% of the participants strongly agreed that Social networking sites are used for reading academic journals, articles and text books by them, 16.8% agreed, 37.4 % disagreed while 28.2% strongly disagreed. Therefore, the largest percentage of the respondents was of the view that Social networking sites are not used for reading academic journals, articles and text books by them. Lastly, Item 7 shows that 16.0% of the participants strongly agreed that they mostly use materials received from blogging sites to complement what they were taught in class, 12.2% agreed, 32.8% disagreed while 38.9% strongly disagreed. Thus, respondents mostly did not use materials received from blogging sites to complement what they were taught in classroom.

#### 4. Research Question Four: What is the amount of time invested by students on the use of Social Networks Sites?

**Table 4: Respondents views on Time Spent on Social Networking Sites**

S/N	ITEM	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
1	It is a routine habit for me to use different social network sites 24/7?	46 (35.1%)	46 (35.1%)	24 (18.3%)	15 (11.5%)
2	I visit the social network site daily for learning purposes.	12 (9.2%)	14 (10.7%)	62 (47.3%)	43 (32.8%)
3	I usually spend more time on social networks sites than I spend reading my course materials.	57 (43.5%)	33 (25.2%)	26 (19.8%)	15 (11.5%)

Source: Field Survey, 2017

Table 4 shows the distribution of respondents according to research question 4 which focuses on time spent on social networking sites. The table shows that 35.1% of the respondents strongly agreed that it is a routine habit to use different social network sites 24/7, 35.1% agreed, 18.3% disagreed while 11.5% strongly disagreed. In addition, item 2 shows that 9.2% of the respondents strongly agreed

that they visit the social network site daily for learning purpose, 10.7% agreed, 47.3% disagreed while 32.8% strongly disagreed. Therefore, respondents acknowledged that visiting the social network site daily is not actually for learning purpose.

Finally, Item 3 in this table shows that 43.5% of the respondents strongly agreed that they usually spend more time on social networks sites than they spend reading their books, 25.2% agreed, 19.8% disagreed while 11.5% strongly disagreed. This implies that respondents usually spend more time on social networks sites than they spend reading their books

### **Discussion of Findings**

Findings from the study indicated that the University of Lagos Distance Learning Science Education Students frequently visit social network sites such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Skype, Instagram, LinkedIn, Snapchat, My Space, Classmate.com, Library Thing and My Opera for academic purposes. This result has been noted by (Asemah and Edegoh 2013; Ayiah and Kumah, 2011; Owusu-Achew and Larson; 2015) that social network sites are mostly used by undergraduates. It has also been shown in this study that social networking sites have negative corresponding influence on the academic performance of the University of Lagos Distance Learning Science Education Students which is in accordance with (Mehmood and Tawir 2013; Ezeah, Asogwu, and Obiorah 2013; Asemah and Edegoh 2013). Although, a substantial percentage of the respondents acknowledged that they use social network sites for academic purposes which is in agreement with (Brennan 2001 and Notle 2010), they are fewer in number than those who admitted they use it for purposes other than academic. In all, the results showed that the respondents spend more time on Social Networking Sites than their course materials and this also aligns with the findings of (Ezeah, Asogwu, and Obiorah 2013; Banquil, et al.2009; Ayiah and Kumah, 2011; Owusu-Achew and Larson; 2015). In conclusion, whichever way one looks at the influence of social networking on academic performance, the results of this study reveal that the use of social networking sites by students is detrimental and counter-productive to the attainment of their academic goals, as it results to poor study skills and habits, dismal academic performance and unfulfilled academic goals.

### **Conclusion/ Recommendation**

This research has shown that social networks have become an essential part of students' social life. These networks have become important as they serve as platforms for users to interact and relate with one another. Social networks are now being seen as learning platforms or communities that could be used to enhance student engagement and performance. It appears that the use of



technologies such as social media networks and the internet is one of the most important factors that can influence educational performance of students positively or adversely.

In addition, the study acknowledged that science education students frequently visit social network sites for several purposes (including the academic purpose). However, it affirmed that the students do not visit social network sites frequently for academic purposes as they do for other reasons. It was also established that social network site have negative influence on the academic performance of the University of Lagos Distance Learning Science Education Students. This is because their use of social networking sites for academic purposes is very low while they spend more time on social networking sites for socializing and hob knobbing than their course materials.

Based on the findings, it is necessary and important that excessive use of social networking be curbed since it has negative effect on the learners' academic pursuit. Open and distance learners should be educated on the danger of addiction to social networking sites, and the benefits of social networking when used to supplement their studies rather than the usual chatting with friends most of the time. Also, school authorities and the government should consider the possibility of enacting a policy to curtail learners' excessive usage of social network sites. Lastly, each institution should organize seminars or workshops on how to use social media or social networking sites to improve academic performance and also highlight the dangers of being hooked to and misled by the time-wasting parts of social media usage.

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