



ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL MEDIA UTILIZATION BY STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A CRITICAL LITERATURE REVIEW OF GHANA

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ABSTRACT

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Social media has drastically changed the communication perspective of the world through different aspects, both positively and negatively. The existence of social media has made it easy for scholars and non-scholars to pass information in the form of communication as well as has boosted businesses through online advertising and selling. Social media is enhanced by different aspects and forms of technology hence it is safe to say the two go hand in hand in depicting a social and now our academic world. Social media and Institutions of Higher Education work together to explore different skills including critical thinking, collaborations, and knowledge construction. This means that students, lecturers, and professors benefit differently from social media. For instance, in certain countries, social media is accepted as a tool for teaching and learning. Ideally, through social media, one is able to attend online classes without necessarily appearing physically at the lecture hall. In a country like Ghana, social media has paved ways to very many teachers and students in higher educational institutions who have benefited differently. This paper focuses on a literature review of social media utilization by students in higher educational institutions in Ghana. Other concepts of social media will also be explored including the positive and negative effects of social media on students and professors in tertiary education.

Contribution/Originality: This study contributes in the existing literature by logically analyzing the utilization of the social media by students in the higher education institutions in Ghana. Therefore, it documents how the social media tools can be used to promote teaching and learning as well as its effects on education across the globe.

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is considered a basic need across the world and is part of every country's development agenda. In Ghana, education is considered the back born of the economy and its resources. According to Pinto (2019) the socio-economic growth of Ghana and Africa as a whole is linked to the consistency in its education factors. For instance, the financial, economic, political and religious factors of the nation are advanced and improved due to the quality of education. With education, all these factors are put into place hence able to work effectively. This is explained such that the right to education is a basic right, applauded worldwide. Through such provision of quality accessible education, living standards of people are improved and the nation is turned into a working nation hence developing in every aspect. There is an African saying that states "when you educate a child, you empower the whole generation". This is basically how education is interpreted in Ghana (Republic of Ghana, 2013). Social media technology is considered among efforts combined in achieving quality education in Ghana. Different stakeholders

have come together in ensuring this ambition is achieved hence the excellence in making social media work effectively. Higher learning institutions thus have joined the train of emerging technology to change students' way of learning as well as assimilate knowledge with professors and lectures (Buami, 2013).

Ainin, Naqshbandi, Moghavvemi, and Jaafar (2015) argue that social media came about with the introduction of mobile devices, where learning activities can be conducted. For example, before the invention of technology and the introduction of social media and mobile devices, learning was based on reading and writing involving books and teachers. However, this has changed over time as notes can be sent through emails and one does not have to attend classes to sit for an examination. There are online classes and lessons which work pretty well. Ghana has since adapted to the use of social media in learning different aspects, both practical and formal.

Social media has empowered and create students who are social media savvy and in a world where technology is fast hand, it comes in handy. Technology aids in discovering new knowledge at the tips of our fingers (Abe & Jordan, 2013). One does not have to go through different libraries or books to be able to get the needed information. Through mobile devices, one is able to access any type of documents and reference them to class. Ideally, collaborative learning is enhanced through mobile devices, technology, and social media. This works in that, social media is wide and once an individual updates a statement necessary for learning or teaching, it is viewed by different people from different regions of the world. Through that, a debate can arise where concepts are challenged and made clear (Abe & Jordan, 2013). According to the 2015 Global Monitoring Report of Education for All (EFA), only one-third of all the countries signatory to the program were able to achieve the goals of the Dakar 2000 forum and stressed that adopting emerging Information Communication Technology (ICT) and educational technologies by member countries will bridge the gap of lack of resources to achieve the set goals of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization(UNESCO). Succinctly stated the obvious underlying mentality of any new and evolving technology that "teachers and students need to be concerned about investing time and money in unproven technology" (UNESCO, 2015).

2. OBJECTIVES

The objective of this paper is to discuss the effects of social media on students in higher educational institutions in Ghana. The paper will look at the concept of Social Media, social media in the New Era of Higher Education, and the effects (positive and negative) of social media on higher educational institutions.

3. METHODOLOGY

The primary method of this review is to search the Internet and peer-reviewed scholarly articles and papers so much related to the study in order to achieve the above-mentioned objectives. In this review, the focus is on purposive prominent qualitative studies that evaluate the use of social media in higher educational institutions. Primarily, this review would rely on a descriptive method to espouse social media utilization by students in higher education in Ghana.

3.1. *The Concept of Social Media*

Social media originated from different scholars, with articles giving different definitions. Social media refers to using social sites to convey and pass different messages (Bucher & Helmond, 2018). Forms of social media include Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, Snap Chat, Youtube among others. Basically, social media involves internet-based software. Additionally, it relates to the exchange of information such as background, data, family, geographical location and many other requirements. However, social networking involves the exchange of ideas relating to jobs, businesses or employment (Bucher & Helmond, 2018). Social networking is different from social media as it uses social media programs to create connections with family and friends. Therefore, social networking cannot be effective without the use of social media.

According to Ouiridi, El Ouiridi, Segers, and Henderickx (2014) social media use mobile platforms that allow users to share and add geographical information with the intention of collaboration or building networks. In all social media platforms, there is the aspect of gaining knowledge and exploring different things in life. Aleksandrova and Parusheva (2019) cited that Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp are the most widely used social media platform for learning in Higher Institutions. It documents all learning details from basic education to tertiary. YouTube includes practical and physical representation of aspects hence fully adapted for higher learning education (Leonardi, 2014). Apraku, Duah, and Bofa (2019) reported the most students in Universities in Ghana have adapted to the use of YouTube in pronunciation and vocabulary. For instance, there are writing and referencing styles that are fully documented hence does not need one to attend classes. Ideally, languages such as French, Germany among others can be learned and taught from YouTube (Norton, 2019). Therefore, it has completely made learning in Higher Education Institutions effective and easier. Social media platforms have been categorized based on age and generations. For instance, Snap chat is majorly used by the younger generation while the older ones are mostly on Facebook (Sargent & Casey, 2020). Additionally, Instagram is mainly for models and influencers since it details pictures and captions describing the same. LinkedIn, on the other hand, is for professionals and business-oriented people hence details less antics and mainly job opportunities and *knowledge* (Sargent & Casey, 2020).

Gündüz (2017) revealed that one of the major drawback of social media is how people use it to construct their identity or give false identities and impression of themselves (“fake identities”) especially among students in Higher learning Institutions. Some scholars such as Gündüz (2017) believe that students are forced to “fake” identities which is intended to appear appealing to the outside world. This interferes with learning in two ways such that students fail to study and keep up with their main purposes in the institutions and rather engage in unnecessary competitions that lower and affect their grades negatively. Secondly, to keep up with their fake identities, they have to behave in certain ways that describe the identity they have constructed and will engage in illegal means of making money to match up with the false identities constructed. These entail doing odd jobs or engaging in prostitution with older men to maintain a rich lifestyle (Krombholz, Merkl, & Weippl, 2012). This is one of the major setbacks affecting higher learning institutions not only in Ghana. In Ghana, however, it has recently become rampant and affects both male and female students in higher institutions of learning. This has also contributed to an increase in Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) among these students (Sargent & Casey, 2020).

3.2. Social Media in the New Era of Higher Education

The new era of higher education corresponds perfectly with social media as it implores its use completely. The use of social media among university students in Ghana has been proven effective by not only scientists but also scholars (Fummey, Aziakui, & Adukpo, 2018). Learning is consistent and does not stop at any level of life hence advanced by social media. Facebook, WhatsApp, and Youtube are the most favourite means of communication among teachers and students in Ghana (Fummey et al., 2018). The preference of Facebook and WhatsApp is attributed to the fact that it allows for free interaction among students in higher educational institutions and offers multiple ways for students to reach and engage with their peers and teachers (Khan, Sultan, & Alsamarai, 2019).

Technologies are currently focused on building online metropolitan areas where the internet can be easily accessed. Through this, online discussions are encouraged among students in higher educational institutions and they are able to learn and gain more knowledge in regards to the specific areas of study (internetsociety.org, 2019). For instance, Ghanaian Universities are at the forefront in ensuring students are educated through online and other social media platforms (Asiedu, 2017). Furthermore, professors have over and over complained that using online technologies like social media does encourage online students' discussion beyond the normal school hours (Meng, Li, Duan, Chen, & Zu, 2017). It aids them to carry out the necessary assignments and seek clarifications from teachers and colleagues on the subject areas they did not understand during the normal instructional hours (Meng et al., 2017). Notwithstanding this very commendable use of social media and online technologies in higher

educational institutions, Gündüz (2017) argue that most students do not put or give their real personal information on social media with the fear of victimization, cyber mobbing, and stalking. Students in the Higher learning institutions fall under the same age groups hence have similar interests and ambitions. Through social media, they are thus able to mingle and engage in solid discussions that are relevant to their interest. According to Fumme et al. (2018) female students are more careful in displaying their actual information details on social media.

Here is a table detailing different forms of social media and their services as they allow people to frequently interact and collaborate on life aspects:

Table 1. Shows forms of social media platforms used in higher education adapted from Bucher and Helmond (2018).

Forms of social media	Description
Blogs and Forums	Blogs and forums are very popular, especially amongst tertiary students. Here, they are categorized depending on the topics for discussions. Mainly, one is able to air and give their opinions about something hence highlighting the public. Ideally, it can detail a commentary over a subject matter that reoccurs in the institutions. They are used for financial and personal gain in that through them one can make some money and at the same time educate or create awareness.
Social News Sites	These are sites that contain services that give users the chance to vote on news articles and links. The articles that get the most or highest votes get displayed most frequently or rather is viewed largely by many people. Examples of these sites include Gidd.
Media Sharing Sites.	These include Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube among others where one can upload a picture or video to share with friends and family.
Social Networking Sites.	Here, an individual sets up a profile that corresponds with what they intended to be represented as a requirement. Ideally, friends with similar interests or backgrounds will be displayed for a link-up or connection. The profile contains users' personal information and includes Facebook and LinkedIn.
Blogs and forums	Blogs are like online diaries of thoughts, which give other users the opportunity to post comments on the blog postings. Forums allow registered users to have conversations with other users by post messages. They also include institutional owned, have a particular purpose. Examples of blogging sites include WordPress and Blogger.
Cross-platform messaging app("Messaging and VOIP")	FREE cross-platform messaging (or chat) application whose functionality extends into Voice over internet protocol

Source: Bucher and Helmond (2018).

3.3. Effects of Social Media on Higher Education

There is the issue of cyberbullying and cybercrimes that detail the use of social media (Abaido, 2020). For a person who does not know how to use the platforms, it may affect their academic life in school. First, cybercrimes are a challenge affecting tertiary education students (Abaido, 2020). For instance, just as female students are more careful in giving out information that suits their profiles; male students are often at the centre of such crimes of cyberbullying. Crimes such as fraud, extortion and even catfishing are brought about by social media (Abaido, 2020).

Secondly, Cyberbullying is very common in Universities in Ghana where students are discriminated against and bullied based on what they stand for or represent. Just as social media allows all people from different regions of the world to come together and interact, it also creates room for terrorism and attacks. Cases of Cyberbullying in Ghana universities have been on the rise in recent years, leading to suicide and deaths. For instance, through social media, one can be traced and murdered or attacked based on their affiliations (Sam, Bruce, Agyemang, Amponsah, & Arkorful, 2019).

As much as social media has been adopted in various aspects of learning in Higher Institutions, it hasn't been fully integrated into the classes and syllabuses. This means that despite the fact that social media has taken over the majority of activities of students in Ghana Universities, scholars and the education ministry is yet to integrate it

into the curriculum (Yeboah & Ewur, 2014). Among the excuses being peddled is that social media is already a bigger part of students' lives in that they spend it playing video games, compute games, instant messaging, social networking among others hence they cannot concentrate on more than one aspect. Basically, the argument behind failure to have social media integrated in-school programs, lessons and classes is that it would take over the majority of student's time and end up affecting grades and performances (Yeboah & Ewur, 2014).

Buami (2013) indicated that change is inevitable and the current generation of students requires digitalization and advanced technology to match their interests and ideas. Therefore, social media being a tech-savvy platform would perform very effectively if well detailed and made to correspond with learning requirements (Sam et al., 2019). For instance, in Information Technology (IT) courses within Universities in Ghana, using social media to teach the concepts would work more efficiently (Buami, 2013). A good example of this is using a phone or computer to carry out instructional activities. Another instance is where social media marketing is the topic, practically displaying how these are intertwined would bring more understanding rather than just regular teaching and demonstrations. Additionally, the current generation of students is intrigued by new things that relate to technology. Therefore, no matter how boring or complicated the lesson might turn out to be, incorporating social media into the classes would ignite an interest that would, in turn, yield good results (Sargent & Casey, 2020).

According to Sargent and Casey (2020) today's students are no longer the people our educational system was designed to teach. "Our students have changed radically and change is therefore upon us globally for faculty members, professionals and administrators of higher institutions to adopt social media methodologies and teaching techniques that would be supportive, innovative, learner-cantered and engaging to our students since they are more in tune with digital era of information sharing and learning".

As much as social media is an effective tool used in aiding learning in Higher learning institutions, more should be focused on its effects, both negative and positive to make it a better platform. The media is required to make public the negative impacts it brings to students so as to create awareness and educate on its dangers. Ideally, it should be effectively used as a form of employment among youths who are in Universities to be able to curb Cybercrimes and other related criminal activities (Sam et al., 2019). There have existed worst-case scenarios where students have found themselves in trouble due to social media and worst cases leading to death. In one of the Universities in Ghana, a student was found dead in her hostel room, with investigations linking her murder to an online lover. Therefore, as much as social media is a huge tool aiding in development, more should be cantered on sensitizing students on the proper and negative uses therein. This should be a communal program where all parties including students, parents, and educators participate in Buami (2013).

The government should initiate laws that monitor social media and ensure it is safe enough for all groups of people. This will do away with serious cases such as cyberbullying and online insults. For example, when there are laws that govern cybercrimes such as fraud, less will be done or such crimes will be minimized due to the consequences attached to them. Social Media to assist Collaborative Learning (SSCL) might be found in the learning atmosphere for encouraging the students in the learning process and cooperates in groups with the group process, communication involving the students, experts, and workplace entrepreneurs. The understanding and experience are viewed since the tools for understanding construction that's precise and matches the particular context in solid existence (Sam et al., 2019).

4. CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this study was to review and look through the effects of social media on students in higher learning institutions. Conclusively, social media has both positive and negative effects depending on how it is used. The positive effects majorly benefit the student and advance their knowledge in different sectors of life. However, the negative effects are also very adverse hence need to be highlighted and awareness created to stop them from affecting learning and normal lives. Social media thus details a collective role where the government, educators,

students, and the community participate to make it effective and conducive to correspond with the relevant environment needed.

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