Social Media Use and Students' Adherence to University Policies among Undergraduates

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Abstract

Social media platforms have emerged as a popular new medium that has integrated into our daily lives. Cell phones, iPods, and other portable media players have made it possible for people to carry a wealth of knowledge in the palm of their hands at all times. The advent of computer-mediated communication (also known as CMC) in the latter half of the 20th century is considered to be the seed from which social media sprang. This research aims to investigate the social media policy and the degree of compliance among undergraduate students in private and public universities in Osun State. Quantitative information was collected from 380 students at Redeemer's University and Osun State University for this research. The study used a questionnaire to gather data from its respondents, using a quantitative research approach for its investigation. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse the study. The findings indicate that undergraduates are not aware of the university policy regulations, but they inadvertently had a high degree of compliance overall. The researchers concluded that students typically comply with the rules, with just a small percentage straying from them on occasion. As a result, the study suggested that educational institutions should make students aware of the potential consequences of violating social media policies and emphasise the importance of complying with these policies.

Keywords: Compliance, Compliance Level, Policies, Social Media.

Introduction

In recent years, social media has emerged as a popular medium all over the globe, in particular, because it has been a consistent source of chances for individuals, communities, and organisations to disseminate information and knowledge, innovate together, and work together (1-2). It has become a part of our everyday lives (3). People now have access to all types of information in the palm of their hands through cell phones, iPods, and other handheld devices. Social media (such as Instagram, Twitter, etc.) has taken the technology world to a new level. Social media is an online platform that focuses on building social relations among people who share interests, backgrounds or activities. Social media is popular because it allows people to connect in the online world to form a group, a forum and a community where ideas and information can be exchanged without geographic barriers (4). Although social media can be a positive thing by being a good source of communication, it can also serve as a negative channel when issues such as cyberbullying and misinformation occur. For this reason, Universities across the globe recognise the value and importance of diverse opinions and encourage responsible and respectful social media that is consistent with the commitment to academic freedom and university values. They also recognise that social media content has the potential to affect the reputation of the university

and members of its community. A lot of people today have become aware of both the positive and negative impacts that social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter and WhatsApp have on individuals, groups, communities and societies (5-6). In light of this, every academic institution is committed to promoting, regulating, and protecting the integrity of its identity and its trademarked names and identifying marks through regulations and policies (7). Several undergraduates have become frequent users of these social media platforms and use them how they deem fit, thereby publishing a mixture of negative and positive content to their audience or viewers, which may consist of fellow students. This study primarily seeks to know if using Instagram, Twitter and WhatsApp hinders students' adherence to basic University policies such as the prohibition of degrading or dehumanising, exploitive, hateful, or violent materials, including, but not limited to pornography, gossip and slander. The objectives of this study are to know the extent to which students at Redeemer's University and Osun State University are aware of the social media policies, examine which of the social media platforms mostly used by undergraduates to publish content which is against the policies and guidelines of the University, investigate if the use of social media has had a negative effect rather than a positive effect on student behaviour towards University policies, determine the frequency by which undergraduates publish content which are against the University policies and guidelines and examine the effectiveness of the university's social media policy in promoting responsible online behaviour. In every University in Nigeria, there are regulations guiding the conduct of students' activities. Students see social media as an opportunity to air their voices making use of various social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, WhatsApp among others. Students use the social media platforms to post information among themselves on issues relating to university rules and sensitise other students both on compliance and deviants. Therefore, the extent at which students use social media to adhere to the policies of university management becomes a subject of research. The relevance of this research lies in the fact that it can investigate the connection between

the usage of social media and the degree of adherence to policies that students demonstrate at educational institutions of a higher level. The use of social media is rapidly becoming an essential need for all educational establishments. Using social media can, however, bring about negative or positive impacts, some of which the institution may not be aware of or even be able to adequately address because of its lack of resources. As a result, the design of this research is geared on making the institutions understand the significance of the regulation of social media (8). The concept of media as understood is based on the human experience which is never unmediated but rather is permanently constituted and organised by various types of material and technological mediation that vary throughout history (9). The idea of media has undergone tremendous change over the last century due to the development of new technologies and the growth of digital platforms, both of which have dramatically altered how information is disseminated and used. The term "media" is used to characterise the various channels via which information and entertainment are communicated to large audiences (10). The term media encompasses a wide variety of media, some of which have been around for a long time such as television, radio, and newspapers. In contrast, others, such as the Internet and other social media platforms, have just recently come into existence. Marshall McLuhan is credited with coining the expression "the medium is the message." This concept was first presented in his book "Understanding Media: Extensions of Man," which was released in 1964 (11). The idea that lies behind this expression is that how a society transmits and receives information is of more significance than the content itself. In other words, McLuhan's thesis is that how a society receives a message is affected by the form of that communication, such as whether it is visual, printed, musical, or any other form. The statement shows how important it is for the various types of media to exist. In addition, he was the first person to forecast that the globe would one day shrink to the size of a village, suggesting that there would come a day when people could access information from the palms of their hands. Again, social media refers to the means of interaction among people in which they create, share, and/or exchange

information and ideas in virtual communities and networks (12). The creation of the Internet and the World Wide Web in the 1960s and 1970s, followed by their commercialisation, revolutionised worldwide communication and information exchange and this paved the way for the coming of social media itself. Furthermore, the term "social media" refers to forms of online communication (such as those found on websites for social networking and micro blogging) that enable users to collaborate on the creation of content and exchange information, ideas, and personal messages with one another such as videos (13). The terms "social networking" and "social media" are often used interchangeably; however, social networking is more commonly understood to refer to users building communities among themselves, whereas social media focuses more on the practice of using social networking sites and other related platforms to build an audience. The first kinds of social media emerged almost simultaneously with the advent of technology that enabled their creation. E-mail and chat programmes were first introduced in the early 1970s, but the emergence of long-lasting online communities did not occur until 1979 when the discussion group network USENET was established. Social media is viewed as a set of web-based broadcast technologies that enable the democratisation of content, giving people the ability to emerge from consumers of content to publishers. With the ability to achieve massive scalability in real time, the social media technologies allow people to connect with each other to produce or reproduce value through online conversation and collaboration (14). The advent of social media marked the beginning of publishing's transition towards a two-way and dialogic format. The conventional model of one source to many users was replaced with the model of "many sources to many users." As a direct consequence of this, the power dynamic in the relationship between the publisher and the customer shifted, and the latter became the dominant party in the dynamic. In the past, even the most successful newspapers were unable to attain the same level of reach and audience size that they do now via the use of physical distribution channels. Social media changed all of that. Social media possesses features such as users being content creators, instantaneous

communication, inclusive and participative and global interaction. Social media platforms include social networking platforms, image and video-sharing platforms, video hosting sites and community blogging platforms. The early years of the new millennium saw the proliferation of social networking websites, which fundamentally altered how individuals connect and communicate with one another online. Facebook, which first appeared online in 2004, is generally seen as the platform that paved the way for current social networking sites. Users were given the ability to establish profiles, connect with friends, and grow their networks via its usage. The rising number of people who have access to the Internet is one of the primary factors that has contributed to the expansion of social media in Nigeria. The statistics provided by the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC), stipulates that the total number of active mobile internet customers reached 154.28 million by the end of December 2022, which was an increase from 97.03 million members reported in December 2015 (15, 16). In fact, as of December 2023, the Internet users in Nigeria stood at 163.8 million (17). This increase in internet access has led to a corresponding increase in the number of people using social media in the country. The roles of technology in education include engagement, personalisation, accessibility, global learning, 21st-century skills, flexibility and efficiency. Likewise, the challenges of technology in education span through digital divide, teacher preparedness, cybersecurity and overreliance. The future of education also relies on artificial intelligence, virtual reality, educational Apps and games, global collaboration, online and blended learning among others (18). Compliance with University laws: Compliance is the degree to which people adhere to certain guidelines, regulations, or prescriptions set out by an organisation. Compliance is the term used to describe the degree to which students and employees at a university adhere to the many policies and regulations that have been established. It is vital to comply with the regulations and norms of the university to keep the learning environment secure and well-ordered, as well as to ensure that the purpose and objectives of the institution are realised. When placed within the framework of universities, compliance level refers to the degree to which

students follow and conform to the established policies and guidelines. The purpose of this in-depth piece of writing is to give readers knowledge of compliance concerning university regulations, including its relevance, variables affecting compliance, measurement, and techniques for boosting adherence. The goals of university policies centre on maintaining order and fostering a favourable learning and working environment. University laws are meant to maintain academic honesty, maintaining high ethical standards and safety on the campus. Several empirical investigations of how students in Nigeria and elsewhere make use of social media have been carried out. While several studies have shown researchers the positive effects that children may get from using social media, a few have shown the reverse. In a study of undergraduate students' use of social media in Nigerian Universities, the results of the data analysis shed light on the most significant challenges that students encounter when using social media. The results show that there are no regulations or policies in place in Nigerian institutions that prohibit the use of social media or networks as well as the inappropriate usage of such platforms (19). The advent of social media technology has redefined learning and the effectiveness of communication education. Institutions of higher learning use technology to disseminate information to the entire institution community while the community members use technology to provide feedback for the constituted authorities on various issues that affect them. From classroom learning, collaboration to students exchange of information, technology has revolutionised educational activities (19). Also, in a study on the Use of Social Networking Sites among Undergraduate Students at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, findings of the survey showed that most of the students were utilising social networking sites to communicate with their friends, connect with their classmates for the sake of online learning, debate weighty national problems, and watch movies, among other activities (20). The use of social networking sites is not without its commendable advantages; conversely, such sites are not without their share of risks; nevertheless, such risks may be mitigated with the help of the solutions presented in this work. It was advised that university authorities

should conduct seminars to educate students about the not-so-good features of social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, etc., as a direct result of the results of the study. Further study on social media use among students of universities in South-East Nigeria led to the conclusion that a sizeable percentage of students attending universities in South-East Nigeria make use of various forms of social media (21). Based on the findings of the research, it was suggested that the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology should submit to the National Assembly that a law be passed that specifies what users of social media should and should not do. This is very essential because one of the outcomes of this research indicates that some of the students participate in criminal activity via social media platforms. However, no theory is useful unless it enables the greatest effort to explain a phenomenon (22). This study is anchored on Technological Determinism Theory and Social Learning Theory. Technological Determinism theory is set forth to explain why big changes to the societal status quo are a necessary consequence of progress in communication technology. The power of modern communication systems to alter perceptual capabilities and, by implication, day-to-day activities, is highlighted here. As explained by Marshall McLuhan determinism is a reductionist thesis that attempts to link a society's technological progress to its distinctive traits. It seeks to address the issue of who or what could have a decisive influence on human affairs via its investigation. The theory delves into the question of how much technological factors may affect human thought and action. The theory is relevant to this study because social media exposure determines the pattern of current generation communication, then the medium is the message. The second theory for the study is the social learning theory by Albert Bandura (23). According to the theory, learners can acquire new behaviours and information just by viewing a model. Learning takes place when people observe one another. Furthermore, both reinforcement and punishment have indirect effects on behaviour and learning. People form expectations about the potential consequences of future responses based on how current responses are reinforced or punished, and these expectations can be influenced by either

type of reinforcement or punishment. The cognitive variables that contribute to whether or not a behaviour is learned are referred to as mediating processes. Our conduct is influenced by these mediating processes and learning does not always result in change: Just because a person learns something new does not indicate that they will alter their behaviour in response to what they have learned. Social Learning theory also stipulates that rewards and punishments can be adopted to change or alter other people's behaviours. For example, if students repeatedly watch their classmates breach the rules and regulations of the institution, they may be more prone to flout standards themselves.

Methodology

The survey research method was adopted for this study simply because the study is concerned with investigating problems associated with human behaviours. The survey research method is relevant to the study because it assists in providing information from selected university students. The study looked at the social media platforms that students use to communicate their messages and the platforms are Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, TikTok and LinkedIn. The duration of the study was from June to December 2023. The contents on which students use social media to interact include university policies on cyberbullying, sharing confidential information, impersonation, personal expression and disagreement with the university policies on dressing code, attendance at the university activities, academic integrity, campus

conduct among others. This study picked Redeemer's University and Osun State University purposively as the main population of the study because of their proximity, and former being a private while the latter being a public university. The research population for this study covered undergraduate students at Redeemer's University and Osun State University. According to Redeemer's University admission office, there are currently 5,471 undergraduate students while the admission office at Osun State University gives 34,325 as the current population of undergraduate students. This brings the total population of the two Universities to 39,796. Taro Yamane formula was applied to determine the sample size for the study viz: $n = N / (1 + N(e^2))$, n = 396. The data collection instrument for this research is a questionnaire which was used to gather data to identify the influence of social media use on the adherence to policies at Redeemer's University and Osun State University. The instrument was self-administered to the respondents in their various schools using four research assistants. Copies of the questionnaire were analysed using descriptive statistics of frequency tables and simple percentages method. A total number of three hundred and eighty [380] copies of the questionnaire were properly filled out by students in the sampled Universities, out of a total number of three hundred and ninety-six [396]. This represents a ninety-seven per cent (96%) response rate. Responses were provided for all the question items in the questionnaire, thus making them valid for the analysis.

Results

Social Media Policy Awareness Level

Table 1: Awareness and Procession of the Social Media Regulations

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	121	31.8
No	164	43.2
Not sure	95	25
Total	380	100

Table 2: Social Media Offensive Posting

	Frequency	Percent
Posting inappropriate content	220	57.9
Cyberbullying or harassment	87	22.9

Sharing confidential or sensitive information	24	6.30%
Impersonation or unauthorized use of university accounts	21	12.9
Total	352	100

Results from Table 1 reveal that the majority of the respondents are not aware of the social media policies implemented in their schools. The most offensive post among the respondents is posting inappropriate content. The Table 2 results indicate that about half of the sampled students agree that posting inappropriate content in social media is the most offensive post.

Table 3: Social Media Platform Usage

	Frequency	**Percent**
Facebook	55	14.5
Twitter	82	21.6
Instagram	64	16.8
Snapchat	36	9.5
YouTube	78	20.5
TikTok	54	14.2
LinkedIn	11	2.9
Total	380	100

Table 4: Reasons for Publishing Offensive Post

	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of awareness about the policies	58	30.2
Disagreement with the Policies	72	37.5
Press Pressure	17	8.9
Personal expression	20	10.4
Ignorance of the consequences	25	13
Total	192	100

Table 5: Usage of Social Media has a More Negative than Positive Effect

	Frequency	**Percentage**
Strongly Agree	19	5
Agree	63	16.6
Neutral	13	3.4
Disagree	197	51.8
Strongly Disagree	88	23.2
Total	380	100

The Table 3 results show a fairly even spread across the platforms of social media. These results suggest a good usage of the various social media platforms by the students. The Table 4 result shows that 72 of them disagreed with the school policies (37.5%), 58 lacked awareness about the policies (30.2%); 25 were ignorant of the consequences (13%), 20 had personal expression (10.4%) and the remaining 17 were influenced by peer pressure (8.9%). The spread of the result suggests that the majority of the students disagreed with the social media policies. Results from Table 5 reveal that more than half of the respondents disagree with the point that social media has more negative effects on students. The summary of these results indicates that the generality of the students do not believe that the use of social media has negatively influenced behaviour towards University policies.

Table 6: Effectiveness of the University's Social Media Policy

	Frequency	Percentage
Very Effective	95	25
Somewhat effective	178	46.8
Neutral	71	18.7
Not very effective	36	9.5
Not at all effective	0	0
Total	380	100

Results from Table 6 reveal that 25% of the respondents' rate their university social media policy has been very effective in promoting responsible online behaviour. A larger percentage believes the policy is somewhat effective (46.8%), while 18.7% of them are neutral. Only 9.5% think that the policy has not been very effective. The summary of these results indicates that the social media policy has generally been effective in promoting responsible online behaviour among the sampled students. Despite that, the sample population still engaged in offensive online content.

Discussion

This study examined the policy of social media within universities and the level of compliance among students enrolled in selected private and public universities in Osun State. Therefore, discussing the findings of this study would be derived based on the research questions. The finding of the study suggests that a significant proportion of university students are unaware of any of these policies which include activities like posting inappropriate content, cyberbullying or harassment, sharing confidential or sensitive information and impersonation or unauthorised use of university accounts as seen in Table 1 and 2. The students' pattern of behaviour may not be unconnected with the previous scholars' findings that there are no regulations or policies in place in Nigerian institutions that prohibit the use of social media or networks (18). Since the majority of the students are not aware of the social media policies of their respective universities then, posting negative content online may not be a big deal to them. This indicates a negative trend because they post lots of offensive posts ignorantly. If the students are aware of the university policies, such policies can promote responsible and ethical social media usage among students. From the study, it is indicated that there is a diverse social media landscape among the selected university students, reflecting the preferences and content creation habits of the demographic. Another finding within the study reveals a low prevalence of content publishing that violates university social media policies among the surveyed students. Disagreement with the policies and lack of awareness were the primary reasons cited for such violations as see on Table 4. Again, only a small percentage of respondents agreed (16.6%) or strongly agreed (5%) that social media has a more negative effect on their behaviour towards university policies as seen in Table 5. These results suggest that a considerable proportion of students view social media as having a neutral or positive influence on their behaviour about university policies. Therefore, they see social media as an opportunity to democratically air their views. Furthermore, the study reveals that only a negligible number of respondents (0.5%) reported very frequently publishing content that violates university policies on social media. This indicates that a small minority of individuals engage in behaviour that consistently goes against the established guidelines. The implication is that the students are not aware that the offensive online posts are against the university policies. The outcome of the study suggests that only a small proportion of respondents (9.5%) considered their university's social media policy as "not very effective" as seen in Table 6. It is worth noting that no respondents rated the policy as "not at all effective." These results suggest that, at least, the universities' policies have an influence on students' behaviour in promoting responsible online posts. The students viewed their posts as appropriate but it was not, though, the majority of them were not aware of what constituted offensive online posts. The study highlights that the majority of respondents in this sample do engage in publishing content that violates university policies on social media. It indicates that generally, there is no compliance

among the student population, because the majority of them deviate from the guidelines as seen in Table 2. These findings underscore the importance of continued policy communication, education, and support to ensure a positive digital culture within universities. The outcomes of this study are in line with other scholars that the concept of new media experience is never unmediated but rather is permanently constituted and organised by various types of material and technological mediation that vary throughout history. Furthermore, big changes to the societal status quo are the necessary consequences of progress in communication technology (9, 21). The power of modern communication systems to alter perceptual capabilities and, by implication, day-to-day activities is reflected in the behaviour of the sampled population. However, ignorantly their behaviour negates university policies. As such, students should be guided on the positive use of social media. The response of the majority who are not aware of their policies means they would continually to breach the university policy regulation. This shows that educational institutions have a responsibility to make students aware of the possible consequences of breaching social media regulations to ensure that they appreciate the significance of complying with these policies. This is supported by social learning theory because people form expectations about the potential consequences of future responses based on how current responses are reinforced or punished since rewards and punishments can be adopted to change or alter other people's behaviours.

Conclusion

This research study was conducted to discover the compliance level of students to the policy of social media in Redeemer's University and Osun State University. The study discovered that most students are unaware of the social media policies laid down by their universities. They are not aware of policies and the study highlighted the diverse usage of social media platforms among Nigerian university students for content publishing. Twitter and YouTube emerged as the most popular platforms, followed closely by Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok. Snapchat and LinkedIn also maintained a notable presence among the students as seen in Table 3. The study highlights that the majority agree that the social media policies of their universities are effective but their opinion is contrary to their behaviour. Therefore, university policies should be made available to students at the admission and registration points so that they can be aware of the university policies. It is also recommended that since most students are unaware of the social media policies of their Universities, University management should include such policies in their students' handbook and always distribute those policies during student orientation. Furthermore, university authorities should organise seminars and workshops regularly to enlighten the students on the university policies and codes of conduct. Including students in the process of formulating and reviewing regulations will go a long way to ensure compliance. This method will ensure that policies are inclusive, address the concerns of the student population, and develop a feeling of ownership and responsibility among the student body as a whole. Management should establish tools for continuous monitoring of activity on social media to detect possible breaches of policy and give help and counselling to students. This preventative strategy may assist in handling any concerns quickly and stop infractions from occurring again in the future. Colleges and universities can continue cultivating a culture of responsible online behaviour among their student body by regularly analysing and revising their rules around social media.

Abbreviations
CMC: Computer-Mediated Communication, NCC; Nigerian Communications Commission, SPSS: Statistical Package for the Social Sciences.

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