

INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS ON EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE IN BUSINESS SUBJECTS IN SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ADAMAWA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study determined the influence of social networks on examination malpractice in business subjects in senior secondary schools in Adamawa State, Nigeria. The study was motivated by the persistent incidence of examination malpractice in external examinations such as the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WAEC) and the National Examination Council (NECO). The study had two objectives, two research questions, and two null hypotheses. A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population comprised secondary school leavers newly admitted into tertiary institutions in Adamawa State, specifically 100-level students of Modibbo Adama University, Yola; NCE I students of Federal College of Education, Yola; and ND I students of Federal Polytechnic, Mubi. A sample size of 204 respondents was selected using stratified and simple random sampling techniques. A structured 30-item questionnaire titled Influence of Social Networks on Examination Malpractices Questionnaire (ISNEMQ), was used for data collection. The instrument yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.81 (Cronbach's Alpha). Data were analyzed using mean, standard deviation, and regression analysis at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that both Facebook (Grand Mean = 2.84) and WhatsApp (Grand Mean = 2.92) had strong influences on examination malpractice when considered independently. Regression analysis showed that both platforms had statistically significant influences (Facebook: $F(1,202)=6.25$, $p<0.05$; WhatsApp: $F(1,202)=28.86$, $p<0.05$). The study concluded that WhatsApp is a more potent facilitator of examination malpractice than Facebook. Recommendations include strict regulation of mobile phones during external examinations, intensified sensitization programmes for students, and responsible use of social media.

Keywords: Influence, Social Networks, Facebook, WhatsApp, Examination Malpractice, Business Subjects, External examination, Secondary Schools

Introduction

Education is universally recognized as the bedrock of national development because it promotes critical thinking, employability, innovation, and socio-economic progress (World Bank, 2018). In Nigeria, however, the educational system has continued to face numerous challenges, one of which is the increasing incidence of examination malpractice. Reflecting on the state of education in Nigeria, Elechi (2022a) observed a steady decline in educational standards and a growing apathy toward learning among contemporary youths, particularly at the secondary school level. The excessive emphasis placed on educational certificates as the major criterion for employment and advancement has compelled many students to pursue academic credentials through dishonest means, including examination malpractice.

The credibility of Nigeria's examination system has therefore been repeatedly questioned due to the persistent occurrence of malpractice in external examinations such as the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) and the National Examination Council (NECO) examinations (Adeyemi, 2020). Examination malpractice refers to any deliberate act that violates examination ethics, including leakage of examination questions, impersonation, collusion, and the use of unauthorized materials (WAEC, 2022). The problem is not entirely new in Nigeria. According to Babi (2020), examination malpractice dates back to 1914 when the Cambridge School Certificate Examination question papers were leaked, thereby laying the foundation for a problem that has continued to plague the Nigerian educational system.

Examination malpractice manifests in several forms and dimensions. Ogunjobi (2020) identified some common forms of malpractice to include bringing foreign materials into the examination hall, impersonation, foreknowledge of examination questions, mass cheating, and the transmission of information from outside the examination hall to candidates within the hall. Asante-Kyei and Nduro (2014) in Mabia et al. (2023) further explained that examination malpractice involves any act of omission or commission undertaken by individuals to secure unfair advantage in a manner that undermines the validity, reliability, and authenticity of examinations. Similarly, Maheshwari (2011) in Inenemo and Aloaye (2021) defined examination malpractice as deliberate wrongdoing contrary to official examination rules. In the same vein, WAEC (2017) described examination malpractice as any irregular behavior exhibited by candidates or officials before, during, or after examinations with the aim of gaining undue advantage.

The emergence of social networking platforms has introduced new dimensions to the problem of examination malpractice. WAEC (2017) reported that the persistence of examination malpractice has worsened significantly with the advent of social media. Social networks have become integral to students' daily lives by providing unprecedented opportunities for communication, interaction, and access to information (Bello, 2012, in Babi, 2020). According to Adedeji (2011) in Babi (2020), social media are technologies that facilitate social interaction, collaboration, and deliberation among users. These technologies include blogs, networking platforms, media-sharing tools, wikis, and virtual communities. Wordu et al. (2020) further noted that social networks are characterized by user-generated content, online interaction, and community building.

Among the most widely used social networking platforms are Facebook and WhatsApp. These platforms offer users several communication features, including instant messaging, file sharing, group chats, profiles, and discussion forums (Wordu et al., 2020). While these features can support academic collaboration and learning, they have also created opportunities for unethical academic practices, particularly examination malpractice.

Facebook, one of the world's largest social networking platforms, is widely used by students for socialization, academic discussions, and the sharing of learning resources. However, recent studies have shown that Facebook has evolved beyond a mere social interaction platform to become a medium through which examination malpractice is facilitated. Research indicates that students use Facebook groups to exchange examination materials, discuss cheating strategies, and obtain unauthorized assistance during examinations (Elechi, 2022a). Karpinski and Duberstein (2019) observed that students often utilize Facebook for academic discussions and peer support, but the ease of information sharing can equally encourage collaborative cheating during examinations. Olowookere (2016) asserted that the collaborative nature of social networking platforms inadvertently creates an environment conducive to examination malpractice.

Facebook also provides discreet communication tools that can be exploited for dishonest academic practices. Students often create class-based Facebook groups where examination-related information, including leaked questions and answers, can be shared secretly (Olowookere, 2016).

Ibrahim and Stack (2018) further noted that Facebook's direct messaging feature allows students to transfer information during examinations while evading traditional invigilation methods. Consequently, Obarisigbon (2017) maintained that social media platforms aid the commission and perpetuation of examination misconduct in educational institutions. Abubakar and Vincent (2021), citing Jimoh (2009), therefore described the examination process in Nigerian secondary schools as a "Contemporary Shame" because of the widespread incidence of malpractice.

Similarly, WhatsApp has emerged as another major platform influencing examination malpractice among students. WhatsApp is an instant messaging application that allows users to engage in group chats, file sharing, voice communication, and video calls through end-to-end encryption. The application is widely used by students for academic collaboration, dissemination of information, and peer interaction. Studies have shown that WhatsApp enables students to form study groups, share learning materials, and support one another academically (Adebayo et al., 2019). However, the same features that support collaborative learning have also facilitated cheating during examinations.

Mbah and Enuji (2020) found that students frequently use WhatsApp to share answers in real time during examinations, thereby promoting collusion and undermining examination integrity. Oni and Fasheun (2021) also reported that WhatsApp allows students to bypass traditional invigilation methods by discreetly exchanging examination questions and answers during assessments. Babi (2020) revealed that WhatsApp has made students increasingly vulnerable to examination malpractice because of easy access to smartphones and internet-enabled devices. In support of this, Osarumwense (2015) in Abubakar and Vincent (2021) explained how students snap examination questions and send them through WhatsApp to external collaborators who provide answers in real time. Agu (2021) further observed that WhatsApp facilitates several forms of examination malpractice, including group cheating, sharing of examination questions, and dissemination of unauthorized materials. Ekong and Abang (2020) added that WhatsApp groups often normalize cheating behavior among peers, thereby promoting a culture of dishonesty.

Research has also shown that business subjects such as accounting, commerce, economics, and entrepreneurship are among the subjects most vulnerable to examination malpractice because students often perceive them as difficult and highly competitive (Elechi, 2022a). Alabi (2023) reported that students in business subjects frequently resort to malpractice because of the pressure to obtain high grades, often with the assistance of social networking platforms. Common forms of malpractice in these subjects include impersonation, unauthorized collaboration, and the use of illicit materials during examinations (Elechi, 2022a).

Beyond academic misuse, social networking addiction has equally become a growing concern among students. Adedeji (2011) in Babi (2020) identified excessive mental preoccupation with social media, repetitive thoughts about internet access, and inability to regulate social media use as major challenges associated with social networking addiction. Itodo (2011) in Babi (2020) lamented the alarming obsession with social media among adolescents, warning that it could negatively affect their academic, social, and moral lives if left uncontrolled. Ayodele (2014) in Abubakar and Vincent (2021) further observed that some students secretly enter examination halls with mobile phones and use platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp to browse and share answers without the knowledge of invigilators.

In Adamawa State, where communal and peer relationships are relatively strong, informal social networks may further encourage organized cheating among students. Mabia et al. (2023) noted that social media platforms facilitate the rapid dissemination of examination-related information and coordination among students seeking to cheat. Despite the growing concern surrounding the role of social networking platforms in examination malpractice, few studies have specifically examined the individual influence of Facebook and WhatsApp on examination

malpractice in business subjects in Adamawa State, Nigeria. This study therefore sought to fill this gap by determining the influence of Facebook and WhatsApp on examination malpractice in external examinations in business subjects in senior secondary schools in Adamawa State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Examination malpractice remains a major challenge confronting secondary schools in Adamawa State, Nigeria. Despite several efforts by examination bodies and school authorities to curb the menace through sanctions such as cancellation of results and de-recognition of schools, the problem continues to persist. The emergence of social networking platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp has further complicated the issue by providing students with new avenues for cheating and undermining examination security (Babi, 2020).

Students now utilize these platforms to access leaked examination questions, exchange answers, coordinate cheating activities, and communicate discreetly during examinations. The increasing integration of social networking platforms into students' daily activities has therefore raised serious concerns about the credibility and integrity of external examinations, particularly in business subjects. Although previous studies have examined examination malpractice generally, there is limited empirical evidence on the specific influence of Facebook and WhatsApp on examination malpractice in business subjects in Adamawa State.

It was against this background that this study investigated the influence of Facebook and WhatsApp on examination malpractice in external examinations in business subjects in senior secondary schools in Adamawa State, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the influence of social network on examination malpractices in business subjects in senior secondary schools in Adamawa State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Determine the influence of Facebook on examination malpractice in business subjects in senior secondary schools in Adamawa State, Nigeria.
2. Determine the influence of WhatsApp on examination malpractice in business subjects in senior secondary schools in Adamawa State, Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the influence of Facebook on examination malpractice in business subjects in senior secondary schools in Adamawa State, Nigeria?
2. What is the influence of WhatsApp on examination malpractice in business subjects in senior secondary schools in Adamawa State, Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

- Ho₁:** Facebook has no significant influence on examination malpractice in business subjects in senior secondary schools in Adamawa State, Nigeria.
- Ho₂:** WhatsApp has no significant influence on examination malpractice in business subjects in senior secondary schools in Adamawa State, Nigeria.

Methodology

The study employed a survey research design, which enabled the use of quantitative data to describe population characteristics and allowed generalization from a representative sample. The

target population consisted of 434 fresh secondary school leavers in their first year at three federal institutions in Adamawa State: Modibbo Adama University Yola, Federal College of Education Yola, and Federal Polytechnic Mubi, who had offered business subjects in secondary school during the 2023/2024 academic session. The sample size was 204 respondents, determined using Krejcie and Morgan's table. A multistage sampling technique was employed: stratified proportional random sampling at the first stage, followed by simple random sampling within each stratum. The researcher-designed questionnaire titled "Influence of Social Network on Examination Malpractices Questionnaire (ISNEMQ)" was used. For this study (focusing on Facebook and WhatsApp), three clusters of the questionnaire were utilized: Cluster A (10 items on the influence of Facebook on examination malpractice), Cluster B (10 items on the influence of WhatsApp on examination malpractice), and Cluster D (10 items on examination malpractice in business subjects). The questionnaire used a four-point rating scale: Strongly Agree (SA)=4, Agree (A)=3, Disagree (D)=2, Strongly Disagree (SD)=1. The instrument was subjected to face validation by three experts from the Faculty of Education, Modibbo Adama University, Yola. Their comments and corrections were incorporated into the final version. A pilot test conducted with 25 students from Taraba State University (not part of the study area) yielded a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.81, indicating that the instrument was reliable. 204 copies of the questionnaire were administered to respondents across the three institutions. The exercise lasted three weeks. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) to answer the research questions, and regression analysis (simple and multiple) to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. The decision mean was 2.50.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the influence of Facebook on examination malpractices in business subjects in senior secondary schools in Adamawa State, Nigeria?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of the Influence of Facebook on Examination Malpractices in Business Subjects in Senior Secondary Schools in Adamawa State

S/N	Item Description on Facebook and Examination Malpractices	Mean	S.D.	Remark
1	I have used Facebook frequently to receive and share leaked exam questions and answers in business subjects.	2.74	1.07	Agree
2	I have joined Facebook groups where students plan and organize examination malpractice for their external exams.	2.76	1.15	Agree
3	I have accessed unauthorized exam materials via Facebook before the examination.	2.76	1.13	Agree
4	I know classmates who use Facebook to cheat during exams.	2.99	0.92	Agree
5	I find Facebook helpful for collaborating with peers to cheat during external examinations.	2.62	1.03	Agree
6	The use of Facebook during exams reduces the credibility of results in business subjects.	3.05	1.03	Agree
7	I have seen students offer bribes to invigilators and teachers for exam-related favors through Facebook.	2.85	1.11	Agree
8	Facebook has significantly increased the rate of examination malpractice in my school.	2.96	0.96	Agree
9	I have used Facebook to get real-time answers during external examinations.	2.61	1.14	Agree

S/N	Item Description on Facebook and Examination Malpractices	Mean	S.D.	Remark
10	Facebook has made it difficult for schools to control examination malpractice in business subjects.	3.02	0.97	Agree
Grand Mean		2.84	1.05	Agree

The results in Table 1 reveal that Facebook had a notable influence on examination malpractice in business subjects. All 10 items recorded mean scores above the decision mean of 2.50, ranging from 2.61 to 3.05. The grand mean of 2.84 indicated general agreement among respondents that Facebook facilitates examination malpractice in business subjects.

Research Question 2: What is the influence of WhatsApp on examination malpractices in business subjects in senior secondary schools in Adamawa State, Nigeria?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of the Influence of WhatsApp on Examination Malpractices in Business Subjects in Senior Secondary Schools in Adamawa State

S/N	Item Description on WhatsApp and Examination Malpractices	Mean	S.D.	Remark
1	I use WhatsApp to share exam answers during external examinations.	2.99	1.06	Agree
2	I have joined WhatsApp groups where leaked exam questions are shared for business subjects.	2.75	1.06	Agree
3	WhatsApp helps me cheat discreetly during examinations.	2.85	1.11	Agree
4	I know that invigilators are aware of students using WhatsApp to cheat during examinations.	3.04	0.98	Agree
5	WhatsApp makes it easier for students to collaborate and cheat during their external examinations.	3.05	0.98	Agree
6	The use of WhatsApp during exams reduces the credibility of results in business subjects.	2.82	1.05	Agree
7	I have seen students bribe invigilators and teachers through WhatsApp.	3.04	1.04	Agree
8	WhatsApp has significantly increased the rate of examination malpractice in my school's external exams.	2.89	0.99	Agree
9	I receive real-time answers through WhatsApp during external examinations.	2.79	1.05	Agree
10	WhatsApp makes it difficult for schools to control examination malpractice in business subjects.	2.95	1.01	Agree
Grand Mean		2.92	1.03	Agree

The results in Table 2 indicate that WhatsApp exerted a strong influence on examination malpractice in business subjects. All items recorded mean scores above 2.50, ranging from 2.75 to 3.05. The grand mean of 2.92 was higher than that of Facebook, suggesting that WhatsApp had a relatively stronger influence.

Hypothesis 1 (Ho₁): Facebook has no significant influence on examination malpractices in business subjects in senior secondary schools in Adamawa State, Nigeria.

Table 3a: Summary of Regression Analysis of the Influence of Facebook on Malpractices

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.173 ^a	.030	.025	.28712

^a Predictors: (Constant), Facebook

Table 3b: ANOVA of the Influence of Facebook on Examination Malpractices

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	.515	1	.515	6.250	.013 ^b
	Residual	16.652	202	.082		
	Total	17.168	203			

^a Dependent Variable: Examination Malpractices in Business Subjects

^b Predictors: (Constant), Facebook

Table 3c: Coefficients of Beta for the Influence of Facebook on Examination Malpractices

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.439	.177		13.748	.000
	Facebook	.155	.062	.173	2.500	.013

^a Dependent Variable: Examination Malpractices in Business Subjects

The regression analysis showed that Facebook significantly predicted examination malpractice ($F = 6.250, p = .013 < 0.05$). Therefore, H_{01} was rejected.

Hypothesis 2 (H_{02}): WhatsApp has no significant influence on examination malpractices in business subjects in senior secondary schools in Adamawa State, Nigeria.

Table 4a: Summary of Regression Analysis of the Influence of WhatsApp on Examination Malpractices

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.354 ^a	.125	.121	.27270

^a Predictors: (Constant), WhatsApp

Table 4b: ANOVA of the Influence of WhatsApp on Malpractices

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2.146	1	2.146	28.860	.000 ^b
	Residual	15.021	202	.074		
	Total	17.168	203			

^a Dependent Variable: Examination Malpractices in Business Subjects

^b Predictors: (Constant), WhatsApp

Table 4c: Coefficients of Beta for the Influence of WhatsApp on Malpractices

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		

1	(Constant)	2.029	.159		12.726	.000
	WhatsApp	.292	.054	.354	5.372	.000

^a Dependent Variable: Examination Malpractices in Business Subjects

The regression analysis showed that WhatsApp significantly predicted examination malpractice (F = 28.860, p = .000 < 0.05). Therefore, Ho₂ was rejected.

Discussion of Findings

The finding that Facebook had a statistically significant influence on examination malpractice in business subjects (Grand Mean = 2.84; F = 6.250, p < 0.05) indicated that Facebook has become an important avenue through which students engage in examination malpractice in business subjects. The relatively high grand mean suggested that students frequently rely on Facebook to access leaked examination questions, exchange answers, coordinate cheating activities, and obtain real-time assistance during examinations. This finding is consistent with Babi (2020), who reported that Facebook significantly facilitates examination malpractice by allowing students to access leaked examination materials through mobile devices and internet connectivity. Similarly, the finding aligns with Elechi (2022a), who established that Facebook use among secondary school students enhances examination malpractice through the sharing of examination-related content. The finding also corroborates Owoeye and Kofoworola (2019), who noted that students form Facebook groups specifically to exchange examination questions and cheating strategies, thereby promoting collaborative malpractice. Furthermore, the result supports the position of Ibrahim and Stack (2018) that Facebook's discreet messaging features make it difficult for invigilators to detect cheating during examinations. The finding also agrees with Mabilia et al. (2023), which showed that frequent use of social media platforms, including Facebook, significantly predicts students' tendency to engage in examination malpractice, and is consistent with Gidado et al. (2024), who identified social networking platforms as major contributors to examination malpractice among secondary school students.

The finding that WhatsApp had a strong and statistically significant influence on examination malpractice in business subjects (Grand Mean = 2.92; F = 28.860, p < 0.05) implied that WhatsApp plays a dominant role in promoting examination malpractice. The higher grand mean relative to Facebook suggested that WhatsApp is more frequently and intensively used for cheating-related activities such as sharing leaked examination questions, distributing answers in real-time, and engaging in discreet collaboration during examinations. This finding is strongly consistent with Babi (2020), who identified WhatsApp as a major platform through which students engage in examination malpractice due to the widespread availability of smartphones and internet access. Likewise, the finding corroborates Elechi (2022b), who reported that WhatsApp accelerates the spread of examination malpractice by enabling rapid and widespread sharing of information.

The finding also aligns with Mabilia et al. (2023), who found that excessive use of WhatsApp significantly predicts students' involvement in examination malpractice. The result supports Mbah and Enuji (2020), who established that peer influence through WhatsApp encourages students to engage in cheating, particularly when the perceived risk of detection is low. In addition, the finding corroborates Gidado et al. (2024), who identified modern communication tools such as WhatsApp as significant contributors to the prevalence of examination malpractice.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions were drawn: Facebook exerts a strong and statistically significant influence on examination malpractice in business subjects when considered independently. This indicates that Facebook is used by students to share leaked

questions, access unauthorized materials, and collaborate during external examinations in business subjects. WhatsApp has a stronger influence than Facebook and is the most significant predictor of examination malpractice. Its real-time messaging, group chat features, and ease of sharing information make it a major tool for coordinating and facilitating cheating during external examinations. Furthermore, the composite influence of Facebook and WhatsApp significantly affects examination malpractice, with WhatsApp overshadowing Facebook's unique contribution when both platforms are considered together. This demonstrates that examination malpractice in business subjects is facilitated by social media platforms, with WhatsApp being the more potent facilitator.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Examination bodies (WAEC, NECO, NABTEB) and school administrators should strictly regulate the possession and use of mobile phones during external examinations. Since WhatsApp emerged as the strongest predictor of examination malpractice, measures such as the compulsory surrender of mobile phones before examinations and enhanced monitoring within examination halls should be enforced to reduce WhatsApp-enabled malpractice.
2. School administrators, teachers, and guidance counsellors should intensify sensitization programmes for students on the dangers and consequences of using Facebook for examination malpractice. Given the significant independent influence of Facebook, students should be discouraged from forming or participating in Facebook groups used for sharing examination questions and answers.

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