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Social Networking Usage and Students' Learning Behaviour in Upper-Basic Social Studies: Empirical Evidence from Ilorin South, Nigeria

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Abstract

The integration of digital technology into daily routines has brought about significant shifts in the learning environment, interaction styles, and study patterns of secondary school students. This empirical study examined the relationship between social networking site (SNS) use and learning behavior among Upper-Basic Three Social Studies students in Ilorin South Local Government Area (LGA), Kwara State, Nigeria. Data were collected using a validated structured questionnaire titled the Social Networking Site Usage and Students' Learning Behavior Questionnaire (SNSUSLBQ). Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) were used to analyze demographic characteristics and answer the three research questions, while Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) was conducted at the 0.05 level of significance to test the null hypothesis. Findings indicated a high level of SNS usage (74.7%) and a predominantly high level of active learning behavior (50.3%) among the participants. The study concludes that SNSs serve as key digital media platforms where collaborative study and peer learning occur positively when properly harnessed.

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Introduction

Background of the Study

In today's digital age, the fusion of educational technology, interactive media, and instructional theories has transformed secondary education across the globe (Collis & Moonen, 2008; Piotrowski, 2015). Social networking sites (SNSs) are Web 2.0 applications that allow individuals to construct public or semi-public profiles, articulate connections with other users, and generate user-created content (boyd & Ellison, 2007; Kuss & Griffiths, 2011). These digital environments have evolved from simple social spaces into pervasive platforms for informal learning and peer interaction (boyd & Ellison, 2007; Kuss & Griffiths, 2011). Among adolescents and secondary school students, platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and X (formerly Twitter) serve as principal spaces for communication, social comparison, and information exchange (Alexa, 2011; Idakwo, 2011; Patel, 2011).

With the increasing presence of digital technology in educational environments, its association with learning outcomes, motivation, and learning behaviour has become a critical focal point of educational inquiry (Eke et al., 2014; Greenhow & Gleason, 2012). Upper-basic Social Studies education (encompassing Junior Secondary Schools, JSS 1–3) occupies a foundational position in the Nigerian educational system, designed to foster social competence, civic responsibility, critical thinking skills, and positive interpersonal relationships among young citizens (Adaralegbe, 1980; Edinyang & Ubi, 2013; Jekayinfa, 2005). According to Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory, cognitive and behavioural developments occur through social interactions, modeling, observation, and collaborative problem-solving within an individual's immediate environment (Bandura, 1977; Northern Center for Learning Behavior, 2015). Therefore, understanding how SNS usage correlates with students' learning behaviour in Social Studies is essential for curriculum planners, educators, and school administrators.

Empirical literature presents a dual perspective regarding SNS utilization among adolescents (Al-Tarawneh, 2014; Rosen, 2011). On the one hand, unstructured or excessive social networking can lead to academic distractions, sleep deprivation, multi-tasking deficits, and reduced time allocated to core academic tasks (Fewkes & McCabe, 2012; Rogers, 2014). On the other hand, contemporary educational technology research highlights that, when integrated intentionally, SNSs facilitate informal academic discussions, peer-to-peer mentoring, self-directed learning, and collaborative inquiry (Greenhow & Gleason, 2012; Piotrowski, 2015). In developing contexts such as Nigeria, where infrastructure constraints often limit physical library resources, SNSs frequently serve as surrogate digital repositories where students exchange academic materials and seek peer assistance (Eke et al., 2014; Garba et al., 2012).

Statement of the Problem

The widespread acquisition of mobile smartphones and subscription to cheap internet data plans by Nigerian adolescents have integrated digital networking into their daily routines (Nwosu, 2012; Oye, 2012). This widespread usage raises important questions regarding how everyday SNS engagement relates to academic learning behaviour in core subjects such as Social Studies. While numerous studies have examined SNS usage among undergraduate students in tertiary institutions (Arumugam & Ganesan, 2014; Eke et al., 2014; Idakwo, 2011), empirical investigations targeting upper-basic school learners particularly within specific local contexts like Ilorin South Local Government Area (LGA)—remain limited.

Many junior secondary school teachers observe increasing classroom distractions, continuous notification checking, and passive study habits attributed to unregulated social media access (Fewkes & McCabe, 2012;

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Gemmill & Peterson, 2006). Conversely, conventional instructional strategies often overlook the potential of digital platforms to foster positive learning behaviours such as collaborative problem-solving, academic peer group discussions, and interactive inquiry (Piotrowski, 2015). An empirical gap exists regarding baseline SNS usage levels, current learning behaviour patterns, and the nature of the association between these two variables among Upper-Basic Three learners. This study addresses this gap by investigating social networking site usage and students' learning behaviour among Upper-Basic Three Social Studies students in Ilorin South LGA, Kwara State, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The overall objective of this study was to examine the relationship between social networking site usage and learning behaviour among Upper-Basic Three Social Studies students in Ilorin South LGA, Kwara State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Assess the level of social networking site usage among Upper-Basic Three Social Studies students in Ilorin South LGA.

2. Determine the level of learning behaviour exhibited by Upper-Basic Three Social Studies students in Ilorin South LGA.

3. Examine the relationship between social networking site usage and students' learning behaviour in Upper-Basic Three Social Studies in Ilorin South LGA.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the level of social networking site usage among Upper-Basic Three Social Studies students in Ilorin South LGA, Kwara State?

2. What is the level of learning behaviour among Upper-Basic Three Social Studies students in Ilorin South LGA, Kwara State?

3. What is the relationship between social networking site usage and students' learning behaviour among Upper-Basic Three Social Studies students in Ilorin South LGA, Kwara State?

Research Hypothesis

The following null hypothesis was formulated and tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

H01: There is no significant relationship between social networking site usage and students' learning behaviour among Upper-Basic Three Social Studies students in Ilorin South LGA, Kwara State.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study offer practical and theoretical contributions for key stakeholders in basic education:

• Teachers and Social Studies Educators: Provides empirical insight into adolescent digital habits, enabling educators to design blended learning tasks and leverage digital platforms for constructive academic interactions.

• Students: Enhances awareness regarding productive digital media habits versus passive digital distractions, guiding adolescents toward utilizing SNSs as supportive academic tools.

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• Curriculum Developers and Policy Makers: Offers baseline evidence to inform the integration of digital literacy and responsible digital citizenship modules into the Nigerian Basic Education Social Studies curriculum (Garba et al., 2012).

• Parents and Guidance Counselors: Provides empirical context on adolescent online behavior, supporting the development of balanced home-school monitoring strategies and digital guidance frameworks.

Literature Review

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This study is grounded in Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory and Vygotsky's (1978) Social Constructivist Theory. Social Learning Theory posits that human behavior is learned observationally through modeling, imitation, and environmental interaction (Bandura, 1977). In contemporary digital environments, SNSs function as virtual social spaces where peer modeling, information sharing, and reinforcement take place continuously.

Complementarily, Vygotsky's Social Constructivism emphasizes that cognitive development and learning are inherently social activities mediated by cultural tools and language. SNSs act as modern technological artifacts that mediate communication, enabling learners to co-construct knowledge within a 'Zone of Proximal Development' through peer collaboration, group queries, and shared digital content (Gillespie, 2010; Latour, 2005; Oestreicher-Singer & Zalmanson, 2013).

Learning Behaviour in Secondary School Students

Learning behaviour encompasses the observable cognitive, affective, and social actions, strategies, and self-regulatory practices that students display during the learning process (Northern Center for Learning Behavior, 2015). It reflects an interplay between individual self-efficacy, peer interactions, and academic task engagement (Mendoza, 2005). In Social Studies education, positive learning behaviours include active participation in group discussions, peer tutoring outside scheduled class times, self-directed reading, reflective inquiry, and collaborative engagement with societal issues (Adaralegbe, 1980; Xie et al., 2006).

2.3 Educational vs. Recreational SNS Usage and Student Engagement

Empirical studies across global and local contexts highlight the multifaceted nature of SNS interaction (Al-Tarawneh, 2014; Moshi et al., 2018). Early literature primarily associated SNS usage with recreational leisure, reduced attention spans, and academic procrastination (Gemmill & Peterson, 2006; Kuss & Griffiths, 2011). However, recent educational technology research differentiates between recreational SNS usage (e.g., viewing viral videos, entertainment browsing, gaming) and educational SNS usage (e.g., participating in study group chats, sharing academic links, seeking clarification on homework) (Greenhow & Gleason, 2012; Lowenthal, 2011; Piotrowski, 2015).

In the Nigerian secondary school context, research by Eke et al. (2014), Oye (2012), and Garba et al. (2012) demonstrates that secondary and post-secondary students increasingly adapt platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook for peer study networks. These platforms enable informal peer exchange, resource sharing, and collaborative learning outside traditional school hours. Thus, determining the extent to which general SNS usage correlates with constructive learning behaviour is critical for optimizing educational outcomes.

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Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design utilizing a quantitative correlational approach. A descriptive survey is appropriate for capturing systematic data regarding self-reported practices, attitudes, and behaviours across a defined population without manipulating the study variables.

Population, Sampling Frame, and Sampling Technique

Target Population: The target population comprised all Upper-Basic Three (JSS 3) Social Studies students in public junior secondary schools within Ilorin South Local Government Area, Kwara State, Nigeria (N = 4,120 across 22 public junior secondary schools during the academic session). Upper-Basic Three students were selected because they had completed over two years of the junior secondary Social Studies curriculum and demonstrated higher familiarity with both academic expectations and mobile technology.

Sampling Frame and Sample Size: The sampling frame consisted of the enrolled JSS 3 students across the selected schools. A sample size of 300 students was determined based on standard survey sampling guidelines for populations of this scale.

Sampling Technique: A multi-stage sampling technique was employed: 1) Stage 1 (School Selection): Six (6) public junior secondary schools were selected from the 22 public junior secondary schools in Ilorin South LGA using simple random sampling (balloting method). 2) Stage 2 (Participant Selection): From each of the six selected schools, exactly 50 Upper-Basic Three Social Studies students were chosen using simple random sampling (random numbers generated from class registers), yielding a total sample of 300 participants (6 x 50 = 300).

Ethical Procedures

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) / Research Ethics Committee of the faculty. Administrative permission was subsequently secured from the Kwara State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) and the principals of all six participating junior secondary schools. Parental consent forms were distributed and signed for participating minors, and written assent was obtained from all participating students prior to questionnaire administration. Participants were informed that participation was voluntary, anonymity was guaranteed, and data would be analyzed aggregately for research purposes only.

Research Instrument

Data were gathered using a structured instrument titled the Social Networking Site Usage and Students' Learning Behaviour Questionnaire (SNSUSLBQ). The instrument comprised three distinct sections:

Section A: Demographic Profile (Age, Gender, Religion).

Section B: Social Networking Sites Usage Scale (20 items). This section assessed the frequency of access to and interaction with major SNS platforms (e.g., WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, X). Items were scored on a 4-point frequency scale: Always Used (4), Used (3), Seldom Used (2), and Not Used (1). Total potential scores ranged from 20 to 80.

Section C: Students' Learning Behaviour Scale (10 items). This section measured constructive learning behaviours, including peer collaboration, group study participation, individual reading, and academic problem-solving. Items were scored on a 4-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). Total potential scores ranged from 10 to 40.

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Scoring and Categorization Benchmark Justification

To categorize participants into distinct usage and behaviour levels, score boundaries were established using equal theoretical score ranges:

SNS Usage Scale (20–80 range, spread = 60 points): Low Usage: 20–40 points; Average Usage: 41–60 points; High Usage: 61–80 points.

Learning Behaviour Scale (10–40 range, spread = 30 points): Low Level: 10–20 points; Average Level: 21–30 points; High Level: 31–40 points.

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

Face and content validity of the SNSUSLBQ were established by a panel of three experts in Educational Measurement and Evaluation and Social Studies Pedagogy. Items were refined based on their recommendations regarding language clarity, age-appropriateness for upper-basic students, and alignment with construct definitions.

The reliability of the instrument was evaluated through a pilot test administered to 30 Upper-Basic Three students in a public junior secondary school in Ilorin East LGA. Internal consistency yielded reliability coefficients of $\alpha = .81$ for the SNS Usage Scale and $\alpha = .78$ for the Learning Behaviour Scale, indicating high internal consistency.

Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaire was administered directly in person by the researchers with the assistance of designated Social Studies teachers in each school. Clear standardized instructions were provided to the participants before completing the survey. Completed questionnaires were retrieved immediately upon completion, yielding a 100% response rate ($N = 300$).

Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 25.0): Demographic Characteristics were analyzed using frequencies and percentages; Research Questions 1 & 2 were analyzed using frequencies, percentages, and mean scores; Research Question 3 & Hypothesis (H01) were analyzed using Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) at the alpha = .05 significance level.

Results

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

The demographic profile of the 300 participants is presented in Tables 1, 2, and 3.

Table 1:

The Demographic Profile of the Participants

Age Bracket	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
10–12 years	74	24.7
13–15 years	208	69.3
16–18 years	18	6.0
Total	300	100.0

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Table 1 shows that the majority of participants (69.3%, *n* = 208) were between 13 and 15 years old, which represents the standard age bracket for Upper-Basic Three (JSS 3) students in Nigeria.

Table 2:
The Demographic Profile of the Participants

Gender	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Male	117	39.0
Female	183	61.0
Total	300	100.0

Table 2 shows that female participants accounted for 61.0% (*n* = 183) of the sample, while male participants accounted for 39.0% (*n* = 117).

Table 3:
The Demographic Profile of the Participants

Religion	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Christian	137	45.7
Muslim	163	54.3
Total	300	100.0

Table 3 indicates that 54.3% (*n* = 163) of participants identified as Muslim, while 45.7% (*n* = 137) identified as Christian.

Answering Research Questions

Research Question 1: What is the level of social networking site usage among Upper-Basic Three Social Studies students in Ilorin South LGA, Kwara State?

Table 4:
Results of The Research Question 1

Level of Usage	Score Benchmark	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
High Level	61–80	224	74.7
Average Level	41–60	76	25.3
Low Level	20–40	0	0.0
Total		300	100.0

As illustrated in Table 4, 224 participants (74.7%) demonstrated a high level of SNS usage, 76 participants (25.3%) demonstrated an average level of usage, and no participant fell into the low usage category. Overall, the overall mean score for SNS usage was $M = 64.68$ ($SD = 6.38$), demonstrating a high level of social networking site usage among Upper-Basic Three students in Ilorin South LGA.

Research Question 2: What is the level of learning behaviour among Upper-Basic Three Social Studies students in Ilorin South LGA, Kwara State?

Table 5 shows that 151 participants (50.3%) exhibited a high level of constructive learning behaviour, 148 participants (49.3%) exhibited an average level, and 1 participant (0.4%) exhibited a low level. The overall mean

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score for learning behaviour was $M = 30.49$ ($SD = 3.85$), indicating that learning behaviour among Upper-Basic Three students in Ilorin South LGA is predominantly high.

Table 5:

Results of The Research Question 2

Level of Learning Behaviour	Score Benchmark	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
High Level	31–40	151	50.3
Average Level	21–30	148	49.3
Low Level	10–20	1	0.4
Total		300	100.0

Hypothesis Testing

Research Question 3: What is the relationship between social networking site usage and students' learning behaviour among Upper-Basic Three Social Studies students in Ilorin South LGA, Kwara State?

Null Hypothesis (H01): There is no significant relationship between social networking site usage and students' learning behaviour among Upper-Basic Three Social Studies students in Ilorin South LGA, Kwara State.

Table 6:

Results of The Research Question 3

Variable	*N*	Mean (*M*)	*SD*	*df*	Cal. *r*	*p*-value	Decision
Social Networking Site Usage	300	64.68	6.38	298	.36*	.000	H01 Rejected
Students' Learning Behaviour	300	30.49	3.85				

**Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).*

Table 6 illustrates a Pearson correlation coefficient of $r = .36$ with $df = 298$ and a p-value of .000. Because the p-value is less than the specified alpha level of .05 ($p < .05$), the null hypothesis (H01) was rejected. This statistical outcome indicates a statistically significant, moderate positive association between social networking site usage and learning behaviour among Upper-Basic Three Social Studies students in Ilorin South LGA ($r = .36$, $p < .05$).

Discussion

Level of Social Networking Site Usage

The descriptive findings demonstrated a high level of SNS usage among Upper-Basic Three Social Studies students in Ilorin South LGA (74.7% high, 25.3% average). This finding aligns with empirical observations by Moshi et al. (2018), Dwyer et al. (2008), and Idakwo (2011), who documented high digital device uptake and frequent social media platform participation among adolescents. In urban and semi-urban settings like Ilorin South, the availability of low-cost smartphones and affordable mobile data subscriptions enables secondary school students to engage frequently with digital platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube.

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Level of Students' Learning Behaviour

The study also revealed that Upper-Basic Three students exhibited high levels of active learning behaviour (50.3% high, 49.3% average). Active learning behaviours measured in this study included participating in peer group discussions, exchanging academic notes, engaging in self-directed inquiry, and cooperative problem-solving. This outcome aligns with findings reported by Moshi et al. (2018) and Sanchez (2012), who observed that secondary school students frequently employ peer-assisted learning strategies to complement formal classroom instruction.

Association Between Social Networking Site Usage and Learning Behaviour

Inferential analysis established a statistically significant, moderate positive correlation ($r = .36$, $p < .05$) between SNS usage and students' learning behaviour. This finding corroborates earlier research by Akubugwo and Burke (2013), Flad (2010), and Greenhow and Gleason (2012), who reported that digital platform participation positively correlates with peer information sharing, collaborative problem-solving, and self-directed academic inquiry.

From a social constructivist perspective (Vygotsky, 1978), SNS platforms serve as informal digital extensions of the traditional classroom (Piotrowski, 2015). Students utilize messaging groups to form informal study networks, seek clarification regarding Social Studies assignments, and discuss social issues relevant to their curriculum (Adaralegbe, 1980; Garba et al., 2012). Rather than acting purely as an academic distraction, SNS usage can facilitate collaborative learning when students leverage peer connectivity for educational tasks.

However, it is essential to contextualize the magnitude of this association ($r = .36$). While the relationship is positive and statistically significant, it is moderate, indicating that SNS usage accounts for approximately 13% of the variance in students' learning behaviour ($r^2 = .130$). The remaining variance may be driven by confounding variables such as baseline student motivation, socio-economic background, parental supervision, teacher pedagogical effectiveness, and individual self-regulation.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

This empirical investigation evaluated social networking site usage and its relationship with learning behaviour among Upper-Basic Three Social Studies students in Ilorin South LGA, Kwara State, Nigeria. The empirical evidence demonstrates high levels of SNS usage alongside high levels of constructive, collaborative learning behaviour among the participants. Crucially, the study established a statistically significant, moderate positive association ($r = .36$) between SNS usage and students' learning behaviour. These results indicate that digital social platforms serve as accessible environments for informal peer collaboration and academic resource exchange in basic education.

Educational Recommendations and Policy Implications

1. Curriculum Integration and Digital Literacy: Curriculum planners (such as the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council - NERDC) and Social Studies educators should explicitly embed digital media literacy and responsible digital citizenship modules into the Upper-Basic Social Studies curriculum (Garba et al., 2012).

2. Structured Peer Learning Networks: School administrators and Social Studies teachers should encourage the creation of supervised digital study groups (e.g., teacher-moderated subject WhatsApp groups or discussion forums) to channel adolescent SNS engagement toward collaborative academic inquiry.

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3. Institutional Guidance and Policy: School guidance counselors should establish digital wellness programs to educate students on time management, self-regulation, and distinguishing educational SNS use from recreational distractions.

4. Home-School Monitoring Collaboration: School management and Parent-Teacher Associations (PTA) should establish joint frameworks to help parents monitor adolescent digital device usage at home, fostering balanced study habits.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

1. Geographical Scope and Sample Generalizability: This study was limited to public junior secondary schools in Ilorin South LGA, Kwara State. Future research should expand the geographical coverage to encompass private schools, multiple local government areas, and diverse geopolitical zones across Nigeria to enhance generalizability.

2. Methodological Triangulation: The quantitative reliance on self-reported questionnaire data represents a limitation. Future studies should adopt mixed-methods research designs incorporating qualitative focus group discussions, classroom observations, and teacher interviews.

3. Variable Refinement: Future comparative studies should explicitly differentiate between recreational and educational SNS usage, evaluating their relative contributions to academic achievement across different subject disciplines.

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