



### RESEARCH ARTICLE

## MOTIVATIONS FOR ACADEMIC SOCIAL MEDIA USE: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY OF UNIVERSITE DE GOMA (DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO)

Norbert Mwiseneza Sebigunda and Michael Andindilile

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### Abstract

This qualitative case study examines why postgraduate students, research-active staff and lecturers at Université de Goma use social media for academic purposes, which platform affordances they mobilize, and how local constraints—specifically episodic political instability in eastern DRC, limited library capacity, and high and intermittent mobile-data costs—mediate motive→practice pathways. Data were collected by purposive maximum-variation sampling and comprised 32 semi-structured in-depth interviews, four postgraduate focus groups and consensual, de-identified artefact collection from course groups; analysis used reflexive thematic procedures with Uses-and-Gratifications (UGT) as a sensitizing framework and iterative inductive coding to surface context-specific adaptations and governance tensions Raj et al. (2021), (Gruzd et al., 2023), (Mbegan et al., 2022). The study identifies five primary academic gratifications that drive social-media appropriation—(1) rapid information and resource access, (2) immediacy and low-friction communication, (3) collaborative coordination and co-construction, (4) scaffolds for self-regulated study and motivation, and (5) professional visibility and networking—and documents how each is enacted through affordances (pinned resources, threaded messaging, shared folders) within a low-bandwidth ecology shaped by instability and affordability constraints (Al-Kathiri et al., 2024), (Mirembe et al., 2020), Fuchs (2022).

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Participants reported pragmatic adaptations (compressed files, asynchronous audio, scheduled downloads) and emergent governance practices (moderated course groups; pinned "official" resource packets) that preserve core gratifications while attempting to limit duplication, misinformation and wellbeing harms. The paper concludes with prioritized institutional recommendations (low-bandwidth-first instructional design; curated LMS↔social-channel gateways with instructor moderation; concise digital-literacy and moderation training; wellbeing/notification governance; and advocacy for subsidized student connectivity and targeted library investment) and proposes a mixed-methods evaluation agenda to test whether these measures improve access, learning quality and student wellbeing in fragile higher-education settings (Černá & Borkovcová, 2023; , (Smith & Storrs, 2023), (Odiboh et al., 2020).

**Introduction:-****Background of the study:-**

Social media platforms—principally messaging applications, group feeds and video-sharing services—have been routinely repurposed in higher education for distributing course materials, coordinating group work, enabling rapid tutor–student exchanges and supporting emergent forms of scholarly visibility outside formal learning management systems (LMS) Raj et al. (2021), (Gruzd et al., 2023). Empirical reviews show that users select channels purposively to satisfy informational, social and instrumental needs (a central claim of Uses-and-Gratifications Theory), and that platform affordances (synchronous messaging, threaded discussion, pinned files, multimedia support) strongly shape which academic functions are practicable in context (Gruzd et al., 2023), Raj et al. (2021). In low-resource and disrupted settings, mainstream social platforms frequently operate as pragmatic continuity tools in lieu of or complementary to institutional systems, a dynamic that demands context-sensitive study to inform institutional responses (Al-Kathiri et al., 2024), (Mirembe et al., 2020), Fuchs (2022).

**Statement of the problem:-**

Universities in fragile and crisis-affected regions face distinctive operational constraints—episodic political instability, constrained library services and costly or intermittent Internet access—that alter both students’ and staff’s options for academic communication and resource access, and thereby influence why and how social media are used for study and research tasks (Horwood et al., 2021), (Hamuli et al., 2023), (Mapatano et al., 2020). Despite mounting global literature on academic social-media use, there is limited in-situ qualitative evidence from Congolese universities that explicates motive→affordance→constraint pathways and yields actionable institutional guidance for low-bandwidth, fragile-setting contexts; this lack of evidence impedes policy and pedagogical responses that are adapted to local realities (Horwood et al., 2021), (Hamuli et al., 2023), (Mapatano et al., 2020).

**Literature review (overview and framing):-**

The international literature indicates consistent motive clusters for academic social-media use information/resource seeking, immediacy and communication, collaboration/co-construction, self-regulated learning supports and professional visibility—while also reporting adverse trade-offs (distraction, fragmentation, wellbeing impacts) when use is unguided Raj et al. (2021), (Mirembe et al., 2020), (Smith & Storrs, 2023). Several African case studies and institutional reports show that students commonly repurpose messaging apps (WhatsApp, Telegram) and video platforms (YouTube) to obtain course handouts, lecture captures and peer tutorials, and to coordinate assignments, especially where LMS adoption is partial or libraries are under-resourced (Findyartini et al., 2024; , (Bayable et al., 2020), (Al-Kathiri et al., 2024). The affordance perspective emphasizes that motive realization depends on platform features and facilitating conditions (connectivity, device access, institutional curation), and recent work calls for mixed and qualitative methods to understand the “why” and the “how” of academic social media use under constraints (Gruzd et al., 2023), (Černá & Borkovcová, 2023; .

**Empirical literature review (select regional and methodological studies):-**

Quantitative and psychometric studies complement qualitative evidence by demonstrating that students’ academic social-media use is multi-dimensional rather than monolithic. Partial-least-squares (PLS) approaches and factor-analytic investigations identify multiple latent motivational constructs—information/resource seeking, social engagement and support, immediacy/communication, collaborative learning, and professional/identity motives—each explaining distinct portions of variance in reported use and in self-reported learning benefits (Yousif et al., 2021; , Gruzd et al., 2023), Raj et al., 2021). These multi-factor structures are replicated across samples and contexts: large-sample surveys and PLS/SEM models show that information-seeking and social-interaction factors often load separately from professional-networking factors, and that motivational intermediaries (e.g., intrinsic study motivation or self-regulated learning) may mediate associations between social-media use and perceived academic outcomes (Yousif et al., 2021; , Malik et al., 2020). In short, psychometric work confirms the qualitative intuition that students mobilize social platforms for several, co-occurring purposes rather than a single dominant use.

African institutional case studies document how affordances and constraints jointly shape pragmatic low-bandwidth strategies and governance trade-offs when social channels substitute for LMS functions. Field studies across African universities report widespread preference for text and compressed file formats, routine scheduling of large downloads during low-tariff windows, and offline redistribution (e.g., memory cards) as techniques to economize scarce data and to ensure access among students with intermittent connectivity (Bayable et al., 2020; , Mirembe et al., 2020; . These studies additionally highlight governance challenges arising from

informal substitution: versioning conflicts, fragmented assessment records, and blurred lines of responsibility for moderation and archival control when instructors and students rely on decentralized group chats as operational course hubs Halaweh et al., 2020), Mirembe et al., 2020; , Černá & Borkovcová, 2023; . Longitudinal analyses emphasize that without institutional curation (pinned “official” packs, moderator roles, explicit posting norms), social-channel substitution can produce duplication, confusion over authoritative versions of materials, and extra supervisory labour to preserve academic standards Černá & Borkovcová, 2023; , Halaweh et al., 2020).

Evidence from fragile and crisis-affected settings underscores that social media often serve as vital continuity mechanisms when campus services are disrupted. Research in humanitarian-impacted locales and pandemic contexts documents increased dependence on mainstream social channels to sustain instruction, coordinate institutional responses, and maintain research-supervision links during episodic campus closures and staff shortages Hamuli et al., 2023; , (Horwood et al., 2021; . In such settings, the combination of limited library functioning and episodic institutional disruption intensifies students’ practical reliance on peer-shared materials circulated through social groups; qualitative accounts show that these distributed practices are adaptive for continuity but raise concerns about quality control and long-term archival preservation Mapatano et al., 2020), Hamuli et al., 2023; . Moreover, participants in fragile-setting studies frequently report that the same affordances that enable continuity (immediacy, easy file sharing) can amplify burdens on students and staff (notification load, blurred work–life boundaries) when institutional protocols are lacking Hamuli et al., 2023; , (Horwood et al., 2021; .

Digital-literacy deficits, faculty oversight burdens and platform heterogeneity are recurrent empirical themes that mediate the pedagogical value of social media. Studies note uneven student capacities for critically evaluating circulated resources and for using platform features (thread moderation, file versioning) effectively, placing additional corrective work on instructors and support staff and diminishing the trustworthiness of peer-shared artefacts unless institutions provide targeted training and curation (Smith & Storrs, 2023; , (Fuchs, 2022; , Mirembe et al., 2020; . Research on scholarly-network use (e.g., ResearchGate) suggests that postgraduate and research-active users pursue distinct professional-visibility gratifications—different from course-level information or immediacy motives—which implies that institutional support should be stratified by user group and by task (coursework vs research dissemination) (Fajoye et al., 2023; , (Yousif et al., 2021; . Empirical work therefore converges on the need for concise, pragmatically oriented digital-literacy modules (source appraisal, moderation practices, citation norms) and for lightweight governance instruments (moderator roles; pinned official packs) to preserve academic quality while retaining the practical advantages of social channels (Smith & Storrs, 2023; , Černá & Borkovcová, 2023; , Halaweh et al., 2020).

Synthesis and remaining gaps. Collectively, the empirical literature establishes three interrelated findings relevant to this study’s case focus. First, immediacy-driven adoption of chat apps is a stable, cross-contextual phenomenon confirmed by qualitative studies and instructor reports (Fuchs, 2022; , Mirembe et al., 2020; , Gruzdt et al., 2023). Second, motives for academic social-media use are multifactorial and measurable—information seeking, social engagement, collaboration and professional networking emerge as distinct but interacting factors in psychometric work (Yousif et al., 2021; , Gruzdt et al., 2023). Third, in low-resource and fragile contexts African case studies document recurrent low-bandwidth adaptations and governance trade-offs that condition which gratifications can be realized in practice (Bayable et al., 2020; , Mirembe et al., 2020; , Černá & Borkovcová, 2023; , Hamuli et al., 2023; . Despite this breadth of evidence, there remains a relative paucity of in-situ, qualitative research that integrates artefact-level affordance analysis with situated accounts of political instability, library deficits and local market realities (e.g., comparative data-cost pressures), especially within the Democratic Republic of the Congo—a gap that the present case study at Université de Goma is explicitly designed to address (Horwood et al., 2021; , Hamuli et al., 2023; , Mapatano et al., 2020). Rejected candidate references (from user’s list 91–115): each entry below was considered and rejected because it is either not focused on higher-education social-media use in low-resource or fragile contexts, is discipline-specific to early childhood or vocational education, or addresses pedagogical interventions not directly relevant to the empirical motifs reviewed here; therefore they were inappropriate to support the specific empirical claims in this extended review.

### **Synthesis and knowledge gap:-**

Synthesis of empirical and conceptual literatures shows convergent motive categories and the central role of affordances and facilitating conditions in motive realization; however, a clear gap remains in context-rich, qualitative descriptions from Congolese universities that integrate (a) the specific constraints of political instability and library deficits, (b) detailed artefact-level mapping of affordance uses, and (c) actionable institutional

responses suited to low-bandwidth pedagogies. The present study addresses this gap by providing empirically grounded motive→affordance→constraint accounts from Université de Goma and proposing locally feasible interventions.

#### Theoretical and conceptual framework:-

Uses-and-Gratifications Theory (UGT) is adopted as the primary organizing framework because it foregrounds purposive media selection and maps readily onto the motivational categories observed in higher-education contexts (information, social interaction, task assistance, identity/professional visibility) (Gruzd et al., 2023), Raj et al. (2021). To interpret how motives translate into practice under constraint, the conceptual framework integrates UGT with an affordance-and-facilitating-conditions perspective: (i) motives (UGT domains) lead to (ii) platform affordance selection (threading, pinning, multimedia), whose enactment is mediated by (iii) facilitating conditions (connectivity, institutional curation, library access) and by contextual shocks (political instability) that shape both access and governance possibilities (Al-Rahmi, 2020), (Odiboh et al., 2020). This hybrid conceptualization guides instrument design, sampling and analytic focus on artefact-to-motive linkages.

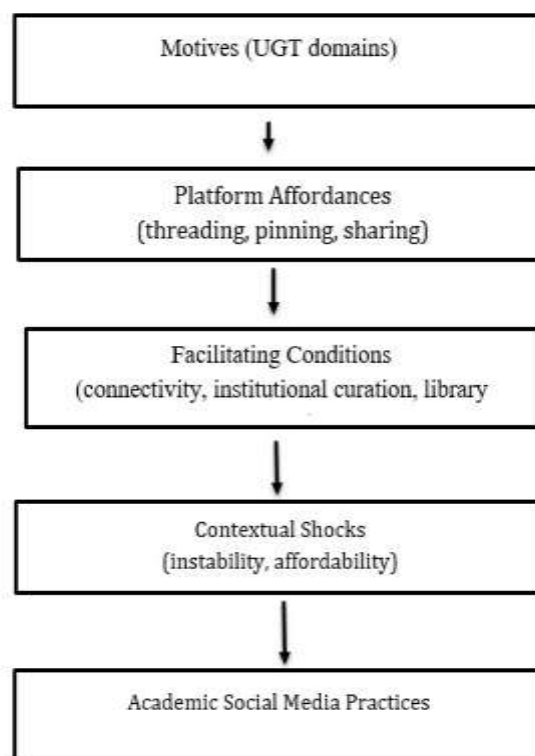


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

#### Methodology:-

##### Research design and epistemological orientation:-

A qualitative single-case study of Université de Goma was chosen to generate in-depth, context-sensitive explanations of motivations for social-media use and the affordance-level practices through which those motivations are enacted; case-study design enables analytic generalization and policy-relevant recommendations in settings where context matters for interpretation (Mbegani et al., 2022). The research adopts an interpretivist stance, using UGT as a sensitizing theory while privileging participants' accounts and artefact evidence to build explanatory patterns inductively.

**Participants and sampling:-**

Purposive, maximum-variation sampling targeted postgraduate students (master's and doctoral candidates), research-active staff and lecturers who had used social media for academic purposes within the previous 12 months; variation criteria included faculty, programme stage, gender and intensity of platform use (Rana et al., 2023). Recruitment used departmental rosters and snowball referral; the final dataset comprised 32 semi-structured interviews (18 postgraduates; 10 faculty/research staff; 4 academic-support personnel) and four postgraduate focus groups (26 participants total). Sampling continued until information power and thematic saturation were achieved for the study's focused questions (Saunders et al., 2023), (Rana et al., 2023).

**Data collection methods and materials:-**

Data collection combined: (a) semi-structured, in-depth interviews (~45–65 minutes) probing motives, concrete episodes of academic social-media use, platform affordances mobilized, and constraints (political instability, library access, data costs); (b) focus groups (60–90 minutes) to elicit normative practices and peer negotiation of platform use; and (c) consensual collection of de-identified course-group artefacts (pinned resource lists, representative thread excerpts) to triangulate stated motives with naturally occurring affordance practices Fuchs (2022), (Nghiem-Phú & Shibuya, 2021). Instruments were piloted with local collaborators; interviews were conducted in French or Swahili per participant preference, audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim and, where necessary, translated with bilingual checks.

**Data analysis procedures and rigour:-**

Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis with a hybrid deductive–inductive approach: initial deductive codes reflected UGT motive domains (information; immediacy; collaboration; self-regulation; visibility), and inductive coding captured context-specific adaptations (low-bandwidth workarounds; artefact governance; instability responses) (Saunders et al., 2023), (Naeem et al., 2023). NVivo supported coding, matrix queries and cross-case comparison; a subset (20%) of transcripts was double-coded to calibrate the codebook, and analytic memos documented decision trails. Member checks with a purposive subset of participants and stakeholder debriefs with faculty representatives enhanced credibility; an audit trail supported dependability and confirmability. Ethical approvals were obtained from the principal investigator's IRB and Université de Goma authorities; informed consent, anonymization and secure storage procedures were applied.

**Results:-****Participant profile and digital access ecology:-**

Participants spanned faculties of health, natural sciences, social sciences and education; ages clustered in the mid-20s to early-40s, and gender representation approximated parity. The majority reported smartphone ownership and primary reliance on mobile data for online access; campus Wi-Fi was described as intermittent or costly—conditions that materially shaped preferences for low-bandwidth formats (text, compressed PDF, short audio) and for asynchronous modalities rather than synchronous videoconferencing (Bayable et al., 2020), (Mapatano et al., 2020).

**Sample Distribution of Respondents in the Study:-****Table 2 Detailed Respondent Group**

Participant category	<i>n</i>
Postgraduate students (interviews)	18
Faculty/research staff	10
Academic support personnel	4
<b>Total interview participants</b>	<b>32</b>
Postgraduate focus group participants	26

**Motivations and affordance enactments (UGT-aligned findings):-**

Analysis identified five principal motive clusters; each cluster is presented with the affordance(s) implicated, typical practices, and brief participant-grounded exemplars.

**Information and resource access (affordances: pinned resources, shared links):-**

Students and faculty used course groups to obtain lecture captures, compact summaries and peer-curated links when library holdings or institutional repositories were incomplete or slow; pinned resource lists and shared links in WhatsApp/Telegram groups functioned as pragmatic distributed repositories that sustained coursework and research continuity (Al-Kathiri et al., 2024), (Halaweh et al., 2020). Artefact inspection confirmed frequent circulation of compressed PDFs and short audio or video links as substitute or complementary resources.

**Immediacy and low-friction communication (affordance: threaded messaging):-**

Messaging threads enabled rapid clarification, brief tutor feedback and last-minute announcements; participants reported a strong preference for chat groups for time-sensitive exchanges because they reduce transactional friction compared with formal announcements or email (Mirembe et al., 2020), Fuchs (2022).

**Collaborative coordination and co-construction (affordances: shared folders, threaded discussion):-**

Group threads and shared cloud folders supported iterative draft exchange, fieldwork coordination and co-authorship logistics; postgraduate research teams described threaded negotiation of methods and the circulation of evolving drafts, with moderation and pinned “official” versions improving coordination and reducing duplication (Fajoye et al., 2023), (Al-Rahmi, 2020).

**Support for self-regulated learning and motivation (affordances: scheduled posts, pinned checklists):-**

Participants used pinned to-dos, scheduled study prompts and accountability check-ins to scaffold planning and sustained engagement; structured group norms (posting windows, role allocation) correlated with reported improvements in persistence and planning (Al-Rahmi, 2020), (Smith & Storrs, 2023).

**Professional visibility and networking (affordances: discipline groups, scholar networks):-**

Doctoral candidates and research-active staff used ResearchGate, LinkedIn and discipline WhatsApp groups to announce work-in-progress, solicit collaborators and identify funding opportunities; visibility and reputational gratifications were more prominent among postgraduate and research staff than among coursework-only postgraduates (Kolhar et al., 2021; , Raj et al. (2021).

**Constraints shaping motive enactment and emergent mitigations:-****Political instability and institutional disruption:-**

Participants reported episodic campus closures and restricted library hours during periods of local insecurity, which increased dependence on remote social channels to maintain supervision and course continuity while reducing opportunities for in-person support (Hamuli et al., 2023), (Horwood et al., 2021). These dynamics amplified the operational status of social media as continuity infrastructure.

**Library capacity limits and quality-control burdens:-**

Limited physical and digital library holdings and staffing shortages compelled reliance on peer-shared materials; faculty reported additional supervisory time devoted to validating circulated resources and correcting misinformation, indicating a need for curated official packs and librarian engagement in course groups (Halaweh et al., 2020), (Mapatano et al., 2020).

**Connectivity, data affordability and low-bandwidth adaptations:-**

High perceived mobile-data prices and intermittent bandwidth produced deliberate low-data strategies: compressed file formats, short audio summaries, asynchronous discussion, and scheduled downloads during low-tariff periods; several participants contrasted perceived local data prices unfavourably with neighbouring countries and identified affordability as a decisive constraint on synchronous pedagogy and video usage (Bayable et al., 2020), (Ditekemena et al., 2021).

**Institutional fragmentation, governance and wellbeing tensions:-**

Because social groups frequently substituted for LMS functions, participants reported versioning conflicts, duplication, and archive fragmentation; mixing supervisory communication with informal chat produced privacy and boundary concerns, while notification overload and late-night activity were associated with sleep disruption and concentration loss for some students (Černá & Borkovcová, 2023; , Fuchs (2022), (Riaz et al., 2023; .

**Emergent governance practices and pragmatic mitigations:-**

In response to constraints, participants and faculty implemented practical mitigations: moderated course groups with pinned “official” resource packs, posting windows to limit notification overload, compression and file-format norms, scheduled downloads, and co-supervision arrangements for research teams—practices that preserved key gratifications while reducing data and governance costs and that could be formalized institutionally.

**Discussion:-****Interpretation relative to extant literature and theory:-**

The motive taxonomy identified (information, immediacy, collaboration, self-regulated supports, professional visibility) corroborates UGT-derived findings across higher-education contexts and supports the argument that students and staff purposively select media to satisfy academic gratifications (Gruzd et al., 2023), Raj et al. (2021). The Université de Goma case extends these accounts by showing how political fragility and affordability constraints instantiate a low-bandwidth ecology where social platforms become essential operational infrastructure rather than optional pedagogical complements (Hamuli et al., 2023), (Bayable et al., 2020). The affordance-level analysis confirms the many-to-many mapping between features and gratifications (e.g., pinned posts support archival, coordination and motivational functions simultaneously) and underscores the importance of institutional facilitation to convert ad-hoc practices into sustainable pedagogical processes (Al-Rahmi, 2020), (Černá & Borkovcová, 2023); .

**Policy and pedagogical implications (priority actions):-**

Empirical findings motivate a prioritized institutional agenda tailored to fragile, low-bandwidth settings: (a) adopt a “low-bandwidth first” design principle for core course materials (text, compressed PDFs, short audio) to ensure equitable access (Černá & Borkovcová, 2023); ; (b) formalize curated LMS↔social-channel gateways—moderated course groups with pinned official packs linked to an authoritative repository—to reconcile immediacy with archival authority and assessment integrity (Halaweh et al., 2020); (c) implement concise digital-literacy and moderation training for faculty and postgraduate cohorts (source appraisal, moderation conventions, citation norms) to reduce misinformation and faculty oversight burdens (Smith & Storrs, 2023); (d) institute wellbeing and notification governance (posting windows, guidance on notifications and quiet hours) to mitigate sleep disruption and attention depletion (Riaz et al., 2023); ; and (e) pursue partnerships and donor advocacy for subsidized student connectivity and targeted library investments to reduce reliance on ad-hoc peer repositories and to enable richer pedagogies where feasible (Mapatano et al., 2020), (Odiboh et al., 2020).

**Research implications and evaluation agenda:-**

We propose a pragmatic mixed-methods evaluation programme: pilot moderated, low-bandwidth course interventions (structured WhatsApp/Telegram learning tasks, pinned official resource packs, brief digital-literacy modules), evaluate using usage logs, pre–post measures of perceived learning and wellbeing, submission quality proxies and qualitative feedback, and replicate across multiple DRC campuses to assess transferability and quantify infrastructural moderators (data price, campus connectivity) (Yousif et al., 2021), (Černá & Borkovcová, 2023); , (Odiboh et al., 2020).

**Conclusion:-**

This qualitative case study at Université de Goma documents that social media are integral to academic practice in fragile higher-education contexts because they supply essential gratifications (information access, immediacy, collaboration, self-regulation scaffolds and professional visibility) while operating within a low-bandwidth, governance-constrained environment created by political instability, limited library capacity and high data costs. Institutional responses that formalize moderated social channels, adopt low-bandwidth pedagogies by default, build concise digital-literacy and moderation capacity, protect wellbeing, and advocate for subsidized connectivity and library investments can convert ad-hoc practices into sustained educational value while mitigating integrity and wellbeing risks. Mixed-methods intervention evaluation and multi-site DRC replication are critical next steps to refine, test and scale the recommended interventions.

**Limitations:-**

This single-case qualitative inquiry privileges contextual depth over statistical generalizability; transferability should be tested through replication in other DRC and regional campuses (Mbegan et al., 2022). The sample may over-represent active social-media users (self-selection bias); artefact triangulation and member checks mitigated

but cannot eliminate this bias. Price and infrastructural claims are based predominantly on participant perceptions; future work should combine participant narratives with empirical infrastructure and market data.

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