

AWARENESS AND ACCESSIBILITY OF ACADEMIC SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES FOR RESEARCH AMONG POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS IN SOUTHWEST NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the awareness and accessibility of Academic Social Networking Sites (ASNS) for research among postgraduate students in Southwest Nigeria. A descriptive survey design was employed, with data collected from 1,338 respondents across six universities using a structured questionnaire. Findings revealed moderate awareness of ASNS, with ResearchGate (91.4%), Google Scholar (74.8%), and Mendeley (74.4%) being the most recognized platforms, while Zotero and Scholarstica recorded the lowest levels of awareness. Accessibility was also moderate (55.8%), with mobile devices serving as the primary means of access, while institutional email accounts and ICT infrastructure posed significant barriers. The study concludes that although postgraduate students are familiar with dominant ASNS, infrastructural challenges and limited institutional support hinder full utilization. It recommends sensitization programs, provision of institutional email accounts, and investment in ICT facilities to enhance effective adoption of ASNS, thereby improving postgraduate research productivity and global visibility of Nigerian scholarship.

INTRODUCTION

The introduction of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in higher education has revolutionized the process of research in the world. PGE In Nigeria, post-graduate education is increasingly gaining traction on online platforms to access academic materials, peer-review with their colleagues and share their results. ResearchGate, Academia.edu, Mendeley, LinkedIn, and Google Scholar are some examples of Academic Social Networking Sites (ASNS) that have become essential in increasing the visibility of research and its collaboration (Manca, 2018). These resources give postgraduate students a chance to overcome the institutional constraints by communicating with international research communities and finding open-access publications (Adeniyi et al., 2024).

Regardless of the potential of ASNS, awareness and access among Nigerian postgraduate students are not even. It has also been revealed that some students are well-acquainted with well-known websites such as ResearchGate and Google Scholar; however, they do not understand the entire spectrum of functionality (Ishola et al., 2023). This under-exploitation is usually connected with insufficient sensitization, low ICT infrastructure, and institutional support. As an example, Nduka and Popoola (2024) established that postgraduate students enrolled in Library and Information Science courses

were moderately aware of social media technologies but did not have a steady access to platforms with academic orientation.

ICT competence and infrastructure have a strong impact on the access to ASNS. It has been found that among postgraduate students of Nigerian universities, the lack of internet connectivity, the inability to access institutional email accounts, and insufficient digital literacy training are the most frequent challenges (Ajiboye et al., 2022). Olaifa et al. (2024) also noted that the acquisition of ICT skills by postgraduate students in the Kwara state was moderate, and many students used mobile devices at a high rate without depending on the institution resources. These results emphasize the importance of universities to build stronger ICT infrastructure and also offer more specific training in order to improve ASNS adoption.

ASNS have been known to be effective socio-technical systems that support scholarly communication and cooperation across the globe (Manca, 2018). Digital tools in the context of African higher education have been associated with increased access and teaching and learning, as well as productivity in research (Maluleke, 2025). But systemic factors like underfunding of ICT and institutional policies face Nigerian postgraduate students in terms of underperformance compared to other countries (Ani et al., 2017). This digital divide highlights the need to research on awareness and accessibility of ASNS in the Nigerian context.

Attitudinal and situational aspects are also contributing factors to the adoption of ASNS. According to Ishola et al. (2023), gender and study area have a direct effect on the awareness and usage, as science and engineering students are more inclined to use ResearchGate, whereas their humanities peers favor Academia.edu. Such discipline-related preferences imply that discipline-specific awareness campaigns and training programs should be designed to fit the needs of various academic disciplines. Besides, postgraduates who view ASNS as valuable tend to use them, and unfavorable or uninterested views prevent their use (Adeniyi et al., 2024).

In conclusion, even though ASNS have great potential in improving postgraduate research in Nigeria, their awareness and access is moderate and uneven. The dependency on mobile devices, weak institutional support, and/or poor ICT infrastructure are still limiting proper utilization. To overcome these issues, universities need to make a conscious decision and incorporate ASNS in postgraduate training, institutional email accounts, and enhancement of ICT. This research study thus examines the level of awareness and accessibility of ASNS amongst the postgraduate students in Southwest Nigeria with the view of establishing gaps and offer approaches of enhancing its adoption.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Academic Social Networking Sites (ASNS) have become essential tools for scholarly communication, collaboration, and research dissemination across the globe. Platforms such as ResearchGate, Academia.edu, Mendeley, LinkedIn, and Google Scholar provide opportunities for postgraduate students to access publications, connect with experts, and showcase their research outputs. However,

in many Nigerian universities, the awareness and accessibility of these platforms remain inconsistent. A significant number of postgraduate students are either unaware of the existence of ASNS or lack the necessary skills to navigate them effectively. This gap limits their ability to participate in global academic conversations and reduces the visibility of their research contributions.

Accessibility challenges further compound the problem. While mobile devices have made it easier for students to connect to ASNS, poor internet connectivity, inadequate ICT infrastructure, and limited institutional support hinder consistent usage. Many postgraduate students struggle with issues such as lack of institutional email accounts, unreliable access to computers, and insufficient training in digital literacy. As a result, their engagement with ASNS is often superficial, restricted to basic functions rather than full utilization of the platforms' collaborative and research-enhancing features. This situation creates a digital divide between Nigerian postgraduate students and their counterparts in other regions where ASNS adoption is more advanced.

The underutilization of ASNS has significant implications for postgraduate research quality and productivity. Without adequate awareness and accessibility, students miss opportunities to collaborate internationally, access cutting-edge publications, and receive feedback from global peers. This not only affects their academic growth but also limits the visibility of Nigerian scholarship in the global knowledge economy. If these challenges are not addressed, postgraduate students in Nigeria risk being marginalized in the increasingly digital academic landscape. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate the extent of awareness and accessibility of ASNS among postgraduate students in Southwest Nigeria, with the aim of identifying gaps and proposing strategies to enhance their effective adoption.

Research Objectives

1. Determine postgraduate students' awareness of ASNS for research.
2. Investigate postgraduate students' access to ASNS for research.

Research Questions

1. To what extent are the postgraduate students aware of the use of ASNS for research?
2. How do the postgraduate students access ASNS for research?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Awareness of Academic Social Networking Sites (ASNS)

Awareness of Academic Social Networking Sites has been an increasing topic of concern in the Nigerian higher learning. In preliminary research, it was found that postgraduate students were conversant with sites like ResearchGate and Google Scholar and had little knowledge on other ASNSs like Mendeley and Academia.edu. Adedokun-Shittu and Tolorunleke (2019) noted that students were

aware of the existence of such platforms, but their awareness was usually limited to the simplest aspects of using them, i.e. searching the articles instead of conducting any research. This low level of awareness curtailed the potential of students to get the maximum out of ASNS in terms of communicating their academic matters.

Awareness differences specific to some discipline have also been noted. According to Ajegbomogun and Oduwole (2016), postgraduates students in the science related majors were more likely to know about ResearchGate since it had a high focus on scientific publications, whereas students in the humanities preferred academia.edu. Here it implies that awareness is being influenced by exposure as well as by disciplinary culture and relevance of each platform.

The consequences of a lack of awareness are enormous. Lacking a proper understanding of ASNS, postgraduate students are deprived of the possibility to get in touch with peers across the world, open-source publications, and share their work with a broader audience. This is the gap that makes Nigerian scholarship less visible in the global academic arena. This gap as pointed out in your thesis should be filled through awareness campaigns and training programs so that the postgraduate students are aware of the potential of ASNS other than just networking capabilities.

Availability of Academic Social Networking Sites (ASNS).

One of the biggest challenges in the Nigerian universities has been found to be accessibility to the ASNS. Adedokun-Shittu and Tolorunleke (2019) noted that most postgraduate students were interested in using ASNS, but most of them could not actively use the platforms due to infrastructural limitations like low internet connection, no institutional email account, and poor ICT facilities. Such use of personal gadgets, especially those of mobile phones, brought about inequality in terms of accessibility since not every student would be in a position to buy and use a quality gadget or even an internet connection.

Ajegbomogun and Oduwole (2016) also added that institutional support was lacking, which made accessibility problems even more complicated. In their research, they found out that postgraduate students tended to rely on cybercafes or their own internet subscriptions to use ASNS, which restricted the level and the extent of use. This state of affairs demonstrated the necessity of universities to offer better ICT infrastructure and institutional facilities to facilitate postgraduate research.

The effects of ineffective access are widespread. Postgraduate students cannot effectively use the features of ASNSs, including the possibility to upload publications, become members of research group, or to track the citations without reliable access. This restricts their capability to publish research work and participate in joint ventures. According to your thesis, accessibility issues need special consideration in terms of intentional investment in ICT infrastructure, institutional email accounts, and inclusion of ASNS in postgraduate training programs, so that it could provide equal opportunities and efficacy of use.

METHODOLOGY

The research design used in this study was descriptive survey research in order to examine the awareness and accessibility of the Academic Social Networking Sites (ASNS) among postgraduate

students in Southwest Nigeria. This design was selected based on its appropriateness in terms of collecting opinions, perceptions, and experiences of a large number of people in a natural environment. The sample of the research involved postgraduate students at six geo-political zone Southwest universities of federal and state. These institutions were chosen due to the active postgraduate programmes and variety of the academic disciplines. A questionnaire was designed in a structured form to gather the information on the awareness and the accessibility of ASNS, and the questions were structured to ensure that information on the familiarity with particular platforms and the forms of their access are captured.

Sampling was done through proportional sampling method to represent the sample throughout the sampled universities. The high rate of response was obtained as 1,338 questionnaires out of 1,506 distributed were retrieved and analysed. The analysis of the data was carried out in terms of the frequency count and percentages which provided clear information on the level of awareness and accessibility among the respondents. This method made it possible to identify trends and tendencies in the use of ASNS that are areas of strength and weakness to introduce interventions. The methodology allowed making the findings reliable, extrapolable in the study context, and with a strong foundation to make a recommendation to improve the engagement of postgraduate students with an ASNS.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: To what extent are the postgraduate students aware of the use of ASNS for research?

Table 1: Respondents' Awareness of Academic Social Networking Sites

S/No	Awareness of Academic Social Networking Sites	Yes	No
	<i>I am familiar with Academic Social Networking Sites like:</i>		
1	Academia.edu	793	545
2	Mendeley	995	343
3	ResearchGate	1234	104
4	Eric.com	421	917
5	LinkedIn	908	430
6	Zotero	219	1119
7	Scholarstica	268	1070
8	Google Scholar	1001	337
	Grand Mean Score	730 (54.6%)	608 (45.4%)

The results indicate that postgraduate students' awareness of Academic Social Networking Sites is moderate overall, with a grand mean score of 54.6%. ResearchGate is the most widely recognized platform, with 1,234 respondents (91.4%) reporting familiarity, followed by Google Scholar (74.8%)

and Mendeley (74.4%). LinkedIn and Academia.edu also recorded moderate awareness levels, while Eric.com, Zotero, and Scholarstica were the least known, with fewer than 40% of respondents aware of them. This pattern suggests that students are more familiar with globally dominant platforms, while awareness of less popular but academically useful sites remains limited, highlighting the need for sensitization and training.

Research Question 2: How do the postgraduate students access ASNS for research?

Table 2: Respondents' Access to Academic Social Networking Sites for Research Respondents' Access to Academic Social Networking Sites for Research

S/No	Access to the Academic Social Networking Sites	Yes	No
1	Internet connectivity to access ASNS	779	559
2	a computer desktop/laptop to access ASNS	987	352
3	a mobile device to access ASNS	1228	110
4	gadgets to access ASNS	725	613
5	an institutional email to access ResearchGate	455	883
6	an email to register on Academia.edu	455	883
7	an email to register on Mendeley	455	883
8	an email to register on LinkedIn	892	446
	Average	747 (55.8%)	591 (44.2%)

The findings reveal that postgraduate students primarily access ASNS through personal devices, with mobile phones being the most common (91%), followed by laptops or desktops (73.7%). Internet connectivity was reported by 58.2% of respondents, while access through institutional gadgets was relatively low at 54.2%. Institutional email accounts, which are often required for registration on platforms such as ResearchGate, Academia.edu, and Mendeley, were the least accessible, with only 34% of respondents reporting availability. The average accessibility score of 55.8% indicates that although more than half of the students have some form of access to ASNS, infrastructural and institutional barriers continue to hinder consistent and equitable engagement, particularly in relation to institutional support systems.

CONCLUSION

It has been revealed in this study that postgraduate students in Southwest Nigeria have moderate awareness and access to Academic Social Networking Sites (ASNS), and the most recognized and accessed were ResearchGate, Google Scholar, and Mendeley. Nonetheless, the less popular platforms are still not well aware and are not easily accessible due to infrastructural factors like lack of internet connectivity and institutional constraints. These results are consistent with the previous research pointing to the disparities in ASNS usage among Nigerian universities when infrastructural gaps and

insufficient sensitization remain the primary factors that restrict the correct use (Ishola et al., 2023; Adeniyi et al., 2024). The use of mobile devices as the main access method also gives added importance to individual initiatives in the process of closing institutional gaps.

The academic ramifications of these results are profound as far as the productive workforce and global penetration of Nigerian scholarship is concerned. Lack of knowledge and availability will tend to marginalize students in the ever-digitizing academic environment. Universities should then focus on ICT integration and considerate sensitization initiatives that will see postgraduate students take full advantage of ASNS in terms of collaboration, publication and exchange of knowledge. According to Awoniyi et al. (2025), the adoption of ICT in the universities of Nigeria is still an issue, yet specific investment and training can help to change the postgraduate research results. These gaps can not only improve the academic performance of the students, but also improve the contribution of Nigeria to the global network of research.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Universities should organize regular workshops and sensitization programs to raise awareness of ASNS among postgraduate students, ensuring they understand both basic and advanced features of these platforms.
2. Institutions should provide postgraduate students with institutional email accounts to facilitate seamless registration and access to platforms such as ResearchGate, Academia.edu, and Mendeley.
3. Investment in ICT infrastructure, including reliable internet connectivity and access to digital devices, should be prioritized to improve equitable accessibility to ASNS across Nigerian universities.
4. Supervisors and lecturers should model the use of ASNS in their academic practices, encouraging postgraduate students to adopt these platforms as integral tools for research collaboration and dissemination.

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