



Influence of Online Forum on Academic Performance of Undergraduates of Ebonyi State University Abakaliki, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Background: The proliferation of social media technologies has significantly reshaped communication patterns among undergraduate students of Universities in Nigeria. This had given rise to the use of online forum. The online forum is a created application such as WhatsApp, Telegram, and other digital network which serves as an interactive space where undergraduate students exchange ideas, share academic materials, and maintain social connections. While online forum holds the potential to enhance collaborative learning and academic engagement, their unregulated and often informal nature has raised concerns about their impact on students' academic performance. In many cases, these forums are dominated by non-academic discussions, distractions, and excessive time consumption, which may detract from meaningful learning activities. Though studies exist in this area, but there remains a gap in knowledge on the specific ways in which online forum participation influences the academic performance of undergraduates in a digitally growing institution like Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, Nigeria.

Objective: This study examined the impact of online forum on the academic performance of undergraduate students of Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki.

Method: The study adopted in this study was descriptive survey design. The population was made up of 3,689 undergraduate students of Ebonyi State University Abakaliki and sample size of 400 was gotten through Taro Yamane's sampling formula. A multi-stage sampling technique was used to select the participants or respondents. Based on the sample size, questionnaire was used as instrument of data collection.

Result: Findings show that: majority of the undergraduates belong to and make use of one form of online forum or the other, students online forums exist for other reasons than for academics and there is poor attitude/performance to learning among the undergraduate students in Ebonyi State University.

Conclusion: This study concludes that online forum via social media negatively affects the academic performance of the undergraduate students, thereby causing negligence and poor performance in academic activities.

Unique Contribution: This study will be useful to the undergraduate students and lecturers of Ebonyi State University by exposing online forums as influencer of poor academic performance of the undergraduates and as well guide them on how to overcome it.

Key Recommendation: The Ebonyi State University authority should educate and sensitize students on the use of online forum for academics by providing online regulatory measures that will checkmate online activities of all students, to encourage them on online academic purposes such as assessing materials for their studies online. The students should be followed up on the use of online forums through formulated rules and regulations in the university by setting up online checking mechanism via an app or platform against the ills of online forums in the University.

Keywords: *Academic, Online Forum, Social Media, University Students, Undergraduates Performance,*



INTRODUCTION

The emergence of modern communication technologies that gave birth to social media cum online digital platforms has contributed in transforming the modes of sharing and receiving information and messages from individuals, groups and associations in the society (Nwonyi et al 2024). One of the developments of communication technologies is the formation of Online Forum. Online Forums is a digital communication avenue that is characterised new ideas, methods and helping to inculcate values as related to individuals in the society and it has impacted students' academic in both positive and negative way. In Nigeria, it is no longer news that virtually all teens and adults both rich and poor engage in the use of online forum, not only for educational purposes but also for non-educational purposes. The existence of online forum has changed the way most people communicate. Many classes of people mostly and other classes uses it for both academic and non-academic purposes. Social media, such as Facebook, Tiktok, WhatsApp, Instagram and Twitter are online interactive platform where students interact with themselves, share life experiences, life hacks, comedies, get updated information, go nude sometimes, watch "fake life" of some influencers, which diminishes most of the confidence of the young ones.(Ufuophu-Biri & Iwu, 2014; Odoemelam et al., 2016).

In the words of Gasmi (2022); Nwafor and Ezike (2015), the spread of digital technologies in the last few decades, coupled with the proliferation of the Internet have influenced the way educators as well as learners conceptualise of and approach the teaching-learning process. Nowadays, educational institutions around the world encourage and support the integration of e-learning technologies in their educational systems (Al-Husban, 2020; Aligwe et al., 2017; Ogbaeja & Nwafor , 2017) in a learning age where web-based education has become ubiquitous (Dinc, 2017). More specifically, Perdana, Jumadi, and Rosana (2019) argue that e-learning enhances students' higher order thinking skills such as analysis and argumentation. Furthermore, Osho(2016) posits that online forum impacts positively on students' academic performance through the flexibility it provides in terms of content and methodology as well as the personalised learning experience it offers.

However, in an active learning environment, students play an active role and take responsibility for their own learning. Thus, it is believed that the systematic integration of ODFs in online and blended learning environments in various fields of study brings about several learning gains. Students should be made to develop self-regulation strategies to enable them use their digital link and reduce its negative effect on academic success. For example, study time or lecture time should not be used for online forum or non-academic purposes. Students should be advised to seek help when needed, especially with their counsellors or lecturers so as to help them to control their interest on online forum for wrong purpose.

It is therefore based on this background that this study was carried out to examine the influence of online forum on the academic performance of undergraduate students of Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki where many undergraduate students belong to one form of online forum or the other while carrying out their studies.



STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The increasing use of online forum among university students in Nigeria has raised concerns about its impact on their academic work. Despite the potential benefits of social media for academic purposes, such as access to educational resources and collaboration with peers, many students are using social media for non-academic purposes, such as socializing and entertainment. There is need for more research on the ways in which online forum can be used to develop students' success in universities.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study were:

1. To examine the extent of online forum usage among students in Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki.
2. To investigate major reasons for online forum participation among students in Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki.
3. To determine the effects of online forum usage on Ebonyi State University undergraduate students' academic performance.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design to investigate the effect of online forum on students' academic performance in Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki. A descriptive survey is a type of research design in which a group of people or items are studied by collecting and analysing data from only a few people or items considered representative of the entire population. The population of this study comprised of 3,689 undergraduate students of Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki under the faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities from the 2023/2024 administrative record of the university. The sample size of the study consisted of 400 students ascertained through Taro Yamane (1965) formula. A two-stage sampling technique was used to select the respondents. First, purposive technique was used to four departments namely Mass Communication, Political Science, Economics and Psychology. The second technique was simple random sampling used to select the students that participated in this study. A structured questionnaire titled effect of online forum on students' academic performance was used for data collection. The instrument consisted of students' personal information and questions based on the research questions. The instrument was validated by two experts from the Mass Communication Department in Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki. The corrections made by the experts were effected and final copies of the instrument were obtained which were then used for the study. The reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach Alpha reliability testing conducted outside the university. Twenty (20) respondents participated. The Cronbach Alpha procedure yielded a co-efficient of 0.82 indicating a high level of consistency of the items and made the questionnaire fit for administration. Data were collected with the help of two trained research assistants using the questionnaire. Four hundred (400) hard copies of the questionnaire were distributed by hand to the students and a total of 386 completed copies of the questionnaire were retrieved for analysis. The percentage of the instrument retrieved was 96.5% while 3.5% of the instrument was lost in transit. This study used descriptive analysis method. The data collected for this study were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, version 23) to get the frequencies, percentages and cumulative percentage of responses.



RESULTS

Demographic characteristics of the respondents

The demographic characteristics of the selected undergraduate students of the Ebonyi State University Abakaliki were presented as follow:

Table1: Sex distribution of respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	286	74.1	74.1	74.1
	Female	100	25.9	25.9	100.0
	Total	386	100.0	100.0	

From table 1, majority of the respondents were male students. This shows that more male students participated in the survey than female students.

Table 2: Level of study by the respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Final year	93	24.1	24.1	24.1
	Third year	192	49.7	49.7	73.8
	Second year	30	7.8	7.8	81.6
	First year	71	18.4	18.4	100.0
	Total	386	100.0	100.0	

The data displayed on the table above show that respondents who were in third year were in the majority while those that were least represented were the second year students of the faculty.

Table 3: Course of study by the respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Mass Communication	100	25.9	25.9	24.1
	Political Science	103	27.5	27.5	73.8
	Economics	90	23.3	23.3	81.6
	Psychology	93	24.1	24.1	100.0
	Total	386	100.0	100.0	100.0

From the table, Political Science students were leading in number followed by the Mass communication students among others.

Table 4: Extent of online forum usage among students of Ebonyi State University

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	High level	208	53.7	53.9	53.9
	Average level	162	41.9	42.0	95.9
	Low level	10	2.6	2.6	98.4
	Not at all	6	1.6	1.6	100.0
	Total	386	99.7	100.0	



Entries in table 4 above showed responses to the statement: extent of online forum usage among students in Ebonyi State University. Majority of them indicated that the extent of online forum usage among students is high.

Table 5: Major reasons for online forum among students of Ebonyi State University

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Valid</i> For all students' matters	281	72.8	72.8	72.8
For students' group	15	3.9	3.9	76.7
For academic reasons	90	23.3	23.3	100.0
Total	386	100.0	100.0	

The data displayed on the table above showed that respondents who agreed that majority of them belong to online forum because of students' matters and are in the majority, while those who said it is for academic reasons.

Table 6: Influence of online forum usage among students of Ebonyi State University on their academic work

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cum. Percent
<i>Valid</i> Negative	254	65.6	65.8	65.8
Positive	115	29.7	29.8	95.6
Neutral	14	3.6	3.6	99.2
Not sure	3	.8	.8	100.0
Total	386	99.7	100.0	

Entries in the table above showed the response degree of respondents regarding the effects of online forum usage on university students' academic work on campus. A greater number of the respondents, 254(65.8%) said 'negative'. Those that said positive were 115 or 29.7% while the least response category was those who simply said 'not sure' 3(0.8%). To buttress the data presented above, the response showed that the effects of online forum usage on university students' academic work on campus is negative.

DISCUSSION

This study investigated undergraduate students' opinion on the influence of online forum and their academic work or performance. Four departments were drawn from four departments in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki. Majority of the respondents were in third year. The results of the findings were the outcome of data analysis on the research questions. Accordingly, the first question sought to ascertain the extent of online forum usage among university students. It was discovered that majority of the respondents belong to one class of online forum or the other, hence there was high level of online forum usage among the undergraduate students of Nigeria. This result is in agreement with some existing works on online cum social media usage among undergraduate students. For instance, Ogbaeja & Nwafor (2017) observe that many university students exposed themselves to social networking sites.



Findings from research question number two showed some major reasons there is online forum among students of universities. Among them that attracted the attention of most of the respondents is the online forum for students' overall affairs with 72.8% response rate. Others were for academic and non-academic reasons. Thus, online forum as indicated in this result does not really promote students' academic work and performance. In the works of Ogbaeja, Nelson-Ogbaeja & Onah (2024), their findings reveal that it is unfortunately, the use of cyber networks has been flooded with infidelity because of the freeway users enter the community, and commit crimes with the networks.

The findings of research question three this study show that the use of online forum by majority of the undergraduate students has more negative effect to positive on their academic work and performance. It means that many students do not use online forum created by social media to enhance their academic performance rather are usually overtaken by other students social affairs within and outside the campus. However, Ogbaeja & Nwafor (2017) have a related but warning result. They say that it is therefore practical that the use of online forum or social networking sites or virtual community by university undergraduates has come to stay. Modern technology is making it easier for academicians to detect unethical practices such as plagiarism and copyright infringement. It calls on the students to learn and be acquainted with responsible and useful use of online forum of the social media to positively affect their academic works and performance in the university.

The negative influence of social media on students' academic work are consistent with the findings of a study by Asemah et al. (2018) found that Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki students use social media primarily for socializing and entertainment, while the positive, aspect is by Oyedemi (2015) found that social media can be a useful tool for enhancing student engagement and participation in learning, which show that this few classes of student are not so distracted as others.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study had proved that the idea of online forum is one of the common online practices where undergraduate students willingly form and belong. This is fully in existence in Ebonyi State University in Nigeria. The online forum was made possible by the availability of social media at the reach of majority of the students. It is unfortunate that majority of the student abuse the forum by failing to use it for advance studies and knowledge advancement. The forum has negatively affected the academic performance by making the students lazy and less attentive to lectures. Based on the above conclusion, this study made the following recommendations for relevant authorities and further studies:

1. The Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki should come up with policies on how students should form and use online forum devoid of distracting students from their academic work in the campus.
2. Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki authorities should educate and sensitize students on the use of online forum for academics by providing curriculum for all students, to encourage them on online academic purposes such as assessing materials for their studies online.
3. Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki should be on alert to watch the students on the use of online forums through formulated rules and regulations in the universities.



Ethical Clearance

Ethical clearance was sought and obtained from the undergraduate students of Ebonyi State University in South East Nigeria. Appropriate research measures were taken to safeguard privacy, confidentiality, and prevent any harm and as well maintain transparency, impartiality, and adherence to proper research ethics and rules.

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Conflict of Interest

There was no conflict of interest.

Author' Contributions

Dr. Stella Nelson Ogbaeja developed this study and conducted the research while the analysis and the discussion and recommendations were collective efforts of the researchers.

Data availability statement

The datasets on which conclusions were made for this study are available on reasonable request

Citation

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