The Role Of Social Media In Shaping News Consumption Habits Among Digital Natives

Olagoke Olawale Israel,

Mass Communication Department,
The Polytechnic, Ibadan, Oyo State
Email: olagokeisrael@gmail.com

Abstract: The paper is on the role of social media in shaping news consumption habits among digital natives. The population of this study are students of Mass communication department of the Polytechnic, Ibadan. The study made used of a random sampling technique and a total number of 105 respondents were selected for the study. The study made use of survey research design and adopted a research questionnaire as a research instrument. Data analysis was done using descriptive statistics involving frequency tables and percentages. The result of the study revealed that most of the students (63.8%) prefer to use WhatsApp, 27.6% of the students claimed that most of them prefer to use Facebook while 3.8% of the students prefer to use of Instagram. Also, it was user-generated content aligns with the participatory habits of digital natives, making them feel more engaged and involved in news creation and dissemination (X= 3.41, SD = 1.92), social media influencers, even those outside traditional journalism, can act as trusted news sources due to their personal connection with followers (X = 3.94, SD = 1.98). The study recommended that the need to promote Media literacy education and implement digital literacy programs in higher institution of learning to help students critically evaluate news sources, distinguish between credible journalism and misinformation.

Keywords: Digital literacy, Digital natives, News consumption, Social media, Technology

Introduction

The rapid growth of digital technology has significantly reshaped how people access and interact with news. Social media, in particular, has become a central channel for news consumption among digital natives those born and raised in an era dominated by the internet and digital devices (Prensky, 2001). Unlike older generations who relied on traditional media like television, radio, and newspapers, digital natives increasingly turn to platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook for news (Bolton et al., 2013). This shift reflects a broader transformation in consumption habits, driven by social media's convenience, speed, and personalized content delivery. According to the Reuters Institute Digital News Report (2023), more than 70% of young people now regard social media as their primary news source, drawn in by algorithm-curated content that aligns with their interests. Engaging visual formats, short videos, and interactive posts have further reshaped how news is presented and consumed (Newman et al., 2023).

However, this transition raises concerns about the reliability, accuracy, and diversity of information. Social media algorithms tend to prioritize engagement — measured by likes, shares, and comments over factual accuracy, contributing to the spread of misinformation and the formation of echo chambers (Pariser, 2011). Tandoc et al. (2018) also highlight that the merging of professional journalism with user-generated content blurs the line between trustworthy reporting and opinion-driven narratives.

Despite these issues, social media has encouraged more participatory news consumption. Hermida (2010) describes this as "ambient journalism," where users remain constantly connected to news through their social feeds, shaping their understanding of current events. However, Vraga et al. (2015) caution that this passive, continuous exposure may limit engagement with more detailed, analytical content, leading to a shallow understanding of complex topics. Given these dynamics, it is crucial to understand how social media shapes the news consumption behaviors of digital natives. This study aims to investigate these evolving habits, explore the implications for information credibility and diversity, and propose strategies to enhance media literacy among young audiences.

Statement of the Problem

The increasing dependence on social media for news consumption among digital natives presents both opportunities and challenges. On the positive side, social media offers instant access to diverse news content, encouraging greater engagement and participation. However, this shift also raises significant concerns about misinformation, the credibility of news, and the depth of understanding of complex topics. Research suggests that digital natives tend to prioritize convenience, speed, and entertainment over traditional indicators of reliability, which can lead to gaps in their comprehension of current events (Newman et al., 2023). Pariser (2011) further emphasizes how algorithmic filtering creates "filter bubbles," where users are mainly shown content that supports their existing beliefs, reducing exposure to alternative perspectives.

Additionally, Tandoc et al. (2018) point out that the rise of user-generated content blurs the boundaries between credible journalism and opinion-based material, complicating the ability to trust news sources. This challenge is particularly evident among younger audiences, who may find it difficult to distinguish between reliable information and misinformation (Guess et al., 2019). Despite the

growing relevance of this topic, there remains a gap in research specifically examining how digital natives' news consumption behaviors are evolving within the social media landscape.

To bridge this gap, the current study aims to explore how social media influences digital natives' news consumption, perceptions, and engagement. It will investigate key factors such as platform preferences, trust in news sources, the effects of algorithmic personalization, and the role of user-generated content in shaping news habits. Ultimately, this research seeks to provide a clearer understanding of how social media platforms shape digital natives' information environments and offer recommendations for promoting critical media literacy among this group.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to investigate the role of social media in shaping news consumption habits among digital natives, focusing on how these platforms influence their access, engagement, and perception of news content. The secondary objectives are to:

i.   examine the preferred social media platforms used by digital natives for news consumption.
ii.   assess the impact of user-generated content on digital natives' trust in news sources.

Literature Reviews

Digital Natives

Marc Prensky (2001) first coined the term *digital natives* to refer to individuals who have grown up in the era of digital technology. Unlike *digital immigrants* — those who adopted technology later in life — digital natives have been immersed in digital environments from an early age. They are surrounded by the internet, smartphones, social media, and other digital tools, which fundamentally influence how they think, communicate, and consume information. Prensky (2001) suggested that this constant exposure leads digital natives to develop distinct cognitive processes for learning and processing information. They are particularly skilled at navigating technology and multitasking across various apps and devices (Bennett et al., 2008). Furthermore, digital natives tend to place greater trust in influencers, peers, and community-based content over traditional media or institutional sources (Turcotte et al., 2015). However, this generation also exhibits skepticism toward mainstream news, influenced by frequent exposure to misinformation and the rapidly changing media landscape, which has contributed to a general decline in trust in traditional news sources (Guess et al., 2019).

Social Media Usage among Tertiary Institution Students

Social media has dramatically reshaped how people communicate and engage, particularly among students in higher education. This group, often labeled as "digital natives," interacts with social platforms in ways influenced by social connections, academic demands, and personal identity development. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter play a key role in student socialization and classroom engagement. Koranteng et al. (2019) found that social media supports the creation of online communities where students share academic resources, collaborate on assignments, and engage in discussions related to their studies. This interconnectedness promotes peer learning and academic support, contributing positively to students' academic performance and overall educational experience (Koranteng et al., 2019).

However, social media's influence isn't entirely beneficial. Türel and Dokumacı (2022) highlight that excessive use can lead to procrastination and distraction. Students who spend too much time on social platforms often experience reduced academic productivity and struggle to focus on their studies. Additionally, social media interactions may affect students' mental health. Keles et al. (2020) found a correlation between heavy social media use and increased anxiety and depression among students, linking this to pressures surrounding online self-presentation and continuous exposure to idealized portrayals of peers' lives. This can lead to feelings of inadequacy and stress. Privacy concerns and the management of one's digital footprint also emerge as key issues.

In Nigeria, social media is an integral part of student life, shaping how they access and engage with news. Ojebuyi and Salawu (2019) observe that Nigerian students use social platforms not only for socializing but also for gathering information and staying updated on current events — reflecting a global trend where students prioritize the convenience and immediacy of social media over traditional news outlets.

Empirical Studies

Atas and Celik (2019) conducted a cross-sectional survey involving 842 undergraduate students from 101 universities across developing countries to explore smartphone usage patterns. The study revealed that most students had been using smartphones for around three years, spending an average of five hours per day on their devices. On average, students checked their phones 28 times

daily and spent approximately four hours connected to the internet. Over 80% of respondents used their smartphones for everyday tasks, while 47.7% engaged with lecture notes for academic purposes. The research also highlighted that smartphones provide various practical services, including information searching, mobile banking, and location-based services.

Similarly, Adepoju (2024) investigated how social media impacts the reading and listening habits of students at the Polytechnic, Ibadan. The study employed a descriptive research design, sampling students from five departments using a simple random sampling technique. A total of 150 students participated, and all completed questionnaires were collected and analyzed using descriptive statistics based on simple percentages. The results indicated that students spent an average of 6.10 to 7.24 hours daily on social media platforms significantly more time than they devoted to academic studies.

Research Methodology

This study was carried out among students of Mass Communication department, the Polytechnic Ibadan. The population of this study are the students of Mass Communication, the Polytechnic, Ibadan. A sample size of 105 students were selected for this study using the random sampling technique. A survey research design was adopted for the study using a research questionnaire as a research instrument. The Yamane formulae were used to determine the sample size was arrived at One hundred and Five (105). The quantitative data was processed, computed and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.0. Descriptive statistics such as percentages and frequency tables were used to analyze the data.

Data Analysis

Research Question 1: What is the most preferred used social media platform among students in the Polytechnic, Ibadan?

Table 1: Descriptive results of the preferred used social media platform among students in the Polytechnic, Ibadan

Smart Phone	Frequency	Percent
WhatsApp	67	63.8
Twitter	3	2.9
Instagram	4	3.8
Facebook	29	27.6
Youtube	2	1.9
Total	**105**	**100.0**

As shown in table 1, 63.8% of the students disclosed that most of them prefer to use WhatsApp, 27.6% of the students claimed that most of them prefer to use Facebook, 3.8% of the students prefer to use of Instagram, 2.9% prefer to make use of Twitter while 1.9% prefer to make use of Youtube.

Table 2: The patterns of news consumption through mobile devices and apps

S/N	Items	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev.
1	Social media prioritizes content engagement likes, shares, and comments over factual accuracy, contributing to the spread of misinformation	37 (35.2)	59 (56.2)	5 (4.8)	4 (3.8)	-	3.89	1.62
2	User-generated content aligns with the participatory habits of digital natives, making them feel more engaged and involved in news creation and dissemination	97 (92.4)	4 (3.8%)	4 (3.8)	-	-	3.41	1.92
3	Social media influencers, even those outside traditional journalism, can act	17 (16.2)	88 (83.8)	-	-	-	3.94	1.48

	as trusted news sources due to their personal connection with followers							
4	User-generated content can both erode trust in traditional media (due to misinformation) and build trust through perceived authenticity and community-driven narratives	39 (37.1)	54 (51.4)	12 (11.4)	-	-	3.81	1.78

Table 2 shows that 56.2% of the respondents agree that social media prioritizes content engagement likes, shares, and comments over factual accuracy, contributing to the spread of misinformation, 35.2% of the respondents strongly agree, 4.8% of the respondents were undecided on the statement while 3.8% of the respondents disagree. Also, 92.4% of the respondents agree that user-generated content aligns with the participatory habits of digital natives, making them feel more engaged and involved in news creation and dissemination while 3.8% of the respondents agree and undecided on the statement respectively. In addition, 83.8% of the respondents agree that social media influencers, even those outside traditional journalism, can act as trusted news sources due to their personal connection with followers while 16.2% of the respondents strongly agree to the statement. Furthermore, 51.4% of the respondents agree that user-generated content can both erode trust in traditional media (due to misinformation) and build trust through perceived authenticity and community-driven narratives, 37.1% of the respondents strongly agree while 11.4% of the respondents were undecided on the statement.

Discussion of Findings

The findings showed that most of the students (63.8%) prefer to use WhatsApp, 27.6% of the students claimed that most of them prefer to use Facebook while 3.8% of the students prefer to use of Instagram. In addition, findings showed that user-generated content aligns with the participatory habits of digital natives, making them feel more engaged and involved in news creation and dissemination (X= 3.41, SD = 1.92), social media influencers, even those outside traditional journalism, can act as trusted news sources due to their personal connection with followers (X = 3.94, SD = 1.98) and user-generated content can both erode trust in traditional media (due to misinformation) and build trust through perceived authenticity and community-driven narratives (X = 3.81, SD = 1.78). These findings are in line with the study of Atas & Celik, (2019) who reported that most students in developing countries use smartphones for 3 years, spending 5 hours per day on them and they check their phones 28 times a day and spend 4 hours connecting to the internet.

Conclusion

This study is on the role of social media in shaping news consumption habits among digital natives. The study was carried out among students of the Mass Communication department of the Polytechnic, Ibadan. Digital natives are highly adept at navigating technology and online platforms, often multitasking across multiple apps and devices. Digital natives are inclined to trust influencers, friends, and community-driven content more than traditional media or institutions. It was revealed that most of the students prefer to use WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram social media platforms. It was also noted that user-generated content aligns with the participatory habits of digital natives, making them feel more engaged and involved in news creation and dissemination.

Recommendations

   i.   Social media platforms have huge valuable potentials and learning applications and could be integrated into school curriculum for academic prowess.
   ii.   There is need to promote Media literacy education and implement digital literacy programs in higher institution of learning to help students critically evaluate news sources, distinguish between credible journalism and misinformation.

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