

Social Media for Information Dissemination among Students

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Abstract

Social media usage trends have established a drastic jump from 5% in 2005 to 72% in 2021. This study, therefore, sought to investigate the extent to which social media is being used to facilitate information dissemination by students in Ghanaian Universities. The Uses and gratifications theory (UGT) which seeks to explain why and how people actively seek out specific media to satisfy specific needs was used as the theoretical framework for the study. The descriptive research design was used to gather both qualitative and quantitative data from respondents across tertiary institutions in Ghana. The study established that social media serves as one of the vital tools for learning and information dissemination among the students. The students used social media for academic work more than for recreational activities. They access social media through the mobile devices they own and are connected to the internet. While the majority of them had only one social media account, a significant proportion had more than one social media account. Although they somewhat trust the information on social media, they only consider it to be genuine unless it is related or find it relevant in the field of academics.

Keywords: Social Media, Uses and gratifications theory, WhatsApp, Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Ghana.

Introduction

The 21st century has brought about developments and advancements in technologies. This has congregated the world to become a global village (Majeed & Ayub, 2018). The most significant and life-changing technologies in this century are the adoption of social media as a major component of commercial, entertainment, and educational activities. Social media are new media technologies facilitating interaction and co-creation among individuals (students, lecturers, librarians, marketers, etc.) and organizations (schools, businesses, libraries, etc) (Alalwan, Rana, Dwivedi & Algharabat, 2017) by viewing, visiting and sharing contents in the form of text, pictures, and/or videos that can then be shared with other users or individuals

quickly, efficiently, and in real-time (Agbawe, 2018). Social media has indeed; become a trending lexicon in media studies such that many researchers have turned towards investigating and evaluating its impact and effect on society lately (Agbawe, 2018).

Social media usage trends have established a drastic jump from 5% in 2005 to 72% in 2021 (Pew Research, 2020). Many of these users such as students use social media for every facet of their life such as learning, interaction with their colleagues and lecturers, information dissemination, recreation, information acquisition, information retrieval, and networking, among others. As such as social media usage has become available and accessible, the users are quick to adopt them as soon as they perceive the benefits associated with its adoption and usage. Social media have therefore become an integral part of the daily lives of students (Mingle, Adams & Adjei, 2016). Social media users are recorded to be 4.2 billion as of January 2021 (Kepios, 2021).

As social media have provided a plethora of opportunities for transforming societies and the advancement of humanity through interactive information exchange, it has also created a catalog of challenges that society is presently contending with (Prensky, 2010). Similarly, social media offers students a vast array of options to communicate, socialize, network, entertain themselves, and stay connected. They now see social media as a tool to communicate and disseminate information than the traditional face-to-face means of communication and information dissemination. The use of social media does not only help or benefit the students but also helps in bridging the gap by enabling lecturers and students to interact among themselves, share academic resources, and information dissemination among others.

Social media usage requires adequate time as students are faced with information overload and this has the potential of negatively affecting students when the use of social media takes precedence over core academic work. It also has the potential of disrupting the attention of students just as the fear of lack of control in the use of social media can lead to moral decline, unethical behavior, and lowering of educational principles and values. Again, students encounter some challenges in the usage of social media, which are known as the rules of engagement. These include how to create and manage social media accounts, what should be the response time and the legal implications and requirements among others. Some of the major challenges encountered by students in using social media include the relative expensive devices needed for the internet and to use social media as well as buying more data bundles; the scarcity and prohibitive costs of high-speed internet connections and the limited number of personal computers in use limited access to the internet, sharing information on some sites, erratic power supply, a different version of the same information, and the time constraints

Several researchers have investigated social media features, functions, and users from different scientific disciplines. These include technology (James, 2011; Ryan & Xenos, 2011), library and information science (Khan, & Bhatti, 2012; Liu, Tu-Keefner, Zamir, & Hastings, 2017; Jones & Harvey, 2019), communication (Brandenburg, 2008), marketing (Alalwan et al., 2017; Alves, Fernandes & Raposo, 2016), business (Van Iddekinge et al., 2013), psychology (Brown & Vaughn, 2011; Kluemper et al., 2012), health (Surani, Hirani, Elias, Quisenberry, Varon, Surani, & Surani, 2017; Jane, Hagger, Foster, Ho, & Pal, 2018), ethics (Chauhan, Connelly, Howe, Soderberg & Crisostomo, 2021; Hajli, 2018), education (Mingle et al., 2016; Chugh & Ruhi, 2018; Tess, 2013), entrepreneurship (Olanrewaju, Hossain, Whiteside, & Mercieca, 2020).

However, there appears to be a theoretical gap in these studies. The researcher is yet to find any empirical or theoretical studies that sought to assess the use of social media for information dissemination among students, with emphasis on Ghana and Ghanaian universities using the Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) as the theoretical framework underpinning the study.

It is against this background that the researcher sought to use the UGT as the theoretical framework to investigate social media usage for information dissemination and academic purposes by students in selected Ghanaian universities. Specifically, the study sought to

- a. assess the reasons for the students using social media;
- b. find out the kind of information shared by the students on social media;
- c. assess how the students access social media and the devices used to access social media; and
- d. find out the rate of usage of social media and the extent to which they trust the information shared via social media.

Theoretical Framework

Uses and gratifications theory (UGT) is an approach to understanding why and how people actively seek out specific media to satisfy specific needs. It is audience-centered and has its origins in communications literature. The theory seeks to explain the use of media by people to fulfill their needs. The needs include cognitive needs (acquiring information, knowledge, and understanding), affective needs (including emotion, pleasure, and feeling), personal integrative needs (including credibility, stability, and status), social integrative needs (such as interaction with families and friends), and tension-related needs (such as escape and diversion).

The theory argues about what people do with media rather than what media does to people. The media use is motivated by needs and goals that are defined by audience members themselves and that active participation in the communication process may facilitate, limit, or otherwise influence the gratifications and effects associated with exposure.

While widely used in other disciplines such as the study of politics and the dissemination of political messages, UGT can be applied to inhuman psychology of needs, motives, and influence; learning; and social media use. The basic premise of UGT is that individuals will look out for media among competitors that meet their needs and ultimately lead to gratification (Lariscy, Tinkham & Sweetser, 2011). The gratification of needs is essential to human life and survival. Studies such as Kaye and Johnson (2002) and Whiting and Williams (2013) have established that one of the predictors of media use and recurring media use is gratifications. Social media thus allow users to communicate with millions and billions of people worldwide.

The emphasis of the UCT is on the free will of the users and that media can be used in diverse ways and purposes. Its premise is that there is nothing as absolute truth. In this case, the user is said to have absolute control over the effect of media on they the users since the user also determines the effect of the media on them. People get knowledge, interaction, relaxation, awareness, escape, and entertainment through media which they use for interpersonal communication as well.

UGT gives the consumer power to discern what media they consume, with the assumption that the consumer has a clear intent and use. The UGT is based on five (5) assumptions (Vinney, 2019). That is

1. the audience is active and its media use is goal-oriented;

2. the initiative in linking need gratification to a specific medium choice rests with the audience member;
3. the media compete with other resources for need satisfaction
4. people have enough self-awareness of their media use, interests, and motives to be able to provide researchers with an accurate picture of that use.
5. value judgments of media content can only be assessed by the audience.

In addition, mobile phones and the internet have become a major source of media that seeks to meet the mass communication needs of the users as well as the interpersonal needs like interaction and emotional involvement of the users. Thus, the users can use the media and internet, chat, call, snap photos and take videos.

Literature Review

Social media consist of several technologies facilitating interaction and co-creation among individuals, groups, or organizations either in the educational field or in other sectors (Alalwan et al., 2017). These include Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Instagram, (Mingle & Adams, 2015; Ogaji, Okoyeukwu, Wanjiku, Osiro & Ogutu, 2017), YouTube, Pinterest, Flickr, Snap chat, blogs, Yahoo, Line, Tango, Skype, WeChat, BBM, Imo, Viber, etc (Eid & Al-Jabri, 2016). Social media serves as search engines and allows people to search, share, and receive information (Lerman & Ghosh, 2010) and a source of news or gateway for finding news online (González-Padilla & Tortolero-Blanco, 2020). Social media again facilitate the dissemination of information to many users at the same time (Balthrop, 2004; Alsufyan & Aloud, 2017) and enable people to stay connected (Liberatore, Bowkett, MacLeod, Spurr & Longnecker, 2018). The concept of social media, types of social media, social media and information dissemination, and social media use in education is been discussed in detail.

Social Media

The concept of social media keeps changing. As a result, it is difficult to define it as Scott and Jacka (2011) put it, “there is no single recognized definition of social media”. However, some scholars have been able to define it based on their orientation, exposure, and usage of social media. Social media employs mobile and web-based technologies (Kavoura & Sylaiou, 2019) to create a highly interactive platform (Bernard & Dzandza, 2018). It allows users (individuals or groups or organizations or a combination of them) to construct, share, correlate, discuss, and modify contents (Shahbaznezhad, Dolan & Rashidirad, 2021) either publicly, privately, or semi-public within a bounded system, identify and connect with other users (Wolf, Sims & Yang, 2018).

As a public web-based system (Kavoura & Sylaiou, 2019) social media allow users (individual(s) or organizations) to develop profile(s), identify other users based on their profile, and connect with them (Trottier, 2016; Bernard & Dzandza, 2018), access and react to the post of their connected friends or public posts, and send, share and receive messages either privately or publicly (Agbawe, 2018).

Also, social media consist of new media technologies facilitating interaction and co-creation among individuals (students, lecturers, librarians, marketers, etc) and organizations (schools, businesses, libraries, etc) (Alalwan, et al., 2017) by viewing, visiting, and sharing contents in the form of text, pictures, and/or videos that can then be shared with other users or

individuals quickly, efficiently, and in real-time (Agbawe, 2018). These connections in terms of nature and nomenclature vary from site to site (Newman, Peck & Wilhide, 2019).

In the opinion of Baruah (2012), social media are “forms of electronic communication (such as blogging & social networking websites (SNS)) through which online communities are created to facilitate the sharing of information, ideas, messages, videos, and other contents. Social media facilitate the exchange of information or services among individuals, groups, or institutions (Ahmed, Ahmad, Ahmad & Zakaria, 2019); specifically: the cultivation of productive relationships for employment or business. Thus, social media is a virtual platform (Bernard & Dzandza, 2018). This platform helps people to make new connections, to improve friendly relations with other humans (Abbas, Aman, Nurunnabi & Bano, 2019), and to exchange information (Coyle & Vaughn, 2008; Wang, Zhang, Wang, Pu & Yuan, 2011).

Social media has become a vital communication tool due to its ability to facilitate connection (Kumar & Nanda, 2019). by making them more accessible to users, social media can produce significant benefits to students such as creating a virtual platform for the users to explore their interests with similar people, providing academic support (Nisar, Prabhakar & Strakova, 2019), facilitating virtual/online communication knowledge and skills (Bernard & Dzandza, 2018). Also, social media creates a platform, where users can learn new skills and showcase their talents on a global level and stay updated on everything happening around them or in the world (Mingle, et al., 2016). Social media allow users to engage in online self-presentation (Bernard & Dzandza, 2018), and social media allow users to explicitly articulate connections and view their social networks and the networks of others (Bernard & Dzandza, 2018; Mingle et al., 2016).

A. Types of Social Media

Different types of social media exist for usage. These include Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Instagram, (Mingle & Adams, 2015; Ogaji et al., 2017), YouTube, Pinterest, Flickr, Snap chat, blogs, Yahoo, Line, Tango, Skype, WeChat, BBM, Imo, Viber, etc (Eid & Al-Jabri, 2016). The most dominant social media site and of online social media is known as Facebook (Lenhart et al., 2010). Mark Zuckerberg who was then an undergraduate at Harvard developed it in 2004. Many studies on Facebook adoption and usages such as those of Salaway & Caruso (2008) and Harvard (2011) have all revealed that between 90-94% of university students use Facebook, spend an average of 10 to 30min on the site, and have between 150-200 friends. As of February 2021, Facebook usage has now reached over 2.7 billion average monthly users (Facebook.com; (Mohsin, 2021). This means that out of the 4.2 billion active social media users, two-thirds (2/3) of them are active on Facebook.

YouTube is seen as both social media and a search engine (YouTube, 2021; Wagner, 2020). It is the second largest search engine and social media platform (Schwemmer & Ziewiecki, 2018; Mohsin, 2021). YouTube’s queues, SEO- friendly tags, descriptions, and titles make it the friendliest platform (Mohsin, 2021). It has an active user base of 2.29billion (Mohsin, 2020; Datareportal, 2019). Over 720,000 hours of videos are uploaded on YouTube every day worldwide (Mohsin, 2021; Tubefilter, 2019) while over 1 billion hours of videos are watched daily (Mohsin, 2021; Statista, 2019)

The third most popular social media is WhatsApp (Mingle & Adams, 2015) with a user base of a billion. WhatsApp is classified as a platform for messaging, chatting, and/or calls (Manji, Hanefeld, Vearey, Walls & de Gruchy, 2021). The most popular and preferred social

media application and platform as established by various studies are WhatsApp (Ahad & Lim, 2014; Mingle & Adams, 2015; Ogaji et al., 2017).

MySpace offers an interactive, user-submitted network of friends, blogs, personal profiles, groups, music, and videos (Boyed et al., 2007). With the enormous growth in its first 6 years of deployment (from 2003 to 2009), it was considered the leading social media site (Lenhard, 2009). Other social media platform such as Twitter is seen as micro-blogging service (Adhi, Saskiah & Widodo, 2019). It is the fastest mode of communication via social media (Katie, 2019) due to its relatively short post length. However, Twitter has a very short lifespan (Wilson, 2016).

Unlike other social media such as WhatsApp and Facebook, LinkedIn is primarily for professional networking (Badoer, Hollings & Chester, 2021; Twitter, 2021). Users of LinkedIn keep in contact with people they know and trust who belong to their professional field (Trust, Carpenter & Krutka, 2017). LinkedIn helps users to create and exchange information, messages, and ideas in virtual communities (Mingle & Adams, 2015), and they facilitate the networking with other users or members with similar or common interests, dreams, and goals (Sharma & Shukla, 2016; Mingle & Adams, 2015).

These social media helps people or users to keep in touch with each other (Tandoc, Ferrucci & Duffy, 2015). They facilitate information exchange and communication among college students. These include posting status and updating it, posting videos, links, and photos among others. Also, they enable the users to follow each other or other users online and keep track of regular updates about their families, friends, acquaintances, and classmates (Smock, Ellison, Lampe & Wohn, 2011)

B. Social media and Information Dissemination

Social network sites (SNSs) provide hundreds of thousands of users with a platform to create and share information and interact with others whether they are individual(s), group(s), or corporate bodies (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Bakshy, 2011). Members of SNSs are connected by mutual interests or friendships in the real world, build relationships (Komori, Hijikata, Tominaga, Yoshida, Sakata, & Harada, 2018) build social networks, meet new friends, and maintain existing friends (Jordan & Weller, 2018), offering communication and interactions (González-Padilla & Tortolero-Blanco, 2020; Jordan & Weller, 2018), and disseminating information (González-Padilla & Tortolero-Blanco, 2020). Social media serves as search engines and allow people to search, share, and receive information (Lerman & Ghosh, 2010)

They serve as a source of news or gateway for finding news online (González-Padilla & Tortolero-Blanco, 2020). People influence information dissemination differently on social media (Luarn, Yang & Chiu, 2014). For instance, Harrigan (2012) opines that users with large followers on Twitter have a greater influence on disseminating information. With social media, information shared can be accessed and seen by others depending on the setting of the social site (Nielsen & Schroder, 2014).

Social media again facilitate the dissemination of information to many users at the same time (Balthrop, 2004). Social media users may share information on their page and profile or on other social media sites/platforms, others will see this information, and the information then begins to spread virally (Alsufyan & Aloud, 2017).

Social media platforms enable people to stay connected (Liberatore et al., 2018). Hence, two or more individuals may have the same kinds of friends on social media and as such once

there is any form of new information, this information is shared with all other individuals on their friends' list (Nisar et al., 2019). A study by Burt (2005) showed that familiar people disseminating information are seen to be more credible. Similarly, information dissemination facilitates socialization and the process of socialization is further strengthened when is shared by friends or people.

C. Social Media Use in Education

Social media have become an integral part of students' academic and social life (Tavares, 2013) and serve as platforms for all kinds of students to interact and relate with their colleagues (Bernard & Dzandza, 2018). They are now seen as platforms for learning or communities that could be utilized to boost engagement and performance (Mingle, et al., 2016).

Some researchers have found numerous progressive results in students' online community engagement with their peers. Kapoor, Tamilmani, Rana, Patil, Dwivedi and Nerur (2018) revealed that social media enables students to participate in forums and discussions at their own pace and time, and freely articulate their ideas. Deng and Tavares (2013) concurred by establishing that group discussions and deliberations among students via social media can lead to the development of students' critical thinking skills and reflective abilities. As compared to the traditional (face-to-face) interaction, students are more willing to voice out their opinion or views irrespective of the level of agreement or disagreement from their peers or members on the social media platform.

In the view of Apeanti and Danso (2014), students believe that it would be exciting should their instructors and lecturers to adopt social media as a means of instructing and information dissemination. This would enhance the contact and relationship between the students and the lectures, which could ultimately lead to an improvement in grades. Yunus et al. (2012) also concluded that the use of social media such as Facebook and Twitter by students enables them to gain more vocabulary that is new and improve their writing and typing skills.

The use of social media by students enable them to exchange or share resources, assignment, and discussions of academic work and other issues either academic or non-academic among themselves either on the same social media platform or across different media (Asad, Mamun, & Clement, 2012). Salvation and Adzharuddin (2014) also posit that students can formulate group discussions to share and exchange ideas and information and communicate to their instructors/lecturers as well as appeal to their friends about assignments on social media sites/platforms. They further established that instructors use social media to create student groups for project idea sharing and collaboration; facilitating teaching and learning, sharing academic and course-related materials with their students, and communicating with their fellow lecturers within and from other universities and the enhancement of academic performance.

Materials and Methods

For this research, a descriptive research design was used as this study employed the mixed research approach (qualitative and quantitative methods) to investigate the variables and research aims under study. This study was centered on students from 5 tertiary institutions in Ghana. These were carefully selected to represent the northern, central, southern, western, and eastern sectors of the Country. Similarly, the cases were selected to represent the public

universities, technical universities, private universities, professional universities, and regional universities. The cases selected include Tamale Technical University (representing the Northern Sector and technical universities); Garden City University College (representing the Central sector and private universities); University of Education, Winneba (representing the Western sector and professional universities; the University of Health and Allied Sciences (representing the Eastern sector and public universities); and the Regional Maritime University (representing the Southern sector and regional universities). This is to ensure general representation and generalization of the findings.

From each university, the researcher purposely selected 50 respondents across the schools and departments of the selected universities. These served as the sample for the study. Therefore, 250 students were purposely selected to serve as the sample for the study. This is in line with the recommendation of Badu (2018) that a researcher in a study can purposively and conveniently select a sample size of not less than 50 respondents for individual organizations when the study involves at least 5 organizations scattered across a wider geographical area and when the actual population for the individual organizations been studied is unknown.

Both primary and secondary data were collected for this study. Secondary data were collected from academic journals, databases, textbooks, etc. The primary data was collected using the questionnaire. The questionnaire was made up of both closed and open-ended questions. The choice of the questionnaire was due to the ease of data collection and ease to analyze the data collected since data entry and tabulation can be easily done with many computer software packages. The questionnaires were distributed to the selected student respondents from the selected universities across the country. The SPSS was used to analyze the quantitative data while the content analysis was used to analyze the qualitative (open-ended) questions. The data were then triangulated for presentation.

Results

A. Response rate and biography

Out of the 250 questionnaires distributed or sent to the sampled respondents, 216 completed or responded. This represents an 86.40% response rate. Out of the 216 respondents who participated in the study, 51.4% were females while 48.6% were male. In terms of age, the age group of 21-27 years was the highest group (81.0%) that participated in the study. The participants who were either 20 years or below (10%) and the least age group participants followed this between the ages of 28-35 representing 9%. Concerning the level of education, it was established that most of the respondents (76%) were undergraduates while 24% were graduate students.

B. Devices Used for Social Media

The first objective of the study was to assess the devices used to access social media by the students. The study thus sought to find out from the respondents the types of mobile devices they own and whether the mobile devices are connected to the internet.

The study established that the majority of the students (88.89%) own different mobile devices. Again, it was established that 101 (46.76%) respondents own desktop, 121 (56.02%) have tablets, 104 (48.15%) have laptops, 58 (26.85%) have PDA's, 32 (14.81%) have iPod, and 61 (28.24%) owned E-book readers. It is evident from the findings that the majority of the respondents own more than one mobile device. The result is shown in the chart below.

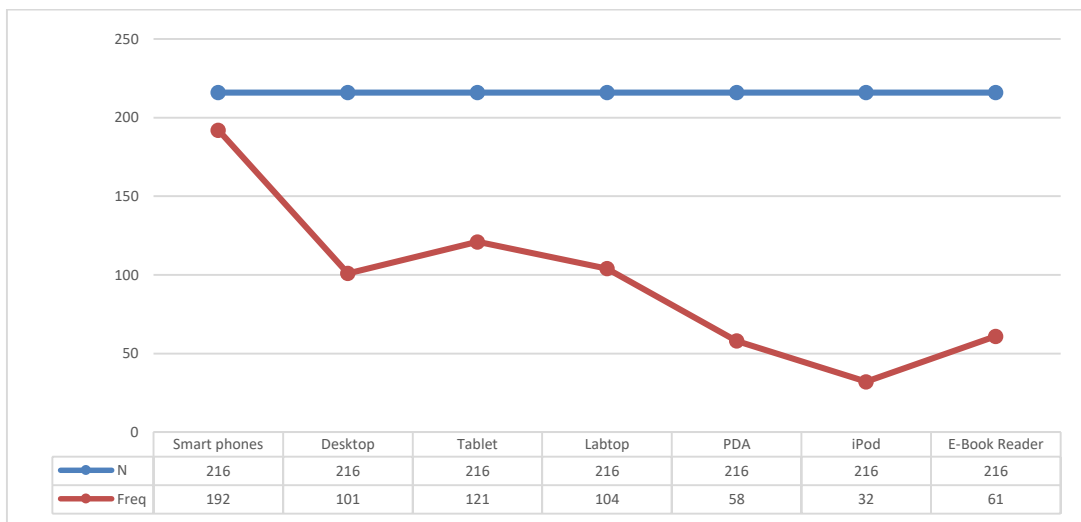


Figure 1: Devices Used for Social Media

The researcher further enquired if the mobile devices are connected to the internet or not. The study revealed that 209 (98.6%) of the respondents affirmed that they had internet access on their mobile devices. This result shows that the use of mobile devices to access the internet is very common among the students/respondents.

C. Social Media and the kind of Information put on it

Due to the immense number of social media sites available, it was needed to identify just what kind of social media sites students were interested in. The survey shows that WhatsApp is the most used social media by the students with a response rate of (21.78%). This was followed by Facebook (17.63%), Snapchat (15.38%), Twitter (13%.14), and YouTube (12.18%). Instagram and messenger recorded the least social media usage with 9.94% usage each. The response indicated that all the respondents engage and use multiple social media.

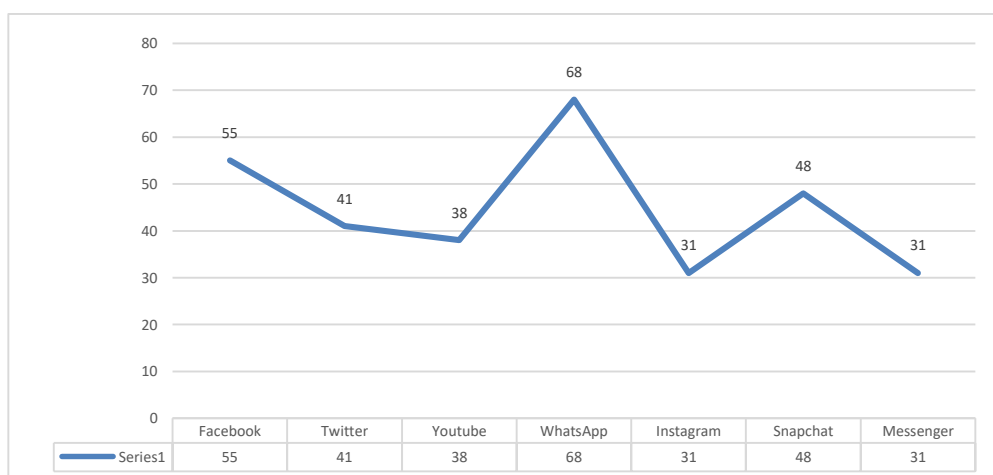


Figure 2: Social Media and the kind of Information put on it

The respondents indicated that they use them to post comments, share their opinion, post pictures, and images, share videos, and songs, share lecture notes, share lecture slides, share pamphlets and other educational materials, group discussion, and capture slides

projection/projected during lectures. Recording lectures, reading, and learning writing and jotting down notes, among others. It was established that the majority (72%) of the respondents said they use social media for academic work more than for recreational activities. Specifically, some of the respondents outlined the following various reasons for using social media.

- I use social networking sites to get information regarding current social events.
- I use social media to read and learn about things around the world.
- I use social media to boost my business.
- I use social networking sites to create my social identity.
- I use social networking sites for getting jobs related information.
- I use social networking sites to get relief from academic stress.
- I use social media sites to share new ideas.
- I communicate with my friends via social networking sites in preparation for the exams.
- I use social networking sites for online academic group discussions.
- I use social media to watch movies and other videos

These responses and comments from the respondents clearly show that social media is used as a tool for many things that are mainly academic.

D. Social Media Access and Usage

One of the objectives of the study was to assess the frequency of usage of social media by students. The study revealed that most of the respondents (183: 84.72%) said they visit social media daily while 26 (12.04%) said they visit and use social media every other day and 21 (9.72%) said they visit and use the social media every three (3) days. No respondent indicated the visit and use of social media between 4-7 days. It was again revealed that out of the 183 (84.72%) who use social media daily, 61 (33.33%) of the respondents spend more than three hours on social media while 64 (34.97%) said they spend an average of two hours on social media per day. Again, 39 (21.31%) said they spend an average of one hour on social media per day while 19 (10.38%) of the respondents said they spend less than an hour on social media per day.

The study again sought to find out the number of social media accounts owned or used by the students. The results from the study indicate that 134 (62.04%) of the respondents have only one account on a specific social media site while 82 (37.96%) of the students have at least two accounts on specific social media sites.

Social media offers broader options for connections to occur among people worldwide to build friendships and ensure collaboration. Therefore through the study, it was recorded that 2.3% of the respondents said they have met some of their friends on social media, 33.3% have met most of them, 15.7% have met about half of them, 44.9% have met a few of them and 3.8% have met none of them.

Social media facilitate information dissemination. The study established that 195 (90.28%) of the respondents believe that one of the vital tools in academia for information dissemination is social media while 21 (9.72%) had a contrary view. Again, 189 (87.50%) of the respondents indicated that they trust every piece of information on social media while 27 (12.50%) of the respondents said they do not trust every piece of information on social media. Further analysis also revealed the relevance of social media and its information to students, the responses

provided show that most students do not find the information on social media to be genuine but find it relevant in the field of academics.

Discussions

Social Media can be accessed using different devices. From the first objective, the study established that the majority of the students own different mobile devices such as cell phones, handheld tablets, smartphones, laptops, PDAs, desktops, and e-book readers. Again, it is evident from the findings that the majority of the respondents own more than one mobile device. This finding concurs with the views of Lo, Cho, Leung, Chiu, Ko & Ho (2016) in their study in Hong Kong that students are competent in the use of smart mobile devices and they indicated that out of a total of 51 students surveyed, 43 could access internet services and information on these mobile devices. Illako (2017) opined in a study at Makerere University “over 96% of the students own internet-enabled mobile devices and they were proficient in terms of their usage”. In another study, Dahlstrom, Walker & Dziuban (2013) also reported that the possession of mobile devices has increased among university students and there is tremendous proficiency in its usage for accessing and retrieving online academic information. Both the findings of Illako (2017) and Dahlstrom, Walker, and Dziuban (2013) supported this study. In supporting the view, Cassidy, Colmenares, Jones, Manolovitz, Shen, and Vieira (2014) indicated in their findings in a study conducted on students in the United States that, 98.4% of students own mobile phones, 82.9% own tablets, and 84.4% own e-book readers and all of them showed proficiency in using these devices to access academic information, send or receive text and access social media services.

Concerning whether mobile devices are connected to the internet or not, the study revealed that the majority of the respondents affirmed that they had internet access on their mobile devices. This result shows that the use of mobile devices to access the internet is very common among the students/respondents. These findings support the literature and the findings of Li (2013) that major academic libraries in China had designed mobile interfaces that allow the users of the library to use their mobile devices to access the institutional repositories that have been digitized and browse through the library’s academic databases and e-journals.

The study further indicated that all the respondents engage and use multiple social media such as Snapchat, WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, and Messenger. The findings of the study concur with the first assumption of the UGT that states the audience is active and its media use is goal-oriented. Gurcan (2015) also established that “social media zips through our campuses and has dominated with regards to its use among students.” Also, a study by Mingle & Adams (2015) established that the most widely used social media platform by students in Ghana is WhatsApp followed by Facebook, confirming this study. However, Oueder and Abousaber (2018) indicated that 77% of students are satisfied with the usage of a single social media. This study again contradicts the findings of Oueder and Abousaber (2018) who established that the most widely used social media site by students of the University of Tabuk, Saudi Arabia is YouTube, followed by Twitter.

The responses and comments from the respondents on what they use social media for clearly show that social media is used as a tool for many things that are mainly academic. It was established that the majority (72%) of the respondents said they use social media for academic work more than for recreational activities. These include posting comments, pictures, and images; sharing an opinion, videos, songs, lecture notes, lecture slides, pamphlets, and other

educational materials; group discussion; and capturing slide projection/projected during lectures. This finding is largely corroborated by other studies and literature such as Tavares (2013), Bernard and Dzandza (2018), Mingle et al. (2016), and Apeanti and Danso (2014). It also concurs with the UGT which seeks to establish the use of media to enable people to fulfill their needs which include cognitive needs (acquiring information, knowledge, and understanding), affective needs (including emotion, pleasure, and feeling), personal integrative needs (including credibility, stability, and status), social integrative needs (such as interaction with families and friends), and tension-related needs (such as escape and diversion).

On the social media account owned and the frequency of usage of social media by students, the study revealed that while the majority of the students had only one social media account; a significant proportionate (37.96%) had more than one social media account. Most of the students used social media or visit social media daily for over 3 hours. This study contradicts the research of Oueder and Abousaber (2018) that postulated that most of the students under study spent between 1-3 hours daily on social media.

Through the study, it was recorded that the respondents said they have met some of their friends on social media. This support supports Boyd and Ellison (2007) and Nosko (2010) who established that “members of social network sites are connected by mutual interests or friendships in the real world and use the social network sites to meet new friends, maintain existing relationships and further build their social networks”. It also concurs with the UGT which seeks to establish the use of media to enable people to fulfill their needs which include cognitive needs (acquiring information, knowledge, and understanding), affective needs (including emotion, pleasure, and feeling), personal integrative needs (including credibility, stability, and status), social integrative needs (such as interaction with families and friends), and tension-related needs (such as escape and diversion).

The study further established that most of the respondents believe that one of the vital tools in academia for information dissemination in social media. Again, most of the respondents said they trust every piece of information on social media. Viewing the results provided by the respondents and making an analogy from the literature, the study proves that social media enables students to have a direct medium to disseminate information as well as to build and maintain relationships.

Conclusion

Social media have become an integral part of students' academic and social life and serve as platforms for all kinds of students to interact and relate with their colleagues. It offers students enormous options to socialize, communicate, network stay connected, and entertain themselves. They now see social media as a tool to communicate and disseminate information than the traditional face-to-face means of communication and information dissemination. The use of social media does not only help or benefit the students but also helps in bridging the gap by enabling lecturers and students to have interaction among themselves, share academic resources, and information dissemination among others.

Significantly, social media has become one of the vital tools in academia for information dissemination and learning among students; serves as a medium for academic work such as posting comments, sharing their opinion, posting pictures, and images, sharing videos, and songs, sharing lecture notes, lecture slides, pamphlets, and other educational materials, group

discussion, capturing slide projection/projected during lectures, recording lectures, reading, and learning, write and jot down notes, among others.

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that:

1. The management of universities should recognize the enormous benefits of the use of social media for information dissemination in the universities. They should therefore provide a more conducive environment that supports social media usage for information dissemination and learning. They should deploy the relevant systems and technologies to support the dissemination of information via social media more effectively.

2. Also since information dissemination and learning via social media is mainly internet dependent, the management of the universities should as much as possible make available internet connectivity and access easier for the students'. This will further enhance the benefits derived from the usage of social media for information dissemination by the students and the university community at large.

3. The students should be engaged and oriented on the roles and use of social media in learning and information dissemination. This engagement and orientation are expected to augment and enhance the maximization of the benefits that are already derived from social media usage

4. Lecturers or instructors should recognize the relevance of social media and its frequent use by students. The lecturers should therefore adopt social media as a medium of information dissemination to students. This is most relevant in the era of COVID-19, digitalization, and the need for blended and e-learning.

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