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Effect of Social Media on Academic Performance of Students in Ghanaian Universities: A Case Study of University of Ghana, Legon.

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EFFECT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS IN GHANAIAN UNIVERSITIES: A CASE STUDY OF UNIVERSITY OF GHANA, LEGON.

BY

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Introduction

The advent of the internet in the 1990s led to major developments in the world of communication hence the introduction of social networking sites (SNSs). The coming into being of these sites revolutionized the world of communication and today we celebrate its improvements ranging from education to entertainment. The evolution of the internet has led to its usage as the best medium of communication whereby two-third (2/3) of the internet world's population visit social networking sites (SNSs) thus serving as communication and connection tools. These networking sites are referred to as social media (Boyd and Ellison, 2007).

Social media exploded as a category of online discourse which enables people to create contents, share them, bookmark them and network at a prodigious rate (Jha and Bhardwaj, 2012). This has breached the gab that existed in communication where people had to rely solely on traditional methods such as letters and phone calls as a mode of getting in touch with friends and relatives. Today, communication is as easy as walking into a neighbor's residence to deliver a piece of information or vice versa through the use of social media. Social media is fast changing the public discourse in the society and is setting trends and agenda in topics that ranges from the environment and politics to technology and the entertainment industry (Asur and Huberman, 2010).

The driving factors for adoption of social media are the progressively ubiquitous access, convenience, functionality, and flexibility of social technologies (Brown, 2010; Schroeder, Minocha and Schneider, 2010). These factors have made the adoption of social media very easy

and have tremendously improved mankind's life by exposing him to different ways of creating and sharing information. An additional benefit of social technologies provided on the internet is that they are frequently free or require marginal investment, thereby eliminating a potential barrier to adoption (Brown, 2010).

As we know, nothing interesting is ever completely one-sided, so it is for social media as it comes with both positive and negative effects. There is a correlation between social media usage and academic performance of students in universities. There have been various views and opinions which recognize four major advantages of social media use in higher education. These include; enhancing relationship, improving learning motivation, offering personalized course material, and developing collaborative abilities (Wheeler, Yeomans and Wheeler,2008; Rifkin, Longnecker, Leach and Ortia,2009). Also, Liccardi et al (2007), argued that students are socially connected with one another and therefore share their daily learning experiences and do conversation on various topics through social media whereas Kuppuswamy and Shankar (2010), reviewed that social network websites grab students' attention and then diverts it towards non-educational and inappropriate actions including useless chatting.

Research has proved the heavy presence of social media usage among students. Wiley and Sisson (2006), for instance argue that previous studies have found that more than 90% percent of tertiary school students use social networks. It is also found out that, students use social networking sites (SNSs) approximately thirty (30) minutes throughout the day as part of their daily routine life (Nicole, Charles, and Cliff, 2007).This shows the level at which students are patronizing these sites and this may bring along both positive and negative effects on students as far as their academic performance is concerned.

Statement of the problem

The internet is today the most important source of information and the growing dimensions of the use of social media by students cannot be underestimated. It has been observed that students devote more attention and time to social media than they do for their studies and they cannot pass their examinations well if they do not learn (Osharive, 2015). Also, the study conducted by Maya (2015), revealed that media use contribute to lower academic performance, low self-perceptions and less interest in college oriented carriers. Academic excellence plays an important role in an individual's life; be it in the family, at social gatherings, at workplace, in an institution or even among peers. Much emphasis is placed on academic excellence because of the role it plays in an individual's life as far as a successful life and respect is concerned in every part of the world. Due to this, many people are concerned with the ways that they can improve their academic performance (Kyoshaba, 2009). Studies have also revealed that social media affects students' use of English. They tend to use short- handwriting to chat with friends and get used to it thereby replicating the same errors during examinations (Obi, Bulus, Adamu and Sala'at, 2012).

Today students at all levels especially tertiary level have been engaged in the use of social networking sites (SNSs). This research therefore seeks to investigate the level of engagement of students of the University of Ghana into social networking sites and also determine the effect of their use on the academic work.

Objectives of the study

1. To determine the level of exposure of students of University of Ghana to social media sites

2. To ascertain what students of University of Ghana use social media for

3. To ascertain how the use of social media has influenced the academic work of students of University of Ghana.

Literature review

The concept of social media

Social media continuously keeps changing and as such it is difficult to assign a fixed definition to it as Jacka and Scott (2011), argued that ''there is no single recognized definition for social media''. However some scholars have defined it in different perspectives over the past years.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), defined social media as a group of internet- based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content. The Oxford dictionary (2011), also defined social media as "websites and applications used for social networking". Another definition of social media is that it is a ''communication channel which is very popular, extremely fast and broad, has proven to be highly effective, as well as trusted by billions of people , to share and discover content concerning individuals, brands, information, entertainment and knowhow'' (Dearborn, 2014). One theme that all these definitions underpin is that social media involves some form of communication between individuals over the internet.

Social media began in the late 1990s with the first recognized social media network called "SixDegrees " in 1997 and this technology enabled people to upload a profile and make friends. From 1997 to 2001 a number of community tools; Asian Avenue, blackplanet and MiGente began supporting various combination of profile and publicly articulated friend (Boyd, Danah, Ellison and Nicole, 2007). There has been tremendous improvement since this era and today

there exist uncountable social networking sites either developed for local use, specific purpose or international use. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), classified social media into six (6) different categories as follows;

1. Collaborative project (wikipedia)

2. Blogs and micro blogs (twitter)

3. Content communities (youtube)

4. Social networking sites (FB, 2go, BB chat)

5. Virtual game World (world of war craft)

6. Virtual second world (second life)

This classification of social media into classes has been useful to scholars and individuals for easy identification and study of a particular social media type but today a difficulty may arise due the high proliferation of social media and one may wonder which group a new developed social media type fits into. Social media is considered to be the fastest growing web application in the 21 century and this rapid development is being backed by technological advancement (Heyam, 2014). Mankind has enormously benefited and continues to benefit from it and as such cannot underestimate its importance as far as communication is concerned.

Today, social media has taken a new dimension and has encouraged more participation through the introduction of mobile phones that support social networks applications. The use of mobile phones that are powered by Android applications to social network is termed as Mobile social networking. According to Humphreys (2007), in his study titled "Mobile Social Networks and Social Practices" social network applications have now been migrated from the computer to the

mobile phone, network information and communication can be integrated into the public space; and these new services that are developed for mobile phones allow users to create, develop, and strengthen their social ties.

Positive effects of social media on students' academic life

Students' academic life has moved to a different dimension since the introduction of these social media networks and several studies have affirmed that social media plays an important role on students in higher education including the study conducted by Wheeler, Yeomans and Wheeler,(2008); Rifkin, Longnecker, Leach and Ortia,(2009). In their study, they recognized four (4) major advantages of social media usage by students in higher education which included; enhancing relationship, improving learning motivation, offering personalized course material, and developing collaborative abilities. Indeed, social media has contributed greatly to facilitating learning in the 21st century. It is shown that a greater percentage of students including those at the PhD level commonly use social media to ameliorate their studies (Khan, 2010).

 The answers to the causes of flexible studies today across the globe might not be far-fetched from the great contribution that social media platforms are providing when used judiciously. Even though, there have been other school of thought that states that social media is a nuisance to students' academic life such as Kuppuswamy and Shankar (2010), who argued in their study that social networks distracts the attention and concentration of the students toward learning and converts it towards non educational activities such as useless and unnecessary chatting, there have been several studies conducted afterwards whose findings are contrary to this claim. For instance, the study conducted by Jain, Verma, Verma and Tiwari (2012), titled "the impact of social networking in promoting education'' revealed that students benefit from chatting with other students, teachers and external sources to acquire knowledge. Also, Yunus and Salehi

(2012), argued in the same direction that students gained more vocabulary, improved their writing skills and reduced their spelling mistakes through social media usage.

In fact as an educational tool, social media enriches learning by giving both students and teachers the opportunity to connect in new and very exciting ways thereby encouraging flexible mode of learning. It is stated that flexible learning expands the choice on what, when and how people learn. It supports different styles of learning including E-learning which is highly patronized across the globe (Pappas, 2013). Other scholars; O'keeffe and Clake-pearson (2011), in their study also revealed that social media benefits students by connecting them to one another on assignments and class projects.

It is further buttressed in the study of Arquero and Esteban, (2013) and Selwyn, (2007) whose conclusions were that social media undoubtedly generate new opportunities to engage students in higher education as they are remarkably effective at connecting people and facilitating the exchange of information. It is clear and indisputable from these studies that social media usage in the educational sector cannot be underestimated since its introduction.

Negative effects of social media on students' academic life

Davies and Cranston (2008), enumerated some of the risks associated with social media which included criminal activities such as identity theft and fake contacts which is prevalent today, sexual abuse or harassment and unsuitable advertising. On the same subject O'keeffe and Clake-pearson (2011), also mentioned cyberbullying, online harassment, sexting, face book depression, and privacy concerns as some of the challenges associated with social networking.

Cyberbullying: cyberbullying is a category of bullying that occurs in the digital realm or medium of electronic text. ''It is any behavior performed through electronic or digital media by

individuals or groups that repeatedly communicates hostile or aggressive messages intended to inflict harm or discomfort on others'' (Tokunaga, 2010). Cyberbullying is one the serious threat in the social media environment and has called for a number of studies to determine its causes. The causes of cyberbullying according to Calvete, Orue, Estevez, Villardon and Padilla (2010), was significantly related with the use of proactive aggression, justification of violence, exposure to violence and less perceived social support of friends.

Privacy concerns: this is another concern that everyone involved in social networking is faced with. The rate at which people post or share fake information calls for alarm and it is difficult to ascertain that, what people say and post are truly who they are. Individuals' private information are publicly displayed on some of these social networks and malicious people take advantage and perpetrate all kinds of harassment. It is also argued that the privacy options offered by most social networking sites (SNSs) do not provide users with the flexibility needed to handle conflicts with individuals who have different conceptions of privacy (Preibusch, Hoser, Gurses and Berendt, 2007).

Aside these effects, other studies conducted by scholars have also proved that social media can be detrimental to students' academic life if caution is not taken in its usage. For instance the study conducted by Obi, Bulus, Adamu and Sala'at (2012), titled "The need for safety consciousness among Youths on social Networking Sites" concluded that social media affects students use of English. They use short-handwriting when chatting with friends and unconsciously get used to it thereby replicating same errors during examinations. Even though one may argue that these are minor challenges, it is important to acknowledge the increasing rate at which these errors are replicated in the education sector and if care is not taken future generation may see it as a norm. Indeed a number of studies including but not limited to the

study of Kuppuswamy and Shankar (2010), Osharive (2015), Maya (2015), among others have revealed unequivocally that social media can be problematic to students' academic life if caution is not taken in its usage.

Social media and Ghanaian education

Ghanaian education has felt its own taste of social media since its introduction. Social media in Ghana started as a slow process like other African countries but has grown steadily over the past years. According to the Ghana National Communication Authority (2016), report; the total mobile subscription increased by 1.3% from 36,138,706 in the first quarter of 2016 to 36,613,987 at the end of the second quarter. Also the number of mobile data subscribers in the country has increased dramatically. Mobile data subscription for the second quarter of 2016 was 18.8 million with a penetration rate of 67.6%.This indirectly means there will be more access to the internet which of course includes social networking sites. The study conducted by Owusu and Agatha (2015), titled "use of social media and its impacts on academic performance of tertiary students" revealed that majority of students in Ghana were engrossed in social networking sites. It also brought to light that most users utilized these sites for chatting and downloading purposes only which affected their academic performance negatively. This finding corroborates the revelation of Mingle and Musah (2015), that most respondents in their study experienced negative effects such as poor grammar spelling, late submission of assignments, less study time and poor academic performance. Though part of these studies affirmed some benefits of social media usage in the academic life of students, it is necessary as educators to be concerned about its negative effects which seem to be outweighing the advantages as far as education is concerned in Ghana.

Methodology

A total sample size of two hundred (200) students were randomly selected from the total population of thirty eight thousand (38,000) in eight (8) randomly selected halls of residence out the sixteen (16) halls of University of Ghana; using cluster sampling method of probability sampling. The total population was grouped into clusters based on the halls of residence. The names of all the clusters (halls) were written on a slip of paper, afterwards the slips of papers were scrambled and placed in a bowl which was shaken well for them to mix. Using simple random sampling technique, the researcher closed his eyes and randomly picked the slip of papers one after the other from the bowl until the eight (8) halls were selected. Commonwealth Hall, TF Hall, Pantagone Hall, Jubilee Hall, Legon Hall, Volta Hall, Akuafo Hall and Liman Hall were randomly selected out of the sixteen hall, representing a fifty percent (50%) of the total number of clusters (halls) on campus housing the students' population. The Questionnaire for the data collection was administered to the first twenty-five (25) students within each cluster (hall) who were met in their rooms in each selected hall in order to give equal representation to all the clusters (halls) and also to arrive at the desired total sample size of two hundred (200) participants.

The questionnaire was designed by putting up statements which respondents had to rank using a likert to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement. 197 questionnaires were retrieved from the study (giving a response rate of 98.5%) and descriptive statistics was then used to profile the responses from respondents.

Findings

The findings first and foremost revealed that students of university of Ghana are well exposed to social media networks; all 197 respondents use one social media platform or the other. All the respondents are on Facebook and whatsApp. Other major social media platforms used by the students are twitter, instagram. This corroborates the findings of Wiley and Sisson (2006), that previous studies have found that more than 90% percent of tertiary school students use social networks. With regards to time spent on so social media, out of the 197 participants; 17 participants (8.6%) spent between 0 to 30 minutes, 31 (15.7%) spent 30 minutes to one hour, 50 (25.4%) spent 1 hour to 2 hours and 99 (50.3%) spent 2 hours and above. It can be deduced that majority of the students; (50.3%) spent over two (2) hours on social media on a daily basis and this comes with implications as it was earlier revealed by the study conducted by Kirschner and Karpinski (2010), that over-involvement or obsession with social networking sites (SNSs) by students can have negative impacts on their academic performance.

A total of 165 students (82.5%) indicated that they mainly use social media for chatting and downloading of pictures/videos while the remaining 32 respondents use social media mainly for academic purposes. This finding corroborates the arguments made by some scholars such as Khan(2010),and Englander, Terregrossa and Wang(2010), whose findings suggested that social media is a nuisance to students' academic life because most of their usage are not geared towards academics but rather to useless things as far as enhancing students' academic life is concerned.

Though majority of the respondents do not use social media mainly for academic purposes, they use such tools to perform certain activities pertinent to their academic work. 68% use social media to engage in academic discussions with lecturers and course mates, 86% use social media as a means of receiving and disseminating information relating to class activities, 50.7% of the

respondents use social medial tools like wikis as sources of information for assignment preparations. The study thus revealed the main use of social media for academic purpose among the students is mainly to disseminate knowledge to their peers. This was earlier revealed by O'keeffe and Clake-pearson (2011), that social media benefit students by connecting them to one another on assignments and class projects. In the same direction Salvation and Adzhruddin (2014), concluded in their study that students are able to formulate group discussions to exchange ideas and communicate to their teachers as well as call on friends about assignments on social networking sites (SNSs). Indeed one cannot dispute the fact that social media networks contribute immensely to students' academic life when used judiciously.

To ascertain how the use of social media has positively influenced the academic work of students of University of Ghana, four statements were outlined and respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement. Responses are represented in Table 1.

Table 1. Positive influence of social media on academic performance of students.

STATEMENT	SA	A	S	SD	TOTAL
The usage of materials from SMS like Wikipedia for research has helped improve my grades.	63 (32.0%)	83 (42.1%)	39 (19.8%)	12 (6.1%)	197 (100%)
I use materials obtained from social networking sites to complement what I have been taught in class.	55 (27.9%)	111 (56.3%)	23 (11.7%)	8 (4.1%)	197 (100%)
Engaging in academic forums on social media increases my understanding of topics discussed in class.	61 (31.0%)	95 (48.2%)	24 (12.2	17 (8.6%)	197 (100%)
Group discussions on social media yield good results as far as my academics are concerned.	56 (28.4%)	95 (48.2%)	36 (18.3%)	10 (5.1%)	197 (100%)

With regards to whether the usage of materials from SMS like Wikipedia for research has helped improve student grades, 63 (32.0%) strongly agree, 83 (42.1%) agreed, 39 (19.8%) disagree and 12 (6.1%)strongly disagree. Thus the number of students who either strongly agree or agreed to using social media to retrieve relevant materials to improve their grade are 146 (74%). Fifty-five (27.9%) of the respondents strongly agree to using materials obtained from social networking sites to complement what they have been taught in class, 111 (56.3%) agreed, 23 (11.7%) disagree and 8 (4.1%) strongly disagree. This responses indicated that majority of the respondents (84.3%) agree to using materials from social media platforms to enhance their academic work. Again a majority of 156 (79.2%) indicated they agree to the fact that engaging in academic forums on social media increases their understanding of topics discussed in class and

151 (76.6%) thinks these discussions yield good results. This affirmed Wheeler, Yeomans and Wheeler,(2008); Rifkin, Longnecker, Leach and Ortia,(2009) research which identified four (4) major advantages of social media usage by students in higher education which included; enhancing relationship, improving learning motivation, offering personalized course material, and developing collaborative abilities.

Another aspect that the study sought to address was to ascertain if students of University of Ghana were addicted to social media and the possible implication on their academics. To bring this to fore, four statements were outlined and respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement. Responses are represented in Table 2.

Table 2. Students' addiction to social media

STATEMENT	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL
I am addicted to social networks and this is a challenge that affect my academic life.	19 (9.7%)	56 (28.6%)	73 (37.2%)	48 (24.5)	196 (100%)
Online social networks distract me from my studies.	15 (7.5%)	87 (44.2)	69 (35.1%)	26 (13.2%	197 (100%)
Time spent on social media can never be compared to time spent on my studies.	33 (16.8%)	96 (46.8%)	50 (25.4%)	18 (9.1%)	197 (100%)
There is no improvement in my grades since I became engaged into these social networking sites**.**	7 (3.6%)	55 (27.9%)	91 (46.2%)	44 (22.3%)	197 (100%)

Table 2 presents results on the students' addictiveness to social media. Nineteen (9.7%) and 56 (28.6%) participants responded strongly agree and agree respectively that they are addicted to social media. Seventy-three (37.2%) and 48 (24.4%) disagree and strongly disagree. On social networks being a distraction, 15 (7.5%) strongly agree, 87 (44.2%) agree, 69 (35.1%) disagree and 26 (13.2%) strongly disagree. 33 (16.8%) and 96 (46.8%) responded strongly agree and agree respectively that they spend more time on social media than their studies while 50 (25.4%) and 18 (9.1%) responded disagree and strongly disagree. Seven (3.6%) and 55 (27.9%) also responded strongly agree and agree respectively that there has been no improvement in their grades since they became addicted to these networking sites while 91 (46.2%) and 44 (22.3%) disagree and strongly disagree. Responses on the negative effects revealed that, though majority of the respondents did not agree to social media negatively affecting their academic work, there is to some extent addictiveness and distraction caused by the use of social media. The data collated showed that (38.3%) of the respondents were addicted to social media and that affected their academic life and (51.7%) also revealed that online networks distracted their attention from their studies. This is in agreement with a study conducted in Malaysia by Oye, Mahamat and Rahim (2012), who posited that most students unconsciously get addicted to social media network and get obsessed with them with time. Also in Ghana Yeboah and Ewur (2014) revealed that social media networks such as whatsApp distracts students' academic life and affects their concentration during classes and learning periods.

It is also important to note that a total percentage of (31.5%) students responded that they did not experience any improvement in their grades (Grade Point Average) and a cross analysis of the responses showed that they were the participants that indicated that they were addicted to social networks and also that these networking sites were distracting them from their studies.

Conclusion

It is without doubt that social media is and will remain an important tool in human life as far communication is concerned. Today mankind is harvesting tremendously from its existence not only in mere communication point of view but also in most scholarly activities. Different forms of education including distance education has been widely patronized and facilitated to some degree through these social media networks. Acquiring information both locally and internationally from friends, lectures or experts is no longer a struggle as compared to the olden days and the internet is the ultimate master behind this success. "Social media is a useful servant but a dangerous master" and can also be "described as a two edge sword" and as such, users especially students must be alert about its dangers and be prudent in its utilization.

The nature of social media as a useful servant but a dangerous master" and a two edge sword has been revealed in the findings of the study that, despite the benefits that students can harness from social media networks such as sharing of information, building relationship, partaking in group discussions from near and far among others, there is to some extent addiction and distraction of attention caused by the use of social media which could have serious consequences on the academic life of students.

Recommendations

In the light of the findings, the following recommendations are made;

1. Seminars should be organized in the various schools or faculties to enlighten students more about the possible implications of social media usage on their academic performance.

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2. Students should make sure that they use these social networking sites judiciously to ensure that they do not become detrimental to their academics.

3. Teachers/lecturers can adopt new strategies by channeling assignments or discussions on social media platforms to help inculcate the habit of using these sites for academic work.

4. Students must minimize the time they spend on social media to avoid being obsessed by these sites for unnecessary chatting.

5. The university authority should also restrict access to certain social media sites that may be prone of distracting students' attention during school hours as a means of minimizing their use.

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