

## THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN KNOWLEDGE SHARING AMONG STAFF AND STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN PLATEAU STATE, NIGERIA

By

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### Abstract

The introduction of social media in the learning institutions has restructured knowledge dissemination in higher education. In Nigeria, its application has spread extremely quickly, but little research delves into how the staff and students in the higher institutions in Plateau State use social media for learning. This study employed a mixed-methods approach through the use of structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews of students and faculty members from three private and public institutions in Plateau State. Social Constructivist Theory and Connectivism guided the comprehension of digital interaction in learning and professional networking. Findings reveal that sites such as WhatsApp, Telegram, Facebook, and LinkedIn are significant sources of scholarly content sharing, collaborative learning, and professional networking. The majority of participants reported a rate of daily use of social media for scholarly activities. There remain still existing challenges from these advantages, including digital distractions, privacy concerns, exorbitant internet fees, and the lack of institutional policy support, which limit the use of these sites to their potential. Social media has emerged as an essential knowledge-sharing platform for employees and students of Plateau State's higher education institutions. To fully benefit from it, the institutions need to create efficient social media policies, build robust ICT infrastructure, reduce the cost of connectivity, and provide constant digital literacy skill training. Strategic integration of social platforms into pedagogy can enhance inclusive, authentic, and sustainable digital scholarship in Nigerian higher education.

**Keywords:** Social Media, Knowledge Sharing, Higher Education, Nigeria, Digital Literacy, Institutional Policy, Social Constructivism, Connectivism.

### Introduction

The 21st century has witnessed digital technologies revolutionising the processes of knowledge creation, access, and dissemination. Of these, social media platforms have become pivotal tools, moving beyond entertainment usage to become primary mediums of education, work, and research communication. Social media facilitates informal, collaborative, and asynchronous learning in higher education, providing a participatory option to traditional pedagogies (Al-Marroof et al., 2023). Facebook, WhatsApp, Telegram, Twitter (X), YouTube, and LinkedIn are getting increasingly embedded in the discourses of scholars, enabling real-time sharing and interaction in various media forms.

In Nigeria, social media usage for scholarly learning has risen dramatically, driven by growth in internet penetration and the need for adaptive learning patterns, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite this growth, empirical evidence of how social media affects the exchange of knowledge among employees and students in Nigerian tertiary institutions, particularly the Plateau State, is minimal. Previous research tends to be preoccupied with aggregate usage patterns or ICT attitudes at a general level (Okonkwo & Udo, 2024). Limited information is available on the particular roles, practices, and barriers that impact the efficacy of social media as a knowledge-sharing medium in this setting.

This study seeks to fill this gap by examining the application of social media in facilitating

knowledge exchange between academic staff and students in Plateau State's tertiary institutions. Drawing from Social Constructivism and Connectivism theories, it examines how online interactions facilitate learning and professional working, and it aims to make an impact on policy formulation and institutional practice.

## Research Objectives

The research specifically tries to:

1. Identify the most frequently utilized social media platforms for educational purposes by students and staff in Plateau State institutions.
2. Examine the perceived benefit of social media in facilitating knowledge transfer.
3. Explore the problems and challenges associated with social media use in education.
4. Assess the extent to which social media adoption for knowledge transfer is influenced by institutional policies and practices.

## Research Questions

In line with these objectives, the following research questions were developed:

1. Which of the social media are the most utilized for study by students and scholars in higher institutions in Plateau State?
2. How does social media support knowledge sharing in such institutions?
3. What are the challenges and barriers to effective academic knowledge exchange on social media?
4. How do practice and policy within institutions affect social media use for knowledge sharing at the level of higher education?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media platforms are web-based and mobile applications that enable users to create, share, and interact with content in real time (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). These platforms—WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter/X, LinkedIn, Instagram,

YouTube, Telegram, TikTok—have evolved into powerful tools for community-building, information dissemination, and collaborative learning (Alabi & Sani, 2023). Knowledge sharing on social media is often characterized by its informal, multi-directional, and instantaneous nature, giving rise to a democratization of knowledge (Kure & Bako, 2025).

In academic settings, social media supports peer-to-peer learning, facilitates access to diverse resources, and fosters professional networking. The accessibility of smartphones and affordable internet has amplified these benefits, particularly in Nigerian universities where formal LMS infrastructure may be limited.

## Theoretical Framework

*Social Constructivism* (Vygotsky, 1978) emphasizes that learning is a socially mediated process where knowledge is actively constructed through interaction. Social media platforms serve as contemporary “zones of proximal development,” enabling learners and educators to co-create knowledge dynamically (Nwankwo & Igwe, 2023).

*Connectivism* (Siemens & Downes, 2009) conceptualizes learning as a process of building networks through digital connections. The ability to access, filter, and evaluate information within these networks is central to knowledge acquisition, making social media platforms crucial nodes in the contemporary learning landscape (Hassan & Obadare, 2025).

## Empirical Insights

Recent studies show high levels of engagement with WhatsApp and Telegram for academic discussions among Nigerian university students (for example, Elom et al., 2025). Staff members utilize LinkedIn and research-focused groups for professional development and collaboration (Okereke, 2024). However, challenges such as distractions, misinformation, poor internet access, and lack of institutional policies pose significant barriers (Olatunji & Umeh, 2023;

Yakubu & Edeh, 2025). Inadequate technological infrastructure and regional disparities exacerbate these issues, undermining the potential of social media to serve as an effective knowledge-sharing platform.

## Research Gaps

Most existing studies focus on either general ICT usage or perceptions without detailed exploration of practical engagement, content types, or institutional policies specific to Nigeria's Plateau State. Few studies analyze both staff and student perspectives simultaneously across diverse institutions, which this research aims to address.

## Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods, descriptive survey design to capture both quantitative and qualitative data. The population comprised academic staff and students from six purposively selected higher institutions across Plateau State: two each from the Southern (College of Agriculture Garkawa, Federal Polytechnic Shendam), Central (Federal University of Education Pankshin, Plateau State University Bokkos), and Northern (University of Jos, Karl Kumm University Vom) zones.

A multistage sampling approach was adopted. From each institution, stratified random sampling selected 20 staff and 80 students, totaling 600 respondents. Data collection involved structured questionnaires covering demographics, social media usage patterns, perceived benefits and challenges, and institutional policies, supplemented by semi-structured interviews with 12 key informants (two per institution).

## Data Analysis

The instruments were pilot-tested and expert-validated and achieved a Cronbach's alpha of 0.81, which is high internal consistency for social science research. Quantitative data were analyzed

using SPSS software version 26. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, and means) were used to summarize demographic variables and usage patterns. Inferential statistics applied chi-square tests to explore relationships between categorical variables (e.g., type of platform and role of respondent), and one-way ANOVA to explore institution differences. Where appropriate, post-hoc tests (Tukey's HSD) were employed to identify sources of group differences. Effect sizes (Cohen's *d* for pairwise tests, eta squared for ANOVA) were calculated to indicate effect sizes, as well as statistical significance. Also, binary logistic regression was utilized to predict probability of frequent scholarly usage of social media as a function of demographic factors (e.g., age, gender, role) and institutional factors.

Open-ended questionnaire responses and semi-structured interview responses were transcribed and thematically analyzed from the qualitative data. Three-stage coding was done, involving open coding to achieve recurring patterns, axial coding to cluster corresponding categories, and selective coding to concentrate themes. NVivo software facilitated management and organization of the qualitative data. Triangulation between quantitative and qualitative outcomes enhanced validity and interpretative depth.

## Sample Size Justification

552 responses were indeed analyzed (441 students and 111 staff), which was above the minimum calculated using Yamane's (1967) formula for finite populations at a 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error, where a sample of approximately 400 participants was found to be adequate. The sample size that was achieved was therefore large enough for descriptive and inferential analysis with sufficient statistical power to detect medium effect sizes in ANOVA and chi-square tests (Cohen, 1988).

## RESULTS

### Respondent profile

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Institution and Role

Institution	Students	Staff	Total
College of Agriculture, Garkawa	76	18	94
Federal Polytechnic, Shendam	74	17	91
Federal University of Education, Pankshin	69	19	88
Plateau State University, Bokkos	72	18	90
University of Jos	79	20	99
Karl Kumm University, Vom	71	19	90
Total	441	111	552

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2025

### FREQUENTLY USED PLATFORMS

Table 2: Frequently Used Social Media Platforms

Platform	Respondents (%)
WhatsApp	94%
Telegram	76%
Facebook	58%
YouTube	42%
LinkedIn	33%
Instagram	29%
Twitter (X)	22%
Google Meet/Zoom	18%

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2025

### Frequency of Use

Table 3: Frequency of Social Media Use for Academic Purposes

Frequency	Percentage (%)
Daily	61%
2-3 times per week	23%
Once per week	10%
Rarely	6%

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2025

### Perceived Benefits

Table 4: Agreement with Benefit-Related Statements

Statement	% Agree/Strongly Agree
Social media enhances knowledge sharing	92%
Improves communication with students/staff	89%
Helps in faster understanding of concepts	84%
Provides access to diverse academic resources	80%

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2025

**Challenges**

**Table 5: Agreement with Challenge-Related Statements**

Statement	% Agree/Strongly Agree
Social media causes distractions	78%
Academic content on social media is not always credible	65%
Internet/data cost is a major limitation	81%
Lack of institutional policy support	72%

Source: Researcher’s Field Survey, 2025

**Content Shared by Role**

**Table 6: Cross-Tabulation: Role vs. Type of Content Shared**

Content Type	Staff (%)	Students (%)
Lecture Notes	86%	72%
Past Questions	48%	91%
Research Articles	73%	40%
Group Assignments	56%	88%
Professional Opportunities	61%	38%

Source: Researcher’s Field Survey, 2025

**Discussion**

The use of WhatsApp and Telegram reflects the findings of previous studies (Ijeoma et al., 2023), with the observation that they are inexpensive, pervasive, and versatile means of academic communication in low-resource environments. In Connectivist theory, such means serve as networks where knowledge is accessed, filtered, and shared on an ongoing basis—hence linking the students and the faculty to a multitude of sources of expertise beyond conventional classrooms (Siemens & Downes, 2009). Just as Social Constructivist theory can explain how cooperation in these spaces enables active co-construction of knowledge via talk, peer explanation, and collective meaning-making,

The same affordances also introduce tensions. The pervasiveness of distractions and entertainment content undercut Constructivist ideals by diluting intense, goal-oriented engagement and reducing the scaffolding needed

to facilitate more significant learning. Similarly, the dissemination of false information negates the reliance of Connectivism on very well-connected, reliable nodes by demonstrating that inadequately filtered networks can transmit errors rather than expanding on knowledge. These discoveries illustrate the irony of social media in tertiary education: it empowers participatory learning yet exposes learners to epistemic risks.

The study also enlightens some of the debate in contemporary digital scholarship. As opposed to conventional Learning Management Systems (LMS), which emphasize structured pedagogy, social media enables flexible bottom-up sharing of knowledge—posing questions regarding authority, trustworthiness, and blurring lines of distinction between formal and informal learning arenas (Selwyn, 2016). The lack of institutional policy in Plateau State's higher institutions reflects a broader global issue of integrating grassroots digital practices into academic administration. The unique contribution of this

research is contextual specificity: while most of the Digital Learning literature emerges in the well-endowed Global North nations, this research places front and center how social media compensates for structural deficits of Nigerian higher education. It demonstrates both students' and faculty members' resilience to work with freely available tools as well as the need for policy directives and digital literacy training to mitigate threats and assure positive use.

## Conclusion

The study offers new insights into the role of social media in facilitating knowledge sharing in Plateau State's tertiary institutions. Previous research has taken into consideration the use of ICT at either a national or general level, while the study focuses on the localized setting of students and employees in a state with infrastructural disparity. Evidence confirms WhatsApp and Telegram as the ground-up alternatives to formal Learning Management Systems, bridging physical and institutional boundaries and making informal yet effective scholarly communication possible. Their promise is thus constrained by infrastructural deficits, policy vacua, and the dangers of distraction and disinformation, which erode the very foundations of collaborative and networked learning. By situating these challenges in Constructivist and Connectivist theses, the study demonstrates how virtual spaces simultaneously foster and complicate knowledge environments. The contribution is that the study demonstrates how social media completes gaps that exist in Plateau State's institutions and the conditions that need to be fulfilled in order to sustain its educational value.

## Recommendations

- Context-sensitive policy regulations: Plateau State colleges and universities should collaborate with faculty and student unions to co-develop social media policies that ensure policies consider local data costs, rural connectivity, and cultural dynamics.
- Targeted digital literacy: Capacity building should surpass ICT

competencies, focusing on critical assessment of online resources, academic honesty in online settings, and collaborative tools utilization for group research and instruction.

- Strengthened institutional ICT units: Institutions need to establish or expand e-learning/ICT directorates with the sole mandate to enable social media usage for teaching and research, with resident staff to enable uptake.
- Partnerships for affordable access: Local mobile network operator partnerships in Plateau State would enable subsidized or zero-rated access to academic WhatsApp, Telegram, and LMS groups.
- Curricular integration: Faculty should be empowered to develop assignments and group work that directly integrate social media, formalizing informal practice into academic activity.
- Accreditation alignment: Plateau State Ministry of Higher Education should integrate digital communication practices into institutional evaluation frameworks, ensuring sustained emphasis on the academic function of social media.

## FUTURE RESEARCH

Further studies could explore longitudinal impacts of policy interventions, compare private and public institutions' practices, investigate psychological effects of social media use, and examine the role of digital librarians and support staff in managing academic networks.

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