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SOCIAL MEDIA ADDICTION, AI-DRIVEN CONTENTS AND STUDENTS' SUSCEPTIBILITY TO EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE IN SELECT SOUTH-SOUTH NIGERIAN POLYTECHNICS

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ABSTRACT: This study investigated the intersection between social media addiction, the use of AI-Driven contents and students' susceptibility to examination malpractice in selected South-South Nigerian Polytechnics. It specifically examined the extent of students' engagement with social media and AI tools, the factors driving such usage, and how these behaviors influence academic performance and integrity. A survey design was adopted, involving 400 students drawn from six state polytechnics across Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo and Rivers States using stratified random sampling. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire and analysed using descriptive statistics. Findings show that although most students frequently use social media, they do not self-identify as addicted, while dependence on AI-driven tools for academic tasks is increasing. Academic pressure and easy access were identified as major drivers of AI use. Results further show that AI tools facilitate examination malpractice more than social media platforms. While only a minority admitted to using AI for examination malpractice, a majority believed AI could promote such behaviour. These findings highlight the dual role of digital technologies as learning enhancers and threats to academic integrity. The study recommends, amongst others, that institutions should develop and enforce clear ethical guidelines for the use of social media and AI tools within academic environments.
KEYWORDS: *Social Media, Artificial Intelligence, Examination Malpractice, Addiction*

I. INTRODUCTION

The increasing evolution of digital technologies has reshaped contemporary education, ultimately altering how students access information, educational materials, communicate, and engage with academic tasks. Within the broader context of the fourth industrial revolution, the integration of digital technologies like social media and artificial intelligence (AI) into everyday life has tremendously transformed educational environments by creating new opportunities for acquiring knowledge while simultaneously introducing complex challenges for academic integrity. Global internet penetration continues to rise (from 71 percent in 2024 to 74 percent in 2025), with young people representing the most active users of digital platforms (International Telecommunication Union, 2025). This demographic shift is particularly evident in higher education institutions, where students rely heavily on digital tools for academic and social engagement.

Social media platforms like Whatsapp, TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter (X) among others have become part and parcel of students' daily engagements within and outside the academic environment. These platforms play divergent roles as they enhance communication and democratize access to information on one hand, and their excessive use constitutes major distraction, cognitive overload and poor academic performance on the other hand. Research shows that many students spend significant study time on social media platforms, mostly at the expense of academic activities (Ayatalumo & Ukegbu, 2018). Such online engagement reduces time spent on meaningful academic activities, ultimately affecting students' learning outcomes (Valkenburg & Peter, 2007). These behavioral patterns around social media usage calls for scholarly investigation to determine whether persistent social media use may significantly impact students' susceptibility to examination malpractice by weakening study habits and academic integrity.

Similarly, AI-driven tools, especially generative AI tools which are used to produce texts, images, and digital solutions in real time, have witnessed significant growth. Like social media platforms, AI is a double-edged sword, enhancing learning efficiency and providing instant access to information and academic materials on one hand and significantly increasing threats to academic integrity on the other hand. Students could now

effortlessly generate essays, write assignments and generate answers to examination questions using AI-tools like ChatGPT, GPT-3, Gemini, Copilot, perplexity and other large language models, further blurring the line between academic support and academic dishonesty (Cotton, et al., 2024). Scholars like Mohammadkarimi and Omar (2025) have warned that over-dependency on AI tools is capable of eroding students' creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills which consequently raises their susceptibility to examination malpractice.

Over the years, the Nigerian educational system has been grappling with the challenges of examination malpractice. While examination malpractice predates the rise of digital technologies, the advent of social media and AI tools have significantly increased the scale and sophistication with which it is carried out. Now, students have access to various encrypted messaging groups, AI-generated contents, and enormous digital tools capable of facilitating examination malpractice with minimal risk of detection (Akinbobola & Adewumi, 2024). Thus, the convergence of social media addiction, access to AI-driven contents, and growing academic pressure, creates a complicated educational environment wherein students may be increasingly susceptible to unethical academic behaviour such as examination malpractice.

Polytechnic students, especially in South-South Nigeria, represent a critical student population for examining these dynamics. Although Nigeria's technical and vocational sector are driven by polytechnics which train students to form the backbone of Nigeria's skilled and technical workforce, research on academic integrity within the polytechnic context remains limited highlighting more concentration on universities. This gap highlights the need to investigate how emerging social media and AI use influence students' susceptibility to examination malpractice within this understudied Nigerian educational context.

This study therefore investigates how social media addiction, and the use of AI-driven contents influences susceptibility of students in selected South-South Nigerian polytechnics to examination malpractice. Through this investigation, the study provides empirical insights into how social media and AI tools simultaneously enhance learning while undermining academic integrity. To achieve this, the following research questions shall guide the study:

1. To what extent students in selected South-South Nigerian polytechnics engaged in social media use and how do this engagement reflect patterns of social media addiction?
2. What factors influence students' use of AI-driven tools for academic activities in these polytechnics?
3. How do social media addiction and the use of AI-driven content affect students' academic performance?
4. To what extent do social media platforms and AI-driven tools influence students' susceptibility to examination malpractice?
5. What contextual or institutional factors shape students' perceptions of examination malpractice in the digital era?

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and the Media System Dependency (MSD) Theory. Both theories provide a multidimensional lens for understanding how students' social media use and use of AI-driven content influence their susceptibility to examination malpractice.

Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

The theory of planned behaviour (TPB) was proposed by Ajzen (1991) and posits that an individual's behaviour is driven by three core components-attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Together, these components shape behavioral intentions, which ultimately predict actual behavior. While attitude entails an individual's positive or/and negative evaluation of behaviour, subjective norms refer to perceived social pressures or expectations from peers and significant others and perceived behavioral control refers to the perceived ease or difficulty with which behavior is performed, influenced by available resources and constraints.

In this study, TPB explains why students may engage in examination malpractice. The principles of TPB posit that students who frequently use social media or AI-driven contents and normalise shortcuts, academic dishonesty, or effortlessly problem-solving have the tendency to develop permissive attitudes towards examination malpractice. Consequently, if peers or significant others endorse or participate in examination malpractice, subjective norms may shift towards acceptance. Therefore, AI tools that normalize or make examination malpractice easier, such as instant answer generation can increase perceived behavioral control, thereby strengthening intentions to cheat.

This is supported by Kura et al. (2018) who found attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control significantly predict academic dishonesty among Nigerian students. Therefore, the theory of planned behavior provides a psychological explanation for how digital exposure and peer influence interact to shape students' ethical decision-making.

Media System Dependency (MSD) Theory

The media system dependency (MSD) theory, developed by Ball-Rokeach and Defleur (1976) explains how individuals depend on media to satisfy their needs relating to understanding, orientation, and play. The theory avers that the more individuals depend on the media, the stronger the media's influence on beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. MSD theory is particularly relevant in today's digital era where students rely on social media and AI tools for several needs such as academic information, emotional support, social validation and problem-solving. As dependency on the media increases, these platforms gain greater capacity to shape students' perceptions of academic norms, including what constitutes acceptable behavior during assessments. AI-driven content feeds can reinforce certain behaviors by consistently exposing students to peers' experiences, shortcuts, or unethical practices.

In relation to this study, MSD theory explains how students' reliance on social media and AI tools could increase their susceptibility to examination malpractice. The implication is that students' dependence on AI to complete academic tasks may lead them to see AI-generated content as legitimate substitutes for personal academic efforts. In the same vein, sharing of leaked examination questions or tips on social media groups is assumed to normalize malpractice among students. Comparatively, while TPB's focus is on individual cognitive processes, MSD is concerned with structural and technological influences.

Social Media Addiction and Academic Performance

Social media has redefined communication and information access by allowing students to connect, collaborate, and learn in unprecedented way. However, concerns have been raised about its pervasive use which leads to distraction, cognitive overload and overall decline in academic performance. Previous studies have found that students spend significant study time on social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter (X) etc, often given priority to online engagements over academic routines (Ahmad et al., 2020; Ayatalumo & Ukegbu, 2018).

Research indicates that excess use of social media can lead to social media addiction, characterised by compulsive use despite negative consequences. Such addiction manifests in several ways including preoccupation, social withdrawal, mood changes, and loss of self-control, all of which ultimately lead to decline in students' cognitive functions and study habits. Students who multitask with social media during classes perform significantly worse in examinations than those who minimise such distractions (Patterson, 2016).

Additional neurocognitive research confirms that social media interactions (likes, comments) stimulate the reward pathways in the brain, leading to dopamine release and reinforcing habitual use (Miliano et al, 2018; Turel et al, 2018). This neurological process may train students to be unable to focus on a sustained manner, thus limiting academic discipline and encouraging the use of shortcuts. The "displacement hypothesis" (Valkenburg & Peter, 2007) argues that social media use displaces time available for academic activities, which results in suboptimal academic performance. Thus, poor study habits and cognitive fatigue in such instances could indirectly increase their vulnerability to examination malpractice as helpless students may resort to maladaptive means (i.e. cheating) to cope with their unpreparedness.

AI-Generated Content and Academic Integrity

Specifically, just in the past few years, a surge of artificial intelligence (AI), primarily in the form of generative AI tools like ChatGPT, GPT-3, and other large language models-has begun to change the dynamic of academic environments. These can write essays, complete assignments and give examination answers in seconds, questions have been raised on authorship, originality and academic integrity.

AI plays dual role as an enhancer of learning efficiency and offers opportunities for academic dishonesty it can provide (Nwisagbo et al., 2025). One challenge is that it has become increasingly difficult for institutions to regulate AI use due to the rapid adoption of AI tools, leaving educators struggling to distinguish between legitimate academic exercise and academic dishonesty. Even AI detection systems such as Turnitin are becoming ineffective, modern AI-generated contents are now original in structure and do not match existing databases. The vulnerability of AI detection systems to "paraphrasing attacks"-a situation where students make use of other AI tools to humanize or paraphrase AI-generated contents makes it more difficult to curtail the use of AI in educational institutions (Weber-Wulff et al., 2023).

These detection challenges, notwithstanding, scholars have warned that over-dependence on AI may erode students' cognitive development, critical thinking and overall academic performance. The "generation effect" (Bertsch et al., 2007) indicates that learning is strengthened when learners generate information themselves; however, when learners outsource the generation of information to AI, they risk losing the ability to critically think, reason analytically and ultimately lacking problem-solving skills. For instance, the Texas A & M University recorded an incident where an entire class was wrongly accused of making use of ChatGPT which was later found to be untrue, highlighting the risks of relying on flawed detection tools.

The way educational institutions respond to AI misuse among students varies. While some have already implemented a strict ban on AI use for assessments, others attempt to integrate AI literacy into the curricula. This shows a broader uncertainty about how the benefits of AI for academic purposes could be balanced with its potential to undermine academic integrity.

Examination Malpractice in Nigerian Polytechnics

Examination malpractice in Nigeria's educational system is not a recent problem; it dates to the early 20th century (Kpangban, Ajaja & Umudhe, 2008). Traditionally, examination malpractice is characterized by examination questions leak, impersonation, prepared answers and copying from others during an examination. However, in recent times, especially with the rise of digital technologies, examination malpractice has transformed from its traditional characteristics to a more sophisticated method of cheating such as instant generation of answers to examination questions, and writing of essays, assessments using generative AI tools.

Reports show that majority of students participate in social media groups on Facebook, WhatsApp or Telegram which are specifically created for the purpose of sharing examination questions and answers in real time (Akinbobola & Adewumi, 2024). These groups are mainly operated and coordinated by group admins who may either be fellow students or external machinery, highlighting a high level of coordination and technological adaptation among students. This challenge has persisted in Nigerian higher education institutions mainly because most of the institutions do not have modern surveillance infrastructure such as CCTV, biometric identity verification or/and AI-driven proctoring systems. The lack of this infrastructure while not aiding examination malpractice increases the students' susceptibility to cheat.

The aftermath of examination malpractice is very pervasive as it traverses beyond individual students' learning outcome, but it undermines the credibility of Nigeria's educational system, weakens Nigeria's skilled workforce and leads to a global disregard for Nigerian certificates and qualifications, especially with the rise of fraudulent acquisition of certificates. As institutions central to technical and vocational education, this erosion of academic integrity in Polytechnics poses a direct threat to national development. Scholars therefore advocate for a combination of technological, pedagogical, and cultural reforms in efforts to curtail this menace (Onyema et al., 2019). While the technological infrastructure mentioned above (CCTV, biometric identity verification or/and AI-driven proctoring systems) can help curtail malpractice, a sustainable solution demands a total overhaul of the assessment practice to introduce newer practice where application, critical thinking and process-based evaluation ranks high. More so, fostering a culture of academic integrity through the integration of ethical literacy and institutional accountability is paramount.

II. METHODOLOGY

The survey research design was utilized to explore attitudes, perceptions, and behavior of a large population of students toward its use. This design allowed for between-institution quantitative data on students' social media use, engagement with AI and susceptibility to examination malpractice. The participants for the present study included students of six state-owned polytechnics within the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria, namely Akwa Ibom State Polytechnic, Ikot Osurua, The Bayelsa State Polytechnic, Aleibiri, Polytechnics in Cross River State, Ugep, Delta State Polytechnic, Ogwashi-Uku, Edo State Polytechnic, Usen, and Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic (formerly Rivers State Polytechnic), Port Harcourt. The choice of these institutions is primarily due to their status as the leading state-owned polytechnics within the states and collectively capturing the heterogeneity of the South-South educational landscape. A sample of 400 students was drawn using a stratified random sampling method. Stratification (with proportionate sampling according to academic level — ND I, ND II, HND I, HND II, and department) was used to allocate respondents across disciplines, academic level was also accounted for. By including participants from different categories of academia, this approach improves the generalizability of the results by accounting for confounding factors in the actual implementation of digital behaviour. The sample size was determined by using Cochran formula for large populations (Confidence interval = 95% and Margin of error = 5%), which assures an adequate statistical power for this descriptive analysis.

Data were collected by a structured questionnaire formulated by the researchers. Twenty items were measured using a five-point Likert scale from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. Establishment of the content validity of the questionnaire was done through expert review undertaken by three professionals in the fields of educational technology and communication studies to ensure clarity, relevance, and fit to provide answers to the research questions. Feedback from them led to revisions to item wording and structure. A pilot study was carried out outside the sample with 30 students from a polytechnic for reliability testing. It resulted in Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.82, denoting high internal consistency. The questionnaire was given in-person in the presence of trained research assistants who assisted with the administration of the questionnaire. This method generated high response rates and avoided non-response bias. Before answering the instrument, respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and were assured that their responses would remain confidential. Simple percentages and frequencies, appropriate for describing trends in behaviour and perceptions in survey research. Results were presented in tables for clear interpretation.

The Research Ethics Committee of Delta State Polytechnic, Ogwashi-Uku approved the ethical clearance of the study. All respondents agreed to participate under the condition of complementing the informed

consent for voluntary participation. No identifiable information was collected, and the data was used for academic purposes only.

III. RESULTS

A total of four hundred (400) copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the respondents, and three hundred and ninety-seven (397) copies were correctly filled and returned while three (3) copies were wrongly filled and therefore deemed unusable. The data collected from the respondents are presented and discussed below.

Table 1: Responses on the extent of Social Media Addiction

The Extent to which students in South-South Nigerian Polytechnics are addicted to social media use	Frequency (Percentage)				
	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
I spend more than 5 hours daily on social media platforms	88(22%)	187(47%)	56(14%)	64(16%)	4(1%)
I find it difficult to concentrate in class because of social media use	12(3%)	48(12%)	44(11%)	274(69%)	20(5%)
I feel anxious or restless when I cannot access social media	52(13%)	139(35%)	64(16%)	131(33%)	(12(3%)
I check my social media accounts even during lectures or study time	20(5%)	139(35%)	60(15%)	159(40%)	20(5%)

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Although 69% use social media more than 5 hours daily, most students disagree that social media distracts them in their academic tasks (69% disagree in concentration loss). Meanwhile, 48% suffers from addiction symptoms (anxiety-type feelings from going offline), indicating a functional addiction mode (i.e., heavy utilization along with a sense of academic control). This implies that heavy usage patterns and emotional reliance do not correlate with any academic disruption, but the cumulative time spent on social media is probably at the expense of academic activities, which is a potential long-term threat to both academic success and mental health.

Table 2: Responses on the extent of AI-driven content Use

Extent of AI-driven content Use	Frequency (Percentage)				
	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
I regularly use AI tools to complete assignments	40(10%)	206(52%)	60(15%)	79(20%)	12(3%)
AI-generated content helps me understand academic concepts better	68(17%)	191(48%)	83(21%)	48(12%)	8(2%)
I rely on AI tools for writing tests, seminars, or take-home assignments	20(5%)	95(24%)	91(23%)	163(41%)	28(7%)
I believe AI tools make academic work easier for students	72(18%)	230(58%)	52(13%)	40(10%)	8(2%)

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Data shows that AI use among students is widespread with 625 agreeing to using AI for assignments and 65% agreeing that Ai use improves their understanding of academic concepts. However, reliance on AI tools for tests and take-home assignments is significantly lower (29%) implying that students can differentiate between acceptable and unethical use of AI tools. This overwhelming perception of AI's usefulness among the student population shows a strong integration of AI tools in academic activities.

Table 3: Responses on the Factors Influencing Social Media Addiction and AI Use

Factors Influencing Social Media Addiction and AI Use	Frequency (Percentage)				
	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
Peer influence encourages my frequent use of social media	16(4%)	159(40%)	52(13%)	163(41%)	16(4%)

I use social media and AI tools more when academic pressure is high	32(8%)	210(53%)	75(19%)	72(18%)	12(3%)
Ease of internet access in my increases my use of social media and AI content	30(7%)	195(49%)	72(18%)	91(23%)	12(3%)
AI tools save time compared to traditional study methods	52(13%)	226(57%)	40(10%)	60(15%)	16(4%)

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Results show that the belief that AI saves time, academic pressure, and easy internet access are the strongest drivers of social media and AI use as indicated by 70%, 61%, and 56% of the respondents. Peer influence was not a dominant factor as the respondents' responses were split between agreement and disagreement.

Table 4: Responses on the Impact of Social Media and AI Use on Academic Performance

Impact of social media and AI Use on Academic Performance	Frequency (Percentage)				
	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
Excessive social media use distracts me from preparing for exams	32(8%)	111(28%)	44(11%)	171(43%)	36(9%)
Using AI tools has improved my grades	28(7%)	99 (25%)	115(29%)	139(35%)	20(5%)
I spend more time on social media than academic tasks	24(6%)	127(32%)	72(18%)	163(41%)	12(3%)
AI Support helps me submit assignments on time	36(9%)	171(43%)	52(13%)	123(31%)	12(3%)

Source: Field Survey, 2025

While earlier results indicated heavy usage, students largely disagree with the statement that excessive social media use distracts them from preparing for exams (52%). AI seems to be somewhat helpful in improving their grades (32%) and very helpful for on time submission of assignments (52%). This implies that AI boosts productivity, whereas learners partially still scratch the social media negative academic impact.

Table 5: Responses on Social Media, AI Use, and Examination Malpractice

Social media, AI Use, and Examination Malpractice	Frequency (Percentage)				
	SA (%)	A (%)	N (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
Social media gives me access to leaked exam questions	12(3%)	56(14%)	20(5%)	214(54%)	91(23%)
I have used AI tools to cheat during online tests	12(3%)	87(22%)	28(7%)	199(50%)	72(18%)
I depend on social media or AI tools to engage in malpractice	32(8%)	143(36%)	44(11%)	147(37%)	36(9%)
AI makes it easier for me to engage in academic dishonesty	52(13%)	187(47%)	44(11%)	103(26%)	12(3%)

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Although only a minority agreed to using AI tools to cheat during online tests (25), majority of students (60%) agree that AI makes cheating easier, indicating perceived behavioural control, a main TPB component. Social media is rarely considered a mechanism to enable malpractice (77%), whereas AI is susceptible both to high levels of risk and to being perceived as malpractice enabler.

IV. DISCUSSION

According to the findings, students are embracing the use of AI-driven tools, as 62% of students are regularly using AI to help complete assignments while 65% agree that such tools provide a better understanding of academic content. This pattern mirrors the global trend towards accelerated integration of AI into higher education, and AI-supported learning environments are constituting the new academic environment for students across the globe. Yet, reliance on AI is not the same for all tasks amongst students. While some students

recognize the utility of AI, only 29% use it for exams or take-home assessments, implying that students have a moral line between acceptable academic mitigation and behaviors they view as academically dishonest. This divergence in behaviour is consistent with the Theory of Planned Behaviour, especially the domain of subjective norms, as students appear to respond to what they perceive to be the normative view of their colleagues and their institution regarding their behaviours.

The claim that AI saves time, the highest-rated perception per our results, resonates both with the Media System Dependency theory, which argues that the more individuals rely on media technologies to fulfil cognitive and efficiency needs, the more these technologies and their effects influence our lives, and with the concerns of human versus artificial intelligence. This dependency may evolve to such an extent that the technical assistance of AI tools would replace cognitive work, making us more idiosyncratic thinkers than critical thinkers. This concern is in line with Bertsch et al.'s arguments. Autonomous learner models (ALMs) present students with information and feedback as opposed to or in addition to teachers or teaching assistants. Therefore, AI may be a boon to academia but also the bane of it if left unchecked.

The report also highlights that academic pressure is the greatest driver behind student usage of digital tools, as 61% stated they use social media and AI more regularly under the strain of academic pressure. This result is in line with Patterson (2016), who describes students who turn to digital technologies as coping strategies when citing high academic workloads and expectations. At the same time, ease of internet access (56% of mentions) also contributes to this behaviour. On the one hand, peer influence led to some mixed reactions, indicating that students' digital behaviours may be conditioned much more by structural and environmental factors than by social pressures.

These results further reflect the Media System Dependency theory by which the uncertain or stressed environment makes people more dependent on media technologies. It seems like students who feel academic stress are using AI and social media to cope, further solidifying and strengthening cycles of digital addiction which aligns with Valkenburg and Peter's (2007) arguments. Why such interaction between digital behaviour and academic performance seems complex Despite balancing time spent on social media, 52% are found to disagree with the statement that social media distracts them from preparing for examinations. Simultaneously, 32% think AI helped their grades, and 52% stating AI filled a gap deadline-wise to get assignments in. These responses further imply that students are over-focusing on the academic advantages of AI and, in contrast, are under-focusing on the negative consequences of social media overuse. The inconsistency between this behavioural evidence like social media checking during lectures and students report perceptions points to a cognitive bias in which students provide self-justifying accounts of their use of digital media.

The Media System Dependency theory provides one useful explanation for the normalization of distraction; students have become increasingly dependent on digital platforms for academic and non-academic purposes. On the other hand, the Theory of Planned Behaviour elucidates how attitudes of students towards AI configure their level of ante (intention to use). AI is perceived by many students as helpful towards their studies, which causes many to lean heavily on the tool even in a way that could ultimately hinder deeper learning and independent thought. This matches the worries stated Miliano et al. (2018) and Turel et al. (2018) that excessive use of digital technologies disrupts attention regulation, which in turn diminishes cognitive involvement.

The results also reveal that just 17% of students confess to using AI tools to cheat while 60% think AI makes cheating easier. Meanwhile, 77% disagree that social media allows access to leaked examination questions while 44% agree that social media or AI caters to malpractice. These findings indicate that AI is a more immediate threat to academic integrity compared with social media. This echoes the observations of Onyema et al. (2019) and Kpangban et al. (2008) that it has become easier to cheat by using technological tools for increasingly sophisticated forms of academic dishonesty.

Conceptually, the Theory of Planned Behaviour identifies three main drivers of student vulnerability to malpractice: at the attitudinal level, the widespread view that AI makes academic work easier; at the subjective norm level, the knowledge that, while few peers will confess to cheating, many students believe that everybody else cheats; and at the perceived behavioural control level, the relative simplicity of using AI without detection. These factors combine to raise the risk of malpractice by students even those who do not openly indulge in it. These durations, coupled with institutional weaknesses in invigilation and surveillance of digital classrooms, support the perception of low risk associated with cheating and thus strengthen perceived behavioural control.

In general, this study suggests that social media may indirectly lead to academic dishonesty by diminishing students study discipline and focus control as observed by scholars like Patterson (2016), and Valkenburg & Peter (2007). Conversely, AI tools facilitate invisible forms of cheating and reduced cognitive effort more directly. These risks are compounded by institutional gaps, such as inadequate monitoring systems and poorly defined policies. The study also indicates that students' perceptions frequently conflicted with their actual behaviours, showing that their digital dependency had become normalised in an academic environment. These findings point to the need for improved processes around academic integrity, robust education around the implications of using AI, assessments that are designed to be less conducive to malpractice, and specific responses to new trends in social media reliance.

V. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the prevalence of social media addiction use of AI-driven content, and their synergistic effect on academic performance and examination misconduct among students of polytechnics in South-South Nigeria. Results indicate students have a mixed but very social heavy digital environments while also leaning on AI tools for schoolwork. Despite not seeing themselves as addicted, many students work in behaviours associated with addiction, which include being on social media for at least five hours or checking it in lectures showing early signs of committing to a dependency. This illustrates a gap between self–perception and reality in terms of digital behaviour.

We found high levels of adoption and acceptance of the AI-driven tools, with many students acknowledging that AI can enhance their understanding and help them complete their assignments on-time. Yet there are concerns that increased dependence on AI could lead to diminished creativity, diminished critical thinking, and an academic shortcut. Although only a small percentage of students confessed to using AI for cheating, a large share felt that AI makes academic dishonesty easier. The problem in their case is not that they cheat, but rather that they could: a latent weakness.

Research by psychologists at the University of Maryland, published in November 2013 found that the students' attitude about academic pressure, the ease with which they could access the Internet and their perception of the efficiency with which they perform their work all impact their negative digital behavior. All these conditions are consistent with the Media System Dependency theory, which states that the more people are in doubt or dealing with a crisis, the more dependent they are on media technologies. The Theory of Planned Behaviour likewise assists in explaining how students' attitudes towards AI, perceived social norms, and perceived ease of cheating, make them generally vulnerable to examination malpractice.

Ultimately, the results show that social media indirectly leads to poor academic performance by distracting students and lowering their level of self-discipline to study, whereas AI tools directly threaten academic integrity by facilitating an untraceable form of cheating. Even more, these risks are amplified by institutional weaknesses such as bad invigilation and lack of digital surveillance.

The study, therefore, highlights the necessity of Nigerian polytechnics to take a balanced approach that leverages the opportunity presented by the educational benefits of digital technologies while managing their risks. Implementing strengthened academic integrity policies, including AI literacy within curricular, reviewing curriculum and assessment approaches to facilitate sustained critical thinking, and continuing the focus on digital wellbeing and literacy to enable responsible and ethical means of digital engagement are important steps in supporting students.

Recommendations

1. Polytechnics could also implement more formal digital-wellbeing programmes to provide support for students who are using social media excessively. Instead, for students who seem to be dependent, counselling units should lend their support; and lecturers can choose to have periods of device-free learning to minimise distractions during class.
2. Institutions ought to produce clear policies establishing what is and is not considered acceptable use of AI tools in assignments, tests, and research. General Studies courses can benefit by having modules associated with AI-ethics and literacy, which can provide students with clear stepping stones for achieving responsible and academically honest use of AI technologies.
3. To reduce dependency on social media and AI, campuses like polytechnics need to expand the availability of tutoring centres, mentoring programmes and peer-learning groups, given the pressure of academic performance on students. More so, lecturers should be encouraged to space assessments out from one another and provide clearer instructions, to lessen the chances of students misusing digital tools under the stress of tight deadlines.
4. Awareness campaigns should be created to help students understand that excessive use of social media affects not only their concentration but also their academic performance. At the same time, they should promote AI-assisted, but not AI-dependent, learning by infusing exercises that develop reasoning skills, creativity, and critical thinking.
5. Polytechnics should investigate implementing stricter examination monitoring such as invigilation, digital surveillance and by controlling the devices students will use in exam halls. They should also re-design assessments to focus on areas of application, and critical thinking, oral defence, practical exams etc as these are not easily outsourced to AI tools.
6. Academic integrity education should be placed across all programmes and not limited to, or found only in, GNS courses. Peer-led integrity ambassadors, periodic sensitization campaigns and strict implementation of penalties can correct the balance of subjective norms in the direction of establishing integrity as a valued social norm, which can indirectly result in the need for a change (in attitude) to reduce the perception of ease of practicing malpractice.

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There is no conflict of interest among the authors. The authors declare that Copilot was used to review and edit the manuscript for grammar, and clarity. However, the research methodology, data collection, analysis and primary findings presented in this paper are the original work of the authors through their research on social media addiction, AI-Driven Contents and students' susceptibility to examination malpractice in selected South-South Nigerian Polytechnics. The authors therefore take full responsibility for the content, accuracy and academic integrity of the paper.

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