



SOCIAL MEDIA USE AND DIGITAL DISTRACTION AMONG NIGERIAN STUDENTS: RETHINKING STUDY HABITS IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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ABSTRACT

The paper analysed social-media-induced digital distraction among Nigerian students, focusing on its relationship with study habits and academic engagement. It examined how poorly regulated social-media use could compete with sustained attention, study time and academic priorities. The paper was anchored on Cognitive Load Theory and Self-Regulation Theory, which explained how competing digital stimuli could increase cognitive demands and how students' capacity for self-regulation could influence their digital behaviour. It discussed excessive and habitual social-media use, continuous connectivity and notifications, social-media multitasking, entertainment-oriented content, poor time management, peer influence and smartphone accessibility as factors contributing to digital distraction. The paper maintained that social media was not inherently detrimental to learning; rather, excessive, poorly regulated and academically irrelevant engagement constituted the major concern. It therefore argued against blanket technological prohibition and advocated digital discipline and purposeful technology use. The paper concluded that effective management required shared responsibility among students, families, teachers and educational institutions. It suggested personal limits on social-media use, notification control, structured study periods, family digital-use routines, institutional guidelines on device use, teacher-led attention management, and digital-literacy policies that promoted self-regulation and responsible social-media engagement.

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of digital technologies has transformed the social, informational and educational environment within which young people learn. Smartphones, mobile internet and social networking platforms have become integral to everyday communication, information seeking, entertainment and academic interaction. Among Nigerian students, social media



platforms provide opportunities for communication, collaboration, information sharing, peer support and access to educational resources. Social media has therefore become an important component of contemporary youth culture and the educational environment. However, the same digital environment that provides unprecedented access to information can also create conditions in which students' attention is repeatedly interrupted, academic activities are displaced and sustained engagement with learning materials becomes increasingly difficult. The central concern is consequently not merely whether Nigerian students use social media, but how the nature, intensity and timing of such use shape their capacity to engage purposefully in academic activities.

Digital distraction has emerged as an important dimension of this problem. It refers broadly to the diversion or fragmentation of attention by digital devices, applications, notifications, messages and online content while an individual is attempting to perform another task. In educational settings, distraction becomes particularly consequential because learning frequently requires sustained attention, working-memory resources, comprehension and self-regulation. Reading a textbook, analysing a scholarly article, solving an academic problem or preparing an assignment requires students to maintain cognitive engagement with a task over time. Continuous exposure to competing digital stimuli can interfere with this sustained engagement. Liu and Gu (2020), for example, examined fragmented reading and found differences in students' reading attention and comprehension under fragmented and congruous information-processing conditions. Their study illustrates how competing digital information and fragmented processing can create challenges for sustained academic reading.

The theoretical basis for concern about digital distraction can be related to the limited capacity of human cognitive processing. When students alternate rapidly between academic tasks and social media activities, they are not necessarily performing several cognitively demanding activities simultaneously; rather, they may be repeatedly switching attention between competing tasks. Ophir et al. (2009) examined cognitive control among heavy and light media multitaskers and reported differences in the ability to filter irrelevant information and manage interference. Similarly, Cain et al. (2016) investigated media multitasking among adolescents and considered its association with executive functioning and academic achievement. These studies provide a basis for examining digital distraction as a cognitive and behavioural issue rather than simply as a technological problem.

The problem is particularly relevant to study habits. Effective study habits require learners to allocate adequate time to academic activities, establish priorities, sustain concentration, manage distractions and regulate their own behaviour. Social media can interfere with these processes when students repeatedly interrupt study sessions to check messages, respond to notifications,



watch short-form videos, browse entertainment content or participate in online conversations. Rosen et al. (2013), in a study of students during study periods, examined media-induced task switching and reported frequent switching between academic activities and media-related activities. Wood et al. (2012) similarly examined off-task multitasking with technology during classroom learning and reported that technology-related multitasking could interfere with students' real-time learning. These studies suggest that the educational problem involves not simply access to technology but the extent to which digital activities compete with academic tasks.

The literature, however, does not support an uncomplicated conclusion that social media is inherently detrimental to students. Rather, empirical studies indicate that the educational consequences of social media depend partly on the nature, purpose and intensity of use. Junco (2012), for example, examined multiple indicators of Facebook use and academic performance and found that different forms of Facebook engagement had different academic implications. Such findings are important because social media can simultaneously function as an educational resource and a source of distraction. Students may use WhatsApp groups to discuss assignments, YouTube to access instructional explanations, Facebook groups to exchange academic materials and other platforms to communicate with classmates and lecturers. At the same time, these platforms can expose students to entertainment, social interactions and algorithmically recommended content that compete for their attention. Tafesse (2022) provides further support for this more nuanced interpretation. Using automated mobile-application usage data, the study examined social-networking-site use and college students' academic performance and identified an inverted U-shaped relationship. The study reported that moderate social-networking-site use was associated with better academic performance, whereas higher levels of use were associated with poorer performance. The study is particularly relevant to the present position because it challenges the assumption that all social-media use has uniformly negative academic consequences. Instead, the intensity and manner of engagement appear to be important considerations.

Empirical studies have also drawn attention to social media multitasking as a specific form of digital distraction. Kokoç (2021), for example, examined the relationship between social media multitasking, attention control and academic performance among adolescents. The study reported that social media multitasking was negatively associated with academic performance and that attention control, as a component of self-regulation, played a mediating role in this relationship. The findings suggest that students' capacity to regulate and sustain attention is an important factor in understanding the academic implications of social media multitasking. Similarly, studies of smartphone use have distinguished ordinary technology use from problematic or excessive patterns of engagement. One study using smartphone-use measures and academic



indicators reported an association between smartphone use, particularly social-networking use, and academic performance (Rozgonjuk et al., 2021). Such findings are useful because they suggest that the issue should not be reduced to the presence of a smartphone or social-media application. Instead, the behavioural pattern surrounding its use, including frequency, duration, purpose and interference with academic activities, requires consideration.

The relationship between digital distraction and academic reading is equally important. Contemporary students increasingly encounter academic and non-academic information through a mixture of printed books, electronic books, websites, social media, videos, discussion forums and messaging platforms. Liu and Gu (2020) describe fragmented information and fragmented information processing as increasingly common within and outside classroom environments. Their study of reading attention and comprehension illustrates the importance of considering how information is encountered and processed, rather than simply asking whether students use digital media. The changing information environment does not necessarily mean that young people have abandoned serious academic reading. Rather, it raises questions about whether sustained reading can be maintained within an environment characterised by rapid information switching and continuous digital stimulation. Students may move between a textbook, an electronic article, a messaging application, a video and social-media content within a relatively short period. Such behaviour may facilitate access to diverse information, but it may also make sustained engagement with lengthy and cognitively demanding academic texts more difficult. Consequently, the concern about study habits should be situated within the broader transformation of reading and information-processing practices.

The Nigerian context makes this discussion particularly significant. Nigerian students increasingly participate in social-media environments for academic, social and recreational purposes. Studies conducted in Nigeria have examined social media in relation to students' academic activities, study habits and educational outcomes. For example, Obadara and Olaopa (2017) examined social-media utilisation, study habits and academic performance among undergraduate students in a Nigerian university of education. Their study demonstrates the relevance of social-media use to the study-habit question within the Nigerian higher-education context. Other Nigerian studies have examined the broader implications of social-media engagement for students. Adimora et al. (2016), for instance, investigated social-media networking in relation to academic achievement and psychological health among undergraduate students in Nigerian federal universities. Their work illustrates that social-media engagement should be understood as a multidimensional phenomenon involving both academic and psychological dimensions. Similarly, Michael-Olomu and Uzobo (2023) examined social-media use, changes in reading and writing culture and academic performance among undergraduates at Niger Delta University. Such studies are particularly relevant to the present paper because they



connect social-media use with changing patterns of academic engagement rather than treating social media exclusively as an entertainment medium.

The issue should nevertheless not be reduced to a simple opposition between printed books and digital media. Contemporary students operate within a multimodal information environment in which printed textbooks, electronic books, scholarly databases, websites, videos and social-media platforms can complement one another. The more fundamental concern is whether students possess the capacity to select appropriate information sources, sustain attention when engaging with complex material and regulate their digital behaviour according to academic priorities. Consequently, poor study habits should not automatically be attributed to social media. Study behaviour is shaped by numerous factors, including students' motivation, self-regulation, time-management skills, learning environment, instructional practices, access to learning resources, peer influence, family circumstances and institutional culture.

A critical distinction must therefore be made between social-media use, excessive social-media use, problematic social-media use and social-media multitasking. Treating these concepts as synonymous can lead to exaggerated conclusions. Ordinary social-media use may serve legitimate social and educational purposes, whereas excessive or compulsive use may consume time that could otherwise be devoted to studying. Social-media multitasking introduces an additional problem because it places academic activity alongside competing streams of information. Empirical studies of multitasking have repeatedly drawn attention to the role of attention control, task switching and competing cognitive demands in understanding the academic implications of digital media use (Kokoç, 2021; Liu & Gu, 2020; Ophir et al., 2009; Rosen et al., 2013).

The position advanced in this paper is therefore that digital distraction among Nigerian students is primarily a problem of excessive, poorly regulated and academically displaced digital engagement rather than an inevitable consequence of social media itself. Social media possesses genuine educational affordances and should not be treated as inherently incompatible with effective learning. However, when students engage continuously with entertainment-oriented content, respond compulsively to notifications, multitask during study periods or allow social-media activity to displace sustained academic preparation, digital platforms can become significant sources of distraction. This position is consistent with empirical studies indicating that the academic implications of social-media use vary according to the intensity, purpose and manner of engagement (Kokoç, 2021; Tafesse, 2022). The appropriate educational response should therefore move beyond calls for the wholesale restriction or rejection of social media. Nigerian students require digital self-regulation, attention-management skills, information-literacy competencies and explicit guidance on purposeful technology use. Students should be



taught not only how to access digital information but also how to manage notifications, establish technology-free study periods, distinguish academic from recreational use and maintain sustained attention when engaging with demanding academic materials. Educators, parents, librarians and educational institutions likewise have responsibilities in creating environments that support focused study while making constructive use of digital technologies.

Against this background, this paper critically examines digital distraction among Nigerian students from theoretical perspectives on social-media use and study habits. It argues that the educational challenge is not the existence of social media but the manner in which its affordances interact with students' attention, self-regulation, time allocation and academic priorities. The paper therefore advocates a balanced position: social media should be integrated into contemporary education where it provides genuine learning value, while excessive, compulsive and distracting patterns of use should be actively addressed. Such an approach recognises the realities of Nigerian students' digital lives without sacrificing the sustained concentration and disciplined study habits required for meaningful academic learning.

CONCEPTUALISING DIGITAL DISTRACTION

Digital distraction refers to the diversion of a learner's attention from an intended academic activity towards unrelated digital content or activities. Martin et al. (2025) describe digital distraction in education as an interruption of learners' concentration during academic tasks, while Jeong and Hwang (2016), through a meta-analysis of media-multitasking studies, found that multitasking can have negative cognitive consequences, particularly when competing activities are unrelated to the primary task. Digital distraction therefore concerns the diversion of attention rather than the mere presence or use of digital technology.

Digital distraction can occur through checking notifications, responding to messages, browsing social-media feeds, watching unrelated videos, gaming and repeatedly switching between applications while studying. Off-task smartphone use encompasses activities such as social-media browsing, internet surfing, instant messaging and digital gaming (Ochs et al., 2024). Similarly, Wei et al. (2023) identified the potential of smartphones to distract students from academic tasks while reviewing their academic use in higher education. Thus, digital distraction is distinguished by the extent to which digital activity competes with the learner's immediate academic task. A related concept is media multitasking, which involves engaging in or switching between multiple media activities while performing another task. Jeong and Hwang (2016) found that the cognitive consequences of media multitasking vary according to factors such as task relevance and user control. Zhao (2023) further reported that social-media multitasking was associated with cognitive distraction and poorer academic performance among college students.



Media multitasking is therefore particularly relevant to digital distraction because the simultaneous management of academic and social-media activities can divide attention between competing demands.

Digital distraction should also be distinguished from productive digital engagement. Digital technology can facilitate learning by providing access to information, communication and educational resources, while inappropriate digital engagement can interfere with academic concentration. Martin et al. (2025) identified both technological and personal factors as causes of digital distraction and noted the need for behavioural and technological strategies to manage it. Ubben et al. (2023), in a systematic review of smartphone use in science education, similarly demonstrated that smartphones can serve educational purposes while presenting challenges associated with their use. The distinction is therefore based on the purpose and relevance of digital activity, rather than on the technology itself. Another important distinction is between ordinary social-media use and problematic social-media use. Ordinary use may involve communication, entertainment, information seeking and academic interaction, whereas problematic use involves poorly regulated engagement that interferes with important areas of everyday functioning. Gao and Shao (2024) reviewed problematic social-media use as a pattern associated with adverse outcomes, while Du et al. (2024), through a systematic review and meta-analysis, treated problematic social-networking use as a distinct behavioural pattern rather than simply equating frequent use with problematic use. This distinction is important because frequent social-media use does not automatically mean that users experience academic or functional impairment.

Digital distraction is closely related to study habits, which comprise the recurring behaviours through which students organise and conduct their learning activities. David et al. (2024) conceptualised study habits in relation to behaviours such as study-session length, learning strategies, study timing and study environment. Oliha and Usiobaifo (2024) likewise examined study habits in relation to students' self-regulatory practices and developed a technology-based intervention for managing learning habits. These perspectives indicate that study habits involve repeated patterns of academic behaviour rather than simply the amount of time students spend studying. Digital distraction can affect study habits through attention, time allocation and continuity of academic activity. Students who repeatedly move between academic materials and unrelated digital content may interrupt the normal flow of studying and make it more difficult to sustain concentration. Flanigan and Titsworth (2020) found that digital distraction affected students' lecture note-taking and learning, while Ochs et al. (2024) examined off-task activities and their implications for students' learning in hybrid educational environments. These studies make attention interruption an important consideration when examining the relationship between digital behaviour and academic engagement.



Digital distraction can therefore be conceptualised as the diversion or fragmentation of learners' attention from intended academic activities through non-academic or poorly regulated digital engagement. Martin et al. (2025) identify digital distraction primarily as an interruption of learners' concentration during academic tasks, while Jeong and Hwang (2016) demonstrate that media multitasking can produce negative cognitive outcomes, particularly when competing activities are unrelated to the primary task. On this basis, the concern is not the use of digital technology itself, since digital devices can facilitate information access and learning, but the extent to which social-media engagement competes with sustained academic attention. This distinction is central to understanding how social-media use may influence study habits among Nigerian students and provides a basis for examining digital distraction as a problem of purpose, task relevance and regulation rather than technology use per se.

SOCIAL MEDIA USE AND STUDY HABITS AMONG NIGERIAN STUDENTS

Social media refers to digital platforms that enable users to create, share and interact with content and with other users. Olajojo and Adetoba (2021) describe social media as websites and applications that facilitate content creation, sharing and participation in social networking, while Fasae and Adegbihero-Iwari (2016) examined social-media use among Nigerian students as a means of communication, information access and other activities. These interactive characteristics distinguish social media from conventional forms of one-way communication and help explain its extensive incorporation into students' everyday activities. Among Nigerian students, social media is used for communication, entertainment, information seeking and academic activities. Afegbua and Afegbua (2024) found that undergraduates at Adamawa State University used several social-media platforms for reading and academic activities, with respondents reporting increased access to reading materials through these platforms. Anyira (2023), however, reported that social media constituted a major hindrance to reading among Nigerian polytechnic students, with many students preferring social-media activities to reading. These contrasting findings demonstrate that social media can function both as an academic resource and as a competing activity.

The educational implications of social-media use depend partly on purpose and intensity of engagement. Social media can support academic communication when students use it to exchange materials, discuss assignments and obtain information, but it can become distracting when non-academic activities displace study time. Akinleye and Akinde (2024) specifically examined the effects of social-media use on the study habits of Library and Information Science undergraduates in two Nigerian universities. Onun et al. (2023) similarly investigated social-media usage and study habits among undergraduates in North Central Nigeria, highlighting the relevance of social-media behaviour to students' academic practices. Social media may influence



study habits through time allocation and concentration. Students who repeatedly interrupt studying to browse social-media platforms, respond to messages or engage in unrelated online activities may reduce the continuity of academic work. Ogunji and Agape reported that social-media use was related to study habits among Babcock University undergraduates, with entertainment representing a major use of social media among respondents. Adepoju (2024), studying Polytechnic Ibadan students, likewise reported substantial time spent on social media in comparison with academic activities. These studies indicate why the allocation of students' time between social-media activities and academic work deserves attention.

The relationship between social media and reading habits is similarly complex. Social media may provide access to information and encourage some forms of reading, but extensive engagement with non-academic content may compete with sustained academic reading. Olajojo and Adetoba (2021) reported a positive relationship between social-media use and reading habits among University of Ibadan undergraduates, whereas Nworie and Odah (2024) reported a negative relationship between social-media use and both the frequency and duration of reading among undergraduate accounting students in Nigerian universities. The contrasting findings suggest that the educational implications of social media depend substantially on the nature of engagement.

Studies conducted in different Nigerian settings further illustrate this complexity. Adeleke et al. (2024) examined social-media use patterns and perceived effects on reading culture among students in selected tertiary institutions in Osun State and reported substantial daily social-media engagement alongside concerns about reduced reading time. Michael-Olomu and Uzobo (2023) examined social-media use, changes in reading and writing culture and academic performance among undergraduates at Niger Delta University. These studies situate the relationship between social-media engagement and academic reading within the wider transformation of students' information and communication practices. The relationship between social-media use and study habits should therefore not be reduced to a simple assumption that increased use necessarily produces poorer academic behaviour. Research on social-media multitasking indicates that how students use social media is important. Chen et al. (2016), examining social-media use and multitasking among university students, found that non-academic social-media use and social-media multitasking negatively predicted academic performance. Tafesse (2022), using automated mobile-application usage data, reported an inverted U-shaped relationship between social-networking-site use and college students' academic performance. These findings suggest that moderate, purposeful use may differ substantially from excessive or academically disruptive use.

Accordingly, social media among Nigerian students should be understood as a dual-purpose digital environment that can support academic engagement while also creating opportunities for



distraction. Michael-Olomu and Uzobo (2023) examined changes in reading and writing practices associated with social-media use among Nigerian undergraduates, while Hassana et al. (2025) found that social media could influence reading habits both positively and negatively among HND students, with educational content, book recommendations and academic discussions supporting reading. The relevant distinction is therefore between social-media engagement that complements academic objectives and engagement that displaces them. The central issue is consequently not whether Nigerian students use social media, but whether their patterns of use allow academic priorities to be maintained. Digital platforms can facilitate access to learning resources, communication and information; yet poorly regulated engagement can compete with sustained study and reading. David et al. (2024) emphasised the importance of developing effective study habits and overcoming screen-related difficulties in self-regulated learning, while Zhao (2023) linked social-media multitasking with cognitive distraction and poorer academic performance. These perspectives provide a logical basis for examining Cognitive Load Theory and Self-Regulation Theory as explanations of why social-media engagement may either support or interfere with effective study habits.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON DIGITAL DISTRACTION

The paper is anchored on Cognitive Load Theory (CLT) and Self-Regulation Theory (SRT) because the two theories provide complementary explanations of digital distraction. CLT explains how competing information and digital stimuli can place additional demands on learners' limited working-memory capacity, whereas SRT explains how learners monitor and control their attention, motivation and behaviour while pursuing academic goals. Together, the theories provide a suitable framework for understanding why social-media engagement may either support learning or interfere with study habits (Sweller, 2020; Panadero, 2017).

The *Cognitive Load Theory* proposes that working memory has limited capacity and duration for processing new information. Consequently, learning can be undermined when unnecessary information-processing demands compete with the demands of the learning task. In the context of this paper, social-media notifications, messages, videos and unrelated online content may introduce competing stimuli that divert cognitive resources from reading, studying or other academic activities. CLT therefore helps explain digital distraction as a problem of competing cognitive demands, rather than as a problem with digital technology itself (Sweller et al., 2019; Skulmowski & Xu, 2022).

The *Self-Regulation Theory* complements CLT by focusing on the learner's capacity to manage cognitive, motivational and behavioural processes in pursuit of learning goals. Self-regulated learners plan their activities, monitor their progress, control their behaviour and adjust their



strategies when necessary. Applied to social-media use, the theory suggests that students need to regulate when, why and for how long they engage with digital platforms so that social-media activities do not displace academic priorities. Thus, the two theories jointly support the paper's position that digital distraction results from the interaction between competing cognitive demands and inadequate regulation of digital behaviour (Panadero, 2017; Broadbent et al., 2017).

SOCIAL MEDIA AS A SOURCE OF DIGITAL DISTRACTION

Social media has become an important source of digital distraction because its interactive, continuously updated and highly accessible nature encourages users to move repeatedly between academic tasks and competing online activities. Notifications, instant messages, short-form videos, social networking and algorithmically recommended content can interrupt sustained attention during study periods. A meta-analysis by Kuş (2025) reported a small but significant negative association between technology-related factors and students' academic performance, while Pyhältö et al. (2025), in a systematic review of off-task social-media and smartphone use, reported predominantly negative associations with academic achievement. One important mechanism is media multitasking, whereby students alternate between academic work and social-media activities rather than maintaining attention on a single task. Such switching may appear efficient because students can communicate, access information and study through the same digital environment; however, it can fragment attention and reduce continuity of academic engagement. Liu et al. (2024), in a meta-analysis of 27 randomized controlled experiments, found a medium-sized negative effect of mobile-phone distraction on students' immediate recall, particularly lecture recall. Similarly, Atomatofa et al. (2024) found among Nigerian science students that access to Android phones for social networking was associated with reduced time spent studying after school. These findings demonstrate that digital distraction is relevant to both the cognitive processes underlying learning and the allocation of students' study time.

Notifications and continuous connectivity can further reinforce interruptive checking behaviour. The problem is therefore not restricted to the amount of time actually spent on social media; the anticipation of messages, updates or new content may itself compete with academic attention. Research on digital distraction has identified interventions such as notification management, reduced digital cues and time-management prompts as potentially useful approaches for improving students' on-task engagement. This supports the view that digital distraction involves both the immediate interruption of study and the broader difficulty of maintaining attention within an environment characterised by persistent digital cues. The Nigerian context further demonstrates that social-media use and study habits cannot be treated as completely separate behaviours. Irele and Arowolo (2025), for example, examined social-media usage and study



habits among senior secondary school students in Ibadan South East Local Government Area and identified excessive social-media engagement and online interactions as issues relevant to students' study behaviour. Similarly, Azubuike (2025) examined social-media usage as a correlate of study habits among students in public universities in South-East Nigeria, demonstrating the continuing relevance of the relationship across different levels of Nigerian education.

The position advanced in this paper is therefore not that social media should be excluded from students' academic lives, but that off-task and poorly regulated engagement should be addressed when it repeatedly competes with academic priorities. Social media can provide educational information, facilitate peer interaction, support academic communication and provide access to learning resources. However, these benefits may be undermined when entertainment-oriented browsing, messaging, short-form content or other non-academic activities become more dominant than the intended academic task. Alshuwaiyer et al. (2026), in a systematic review of social-media and screen-time research among college students, similarly emphasised the importance of distinguishing between different patterns and levels of digital engagement rather than assuming that all social-media use produces negative academic outcomes. Social media should therefore be understood as a potential source of digital distraction whose academic consequences depend largely on the purpose, intensity, timing and regulation of use.

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SOCIAL-MEDIA-INDUCED DIGITAL DISTRACTION AMONG NIGERIAN STUDENTS

Digital distraction among Nigerian students is better understood as the outcome of several interacting behavioural, technological and social factors rather than as an automatic consequence of social-media use. The following factors are particularly relevant to the present paper because they explain why social-media engagement may shift from purposeful use to academically disruptive behaviour.

1. **Excessive and Habitual Social-Media Use:** Excessive social-media use can gradually become habitual, making frequent checking and prolonged engagement part of students' everyday routines. A systematic review by Candussi et al. (2023) identified duration of smartphone use as a potential predictor of problematic smartphone use among university students and noted its association with poorer academic outcomes. Similarly, Sánchez-Fernández et al. (2023), in a systematic review of 117 studies, identified time spent online and patterns of problematic smartphone and social-media use among important predictors of problematic digital behaviour. These findings suggest that the concern is not ordinary social-media participation but prolonged and poorly regulated engagement that consumes time otherwise available for academic activities.



2. **Notifications and Continuous Connectivity:** Continuous connectivity creates opportunities for academic activities to be interrupted by messages, alerts and other digital cues. Notifications can attract attention even when students initially intend to remain focused on studying. In an experimental study, Kushlev et al. (2022) found that receiving smartphone push notifications during a learning activity reduced students' learning performance compared with a control condition. Nobbe et al. (2024) likewise demonstrated that smartphone reminders can influence students' study behaviour, illustrating the behavioural power of repeated digital prompts. For Nigerian students, where smartphones increasingly combine academic, social and entertainment functions, persistent connectivity can therefore make it difficult to maintain uninterrupted periods of study.
3. **Social-Media Multitasking and Task Switching:** Social-media multitasking occurs when learners alternate between academic activities and social-media communication or content, thereby repeatedly shifting attention between competing tasks. This behaviour can create the impression that students are efficiently combining activities, although the cognitive demands of switching may interfere with sustained academic engagement. Zhao (2023) found that social-media multitasking was associated with cognitive distraction and poorer academic performance; while a review of media multitasking among young people reported generally small-to-moderate negative relationships with cognitive control and academic outcomes. The relevance to Nigerian students lies in the ease with which a single smartphone can simultaneously provide lecture materials, messaging, entertainment and social networking, making task switching readily available during study periods.
4. **Entertainment-Oriented and Short-Form Content:** The growing popularity of short-form videos on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram and YouTube introduces another potential source of distraction. Such content is brief, visually stimulating, rapidly changing and easily consumed in successive episodes, characteristics that can encourage extended browsing despite the apparent brevity of individual videos. Haliti-Sylaj and Sadiku (2024) examined short-form reels among undergraduates and reported associations with attention span and academic performance, while Mahmoudi et al. (2024) experimentally examined short-form video exposure and found that viewing such content before a learning task negatively affected indicators associated with attention and cognitive processing. These studies do not establish that all short-form content is harmful; rather, they suggest that frequent exposure to highly stimulating entertainment content may compete with the sustained attention required for academic tasks.



5. **Poor Time Management and Self-Regulation:** Digital distraction is also influenced by students' ability to regulate impulses, allocate time and maintain behaviour consistent with academic goals. Troll et al. (2021) found that students' self-control was related to smartphone distraction, smartphone procrastination and academic performance, with effective smartphone-handling practices being more informative than simple measures of total use. Ning et al. (2024) similarly reported that self-control mediated the relationship between social-media addiction and college students' academic performance. Thus, students who have difficulty delaying immediate digital rewards or controlling smartphone use may be particularly vulnerable to allowing social-media activities to extend into designated study periods. This supports the paper's emphasis on Self-Regulation Theory as an explanation of digital distraction.
6. **Peer Influence and Fear of Missing Out (FOMO):** Peer expectations can encourage young people to remain continuously available on social-media platforms. Adolescents may feel pressure to respond to messages, participate in group conversations, follow trends or remain informed about activities occurring within their peer networks. Leijse et al. (2023) found that peer-related factors and low self-control were relevant to risky and problematic social-media use, while Zhang et al. (2023) reported that peer pressure was associated with mobile social-media addiction among adolescents. Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) can intensify this pressure because students may feel that temporarily disconnecting from social media means missing important social information or interactions. Zhao (2023) similarly found that FOMO was positively associated with social-media multitasking. Consequently, academic activities may be interrupted not because students deliberately reject studying, but because maintaining social connectedness becomes an immediate competing priority.
7. **Accessibility of Smartphones and Mobile Internet:** The widespread availability of smartphones and mobile internet has reduced the physical and psychological distance between students and social-media platforms. A smartphone can be carried into classrooms, libraries, study rooms and private study spaces, allowing social-media engagement to occur whenever attention momentarily shifts from an academic task. Adebowale and Omoyemiju (2023), studying problematic mobile-internet use among undergraduates at a Nigerian university, identified problematic patterns of mobile-internet engagement within the Nigerian higher-education context. Similarly, Prince (2023), in a study of University of Ilorin students, reported that most respondents used smartphones for both academic and social purposes, with WhatsApp being particularly prominent. This dual-purpose accessibility is important because the same device that



provides educational resources can simultaneously provide immediate access to entertainment, messaging and social networking.

CONCEPTION ON SOCIAL-MEDIA-INDUCED DIGITAL DISTRACTION

The paper conceives the following ideas:

1. **Social media is not inherently detrimental to study habits:** The principal concern is **poorly regulated and academically irrelevant use**. Treating social media itself as the problem overlooks its legitimate educational and communicative functions and may encourage unnecessarily restrictive responses. A more defensible position is to distinguish between purposeful social-media use that complements academic activities and off-task use that displaces them. Studies indicate that the academic consequences of social-media use vary according to its intensity, purpose and manner of engagement (Putra et al., 2024; Kuş, 2025).
2. **Digital distraction is partly a self-regulation problem:** Nigerian students increasingly operate in environments where academic and social-media activities occur on the same device, often within seconds of one another. Consequently, simply advising students to stop using social media is unlikely to provide a sustainable solution. Greater emphasis should be placed on developing students' capacity to regulate when, why and for how long they engage with social media and when it should be excluded from academic activities. Attention-management interventions that preserve learner autonomy may help students reduce unnecessary digital interruptions (*Scrolling Less, Learning More*, 2026).
3. **Educational responses should prioritise digital discipline over technological prohibition:** Students require practical approaches to managing their digital behaviour, including designated study periods, notification control, purposeful use of academic platforms, controlled access to entertainment content and deliberate separation of study time from recreational social-media use. Such an approach is consistent with the theoretical foundation of the paper: The *Cognitive Load Theory* explains how competing digital stimuli can interfere with learning, whereas The *Self-Regulation Theory* explains the importance of learners' capacity to control their responses to those stimuli. Effective intervention should therefore address both the cognitive demands of digital environments and students' behavioural capacity to regulate their engagement.
4. **Educational institutions should promote responsible digital engagement:** Schools, colleges and universities should move beyond portraying social media exclusively as an academic threat. Instead, they should incorporate digital self-regulation, responsible

Social Media Use and Digital Distraction among Nigerian Students: Rethinking Study Habits in the Digital Age



social-media use and attention-management skills into students' learning experiences. This position is particularly relevant because empirical studies in Nigeria continue to report associations between social-media use and students' study behaviour, while international studies indicate that the relationship is neither uniformly positive nor uniformly negative (Irele & Arowolo, 2025; Pyhältö et al., 2025).

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF DIGITAL DISTRACTION FOR NIGERIAN STUDENTS

The preceding discussion has important implications for the educational experiences of Nigerian students. The central issue is not the presence of digital technology itself, but the manner in which social-media engagement interacts with students' attention, study routines, reading practices and capacity for self-regulation. UNESCO (2023) similarly observed that technology can facilitate learning but may also create distraction when its use is inappropriate or poorly managed.

1. **Study Habits:** Frequent movement between academic activities and social-media platforms may interrupt the continuity and regularity of students' study routines. Students may spend less time on sustained academic activities when social-media engagement repeatedly competes for their attention. David et al. (2024) related effective study habits to the development of stable learning routines and self-regulatory processes. For Nigerian students, this suggests the need to maintain clear boundaries between academic study and recreational digital engagement.
2. **Attention and Concentration:** Social-media notifications, messages, videos and constantly changing online content can compete with the sustained attention required for academic activities. This is particularly significant during reading, lectures, assignments and examination preparation, where concentration must be maintained over relatively extended periods. The educational concern, therefore, extends beyond the amount of time spent on social media to the extent to which its use fragments students' attention and interrupts academic engagement.
3. **Reading and Book Use:** Social-media environments are characterised largely by brief, rapidly changing and highly interactive content, whereas textbooks and other academic materials often require sustained engagement with lengthy and conceptually demanding texts. Consequently, extensive engagement with short-form digital content may make sustained academic reading more difficult for some students. The issue is not that digital resources should replace books, but that Nigerian students should retain the capacity to



move between digital information and extended academic reading according to the demands of the learning task.

4. **Academic Self-Regulation:** The coexistence of academic and recreational activities on the same digital device places greater responsibility on students to regulate their own learning behaviour. Prasse et al. (2024), in an umbrella review of 31 systematic reviews and meta-analyses, found that self-regulated learning is particularly important in technology-supported learning environments because students must increasingly plan, monitor and manage their own learning. Faza and Lestari (2025) similarly related goal setting, planning, monitoring and reflection to effective self-regulated learning in digital environments.
5. **Teaching and Learning:** Digital distraction also has consequences for classroom teaching and learning. Teachers and lecturers increasingly have to conduct learning in environments where students may simultaneously have access to academic materials and highly attractive social-media content. This creates a need for teaching practices that recognise students' digital realities while maintaining academic attention and participation. Prasse et al. (2024) related effective technology-supported learning to approaches that combine technological support with learners' self-regulatory processes, suggesting that digital learning should not be separated from the development of students' capacity to manage their own learning.
6. **Digital Literacy and Educational Policy:** The discussion also suggests that digital literacy among Nigerian students should extend beyond technical competence. It should include the ability to regulate digital behaviour, manage attention, distinguish productive from distracting online activities and use technology according to academic purposes. Faza and Lestari (2025) emphasised that effective learning in digital environments requires students to employ self-regulatory strategies alongside technological tools. Thus, educational policy should promote purposeful and responsible digital engagement, rather than treating unrestricted technology use and complete technology prohibition as the only alternatives.

CONCLUSION

Digital distraction among Nigerian students should not be interpreted as a consequence of social media itself, but as a consequence of how digital platforms are used in relation to academic goals. The paper has argued, from the perspectives of Cognitive Load Theory and Self-Regulation Theory, that poorly regulated social-media engagement can compete with students' limited attentional resources, interrupt study routines, weaken sustained concentration and make

Social Media Use and Digital Distraction among Nigerian Students: Rethinking Study Habits in the Digital Age



extended academic reading more difficult. Social media, however, can also provide valuable opportunities for communication, information access and learning when used purposefully. The appropriate educational response is therefore not blanket prohibition but the development of a balanced digital-study culture in which Nigerian students acquire the capacity to regulate social-media use, protect academic attention and integrate digital and conventional learning resources effectively.

SUGGESTIONS FOR MANAGING SOCIAL-MEDIA-INDUCED DIGITAL DISTRACTION

Managing social-media-induced digital distraction requires a shared, coordinated and context-sensitive approach involving students, families, educational institutions, teachers and policymakers. The aim should not be to eliminate social-media use, but to minimise academically disruptive digital behaviour while preserving the educational, communicative and social benefits of digital technology. Below are a collection of suggestions to help curb the menace.

1. **Students:** Students should establish clear personal boundaries around social-media use during study periods. They should disable non-essential notifications, use silent or focus modes, close distracting applications, allocate specific periods for recreational social-media use and periodically monitor their digital-use patterns. They should also develop structured study routines that provide uninterrupted periods for reading, revision and other academic activities.
2. **Family:** Parents and caregivers should promote reasonable and consistent digital-use routines within the home, particularly during periods designated for homework, reading and examination preparation. Rather than relying on blanket restrictions, families should establish clear and mutually agreed expectations regarding recreational social-media use. Parents should also model responsible digital behaviour and engage young people in constructive discussions about how excessive or poorly regulated online engagement can interfere with academic priorities.
3. **Schools and Tertiary Institutions:** Schools, colleges and universities should establish clear guidelines that distinguish between **academic and non-academic use of digital devices**. Smartphones and other digital technologies should be permitted when they serve legitimate learning purposes, while unnecessary social-media engagement during lectures, tutorials, examinations and other academic activities should be discouraged. Institutions should also integrate digital well-being, attention management and study-



skills programmes into orientation activities, counselling services and broader student-support initiatives.

4. **Teachers and Lecturers:** Teachers and lecturers should communicate clear expectations regarding the appropriate use of digital devices during instructional activities and explain the academic rationale for such expectations. Where smartphones or other devices are required for learning, their use should be directed towards clearly defined academic tasks. Where they are unnecessary, students may be encouraged to silence notifications or place devices away from immediate reach during activities requiring sustained concentration. Teachers and lecturers should also incorporate responsible digital-use and attention-management practices into their regular teaching.
5. **Policy and Digital Literacy:** Educational authorities should broaden the concept of digital literacy beyond technical competence to include digital self-regulation, attention management, responsible social-media use and critical awareness of persuasive digital environments. Educational policies should avoid both unrestricted technology use and indiscriminate prohibition. Instead, policies should promote purposeful, responsible and context-appropriate technology use. UNESCO (2023) similarly emphasised that the effective use of technology in education should be guided by clear educational objectives and appropriate conditions.

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- Social Media Use and Digital Distraction among Nigerian Students: Rethinking Study Habits in the Digital Age*



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