Volume 16 Issue 16
Originally issued as G4

Global Journal of human-social science: G
Linguistics & Education
Volume 16 Issue 4 Version 1.0 Year 2016
Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal
Publisher: Global Journals Inc. (USA)
Online ISSN: 2249-460X & Print ISSN: 0975-587X

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GJHSS-G Classification : *FOR Code: 930599*



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The Impact of Social Media on Student Academic Life in Higher Education

Raymond Owusu Boateng [α] & Afua Amankwaa [σ]

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I. Introduction

a) Background of the Study

In recent years technology has tried to fulfill its role in helping humanity leading to the substantial medium of interaction in the social world as well as in teaching and learning. Over the years those in higher education has explore the exciting opportunities new technologies bring to institutions, educators and students. Technology has changed the way people interact and has brought about the emergence of an open social platform such as social media that allows the inhabitants of this planet earth to connect with each other making the world a global village. Social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Google Plus, and Flickr, are being used in learning for the purpose of convenient communication with other students and potentially with others outside the class such as students of the same topic and subject experts. The advent of social media has impacted significantly on how students learn and the mode instructors teach. In today higher education settings, social media is has influence instructors, students, and others to cooperate with each other on the tasks of knowledge construction in learning and teaching environments. Social media applications can strengthen class material and positively influence discussions collaborative work, and authoring. Educators and researchers are constantly experimenting with social media technologies hoping to stimulate critical thinking skills, collaboration, and knowledge construction (James). However, the fact that these media are generally open to the world implies a need to carefully consider its' benefits, impacts and risks of openness as well as need for ongoing communication with students in order to address their concerns and deal with issues in the use of social media as they arise..

b) Statement of the Problem

With the explosive growth in the number and use of social media in everyday communication method for individuals and organizations, there has been a corresponding increase of its incorporation in teaching and learning in higher institution. In view of this, this study examine and assess the impact social media has on teaching and learning in higher education. be it positive or negative impacts.

c) Purpose of the Study

This study was purported to assess the impact of social media on student academic life. life To be specific, this study aims at exploring the kind of social media students are familiar with, how such social media is used by students of higher institution and the impact it making on their academic life.

d) Research Questions

The main research question of the study was" has social media has distinctive impact on students' academic life?" To answer these questions and analyze how this impact has taken place, the following question were considered:

How do students use social media?

To what extent has social media support students learning?

e) Significance of the study

An understanding of social media, it usage and how it is influencing students learning environment would be of great relevance to students, researcher, students affairs practitioners and all the various bodies that comes to play when talking of social media and school life. The outcome of the study will help to strategize and reconstruct their attitude regarding the

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use of social media. It will also push people further to identify the exciting opportunities social media add to human and student life as a whole.

II. Review of the Related Literature

a) Social Media

The term "Social media" is defined as the application that allows users to converse and interact with each other; to create, edit and share new forms of textual, visual and audio content, and to categorize, label and recommend existing forms of content (Selwyn 20129). Social media therefore denotes to the wide collection of Internet based and mobile services that connect people together to communicate, participate, collaboratively interact, discuss and exchange ideas and information on an online community. The kind of Internet services commonly associated with social media (sometimes referred to as "Web 2.0") include the following:

Weblog. Weblogs or blogs, as they are branded, are easily created and updateable websites that allow authors to publish to the Internet instantly, hence allowing instructors and students to communicate easily. Basically a blog is an online journal in which pages are usually displayed in reverse chronological order. Blogs can be hosted for free on websites such as Word Press, Tumblr and Blogger.

Wikis. A wiki is "a collective website where any participant is allowed to modify any page or create a new page using her Web browser" (Dewing 2010). Anyone can add and edit what has already been published. One well known example is Wikipedia, a free online encyclopedia that makes use of wiki technology.

Social bookmarking. Bookmarking sites allow users to organize and share links to websites. This enables users to produce a searchable personalized internet. Examples include reddit, Stumble Upon and Digg.

Social network sites. Boyd and Ellison (2007) defined social network sites as public web-based services that allow users to develop a personal profile, identify other users with whom they have a connection, read and react to postings made by other users on the site, and send and receive messages either privately or publicly. These web based services allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system. Among the most popular are Facebook and LinkedIn.

Status update services. This kind is also known as micro blogging services, status update services such as Twitter allow people to share short updates about people or events and to see updates tweeted by others. These are limited list that are certain to revolution quickly, probably could be by our own contributions to the field.

b) Social Media and student academic life in higher education

Academic life in these context is describe as the activities that relates to the work done in colleges and universities especially which involves studying and reasoning rather than practical or technical skills. Higher education on the other hand is an educational level that primarily describes post-18 learning that takes place at the universities as well as other colleges and institutions that awards academic degrees and professional qualification.

A side most deliberations of social media being perceived as either on the very straightforward or the very philosophical, emergent numbers of educationalists exploring and aspiring in this field are beginning to consider the possible significance and likely implications of social media for education practice and provisione specially in terms of higher education. Social media constitute an increasingly important context in one's academic everyday lives. Indeed, some critics talk of social media as a self-networked acknowledging avenue serving as a key site for sociality and identity recognition in many people's lives (Papacharissi, 2010). The apparently changing nature of a student, who is entering university, will ultimately see the significance of social media in higher education in a practical sense, the attribute of social media reflects a highly connected, collective and creative qualities application that are more flexible, fluid and accelerated in nature.

Social media are therefore associated with an increased tendency for young people to multitask, to rely on a digital juggling of daily activities and commitments (Subrahmanyam and Šmahel, 2011). More subtly, the reason with young people associated with these emerging technologies is also associated with the autonomous nature of social media allowing students an increased control over the nature and form of what they do, as well as where, when and how they do it. As Tapscott and Williams (2007) argue that, young people 'are not content to be passive consumers, and increasingly satisfy their desire for choice, convenience, customization, and control by designing, producing, and distributing products themselves'.

For many educationalists the existence of social media in higher education settings is essential if universities are to (re)connect with these students (Selwyn, N). For instance, social networking sites such as WeChat which is predominant in china, LinkedIn and the flipped classroom such as schoology are now being used by universities as alternative spaces in which students can adapt to the university lifestyle through interacting online with peers and faculty. Certainly, many universities now maintain profiles and groups on social networking sites such as Facebook, where students and faculty can interact, share resources and express learner voice. Social media poses a liberal environment for

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students to discuss share their views and opinions easily freely on issues that otherwise would not have been done in a normal traditional classroom, just as Mason and Rennie (2007: 199) reasoned that, shared community spaces and inter group communications are a massive measure of what excites young people and therefore should contribute to their persistence and motivation to learn.

According to Douglas Thomas and John Seely Browns (2011) description of a technology enhanced new culture of Learning that says, learning is based around principles of collective exploration, play and innovation rather than individualized instruction, it could be argued that social media supports the aspect of knowledge consumption and construction that are very different to the epistemological principle of formal education and individual instruction as well as sounding with currently fashionable constructivist and socio cultural learning theories. These ideas are reflected most explicitly in the notion of connectivism the idea that learning in a social media age now rests upon the ability to access and use distributed information on a "just in time basis". Simply put, learning can be seen asan individual ability to connect to specialized information nodes and sources as and when required. Thus knowledge ability would demand nurturing and maintenance of these connections. (Chati et al., 2010). As George Siemens (2004)puts it, learning can therefore be conceived in terms of the 'capacity to know more' via social media rather than a reliance on the individual accumulation of prior knowledge in terms of what is currently known.

c) Impact of Social Media on Student Academic life

Social media provides students a new mechanism for a familiar exercise. It provides students a direct medium by which to publicly evaluate and comment on their campus environments, institutional policies, classes, professors, and administration and fellow students in real-time. Social media zips through our campuses nearly unseen, dragging behind it the heavy weight of social injustices and complicated Jurisprudence accumulated from decades of student speech (Gurcan 2015). Given social media's potential for positive impact, no one is suggesting we pull the breaks on it, and in many ways the technology is already out of our grasp.

Today's students communicate via technology, and that If you say absolutely no Facebook or texting, you are cutting off an important relationship with students technology as an online teacher use of technology via the use of a variety of tools such as Skype, text, email, Facebook and twitter. Social media open up new ways for collaboration and discussion in the sense that, it offers a great deal of content posting, coping, sharing and search ability by easily using online search tools. Students today use social media anywhere and at any time where internet connection is available in order to meet their educational needs Dewing, 2010). Students use social media to communicate with their Teachers as a group outside of class and to plan school events and what not, it also allowed students to get help on school work from teachers during the evening, weekends, and holidays so that they never fell behind. The cell phone numbers and WeChat are equally used to get in touch with teachers quickly during the school day, if a student is going to be late or absent or outside of school in an emergency.

On the subject of the number of complaints of inappropriate contact involving social media, the possible threats are too great. Student engaging in a private relationship outside the classroom circles begs for inappropriate behavior to commence (Gurman 2015). There is the likelihood of users not being courteous and respectful of other such that Profanity, vulgarity, obscenity, or language that is harassing, derogatory, or otherwise inappropriate for the school environment sometimes circulates in these platforms. Users could easily display, send, retrieve, or download any items that are sexually explicit, or contain hate-based or discriminatory material without the notification of a teacher, school administrator or even their peers in the event. This in turn could make students concede that they have no right or expectation of privacy with respect to their use of school technology and therefore would not want to participate fully (Gurman 2015).

There is always the potential for things to go wrong, and that is true before technology as well. So commentators would have to stop worrying about what could go wrong and realize that there is a huge opportunity associated with social media that broaden the learning experience of students.

III. Methodology

a) Research design

In the empirical part of this study, a qualitative approach was employed using a semi-structured interview among some selected student of Beijing normal university. Qualitative research was used rather than quantitative because qualitative methodology is appropriate to collect data in a natural setting rather than a contrived situation (Creswell, 2007), in this study, a face-to-face interview between the researchers and participants was employed to avoid human bias whenever possible. Therefore, the researchers in this study were able to discover detailed information of how student are using and benefiting from social media through in-depth interviews.

b) Population

The target population of the study is international master students studying in BNU. It is out of this population that the sample was extracted.

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c) Sample and sampling procedure

Ten international students volunteered to participate in the study. The researchers adopted convenient sampling technique in selecting the participants. The sample comprises of 5 female and 5 male students with two students each representing different programs including, Comparative Education, Higher Education, Public Policy, World Economy and Environmental Science.

d) Data collection procedure

The whole data collection period lasted for around 1week. Each interview took approximately 20 to 30 minutes and all the interviews were conducted in English. During the interviews, the researchers took notes for better transcription. All the interviews were audio taped for precision and easier transcription with the participants' permissions. The first part of the interview asked for participants study Program. The second part was consisted of the interview questions concerning (a) how student use social media, (b) to what extent has social media support and enhance their learning. With how students use social media, questions such as ; (i) "Are you conversant with social media", (ii) "which social media are you familiar with and which one do you use most", (iii) "do you use social media in your academic work, if yes how do you use social media in your academic work". The second question which was looking at the extent social media has supported and enhance student academic life, had sub questions like (i) "do you believe social media can enhance your learning" (ii) "to what extent has social media impacted on your academic life" (iii) "do you have any challenges associated with the use of social media" (iv) "how would you rate social media good or bad".

e) Data analysis

The data collected, was then Transcribed and categorized based on the answers of the participants. Relevant themes were then developed from the transcriptions. The data of this study was analyzed inductively, starting with the raw data consisting of multiple sources of information and then broadening to several specific themes. Also key words were written down on the margin, and then grouped the margin notes into different subthemes and themes.

IV. Results and Findings

This chapter presents the results of the data to answer the research questions and appropriated themes and subthemes were emerged related to each research question. Ten individual interviews were conducted and analyzed in this study. The data collected from this research study is used to answer the following questions:

How do students use social media?

To what extent has social media supported students learning?

Table 1 : Demographic information of participants

PARTICIPANT	GENDER	FIELD OF STUDY
1	male	comparative education
2	female	higher education
3	female	comparative education
4	male	public policy
5	female	world economy
6	male	higher education
7	male	environmental science
8	female	public policy
9	female	environmental science
10	male	world economy

a) Research question 1: How students use social media

How students' use social media are categorized into three key elements: conversant with social media, what social media student use, using social media in their academic life.

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Table 2 : Summary on the kind of social media students use

	NUMBER	NUMBER
Conversant with social media	10LinkedIn	7
Facebook	10YouTube	10
WhatsApp	6Wikipedia	10
WeChat	10Twitter	4
Line	1Skype	2
Using social media in academic work Class schedules Discussions and assignments Receive and sends information's Connections and exploration		10

As represented in table 2, the entire ten participants indicated that, they are conversant with social media. Facebook, WhatsApp, Wikipedia, YouTube and WeChat are almost use by the entire participant. LinkedIn, Line, Skype and twitter is also used by some of the participants. The entire ten participants admitted that they have been using social media in their academic work. *Yes, I use them, I am conversant with social media, I mostly use Facebook, WeChat, Whats App and YouTube* were what participant mostly used when describing the kind of social media they use.

i. *Class schedules*

Most of the participants claimed they receive class schedule and other work schedules through various platforms. Participant 2: stated

> Time table, class schedule, venue and time of classes are mostly disseminated via WeChat. There are times the TA will update us on a change of venue of a class session
>
> In one of my core courses, lessons and topics to be taught are mostly posted on WeChat to keeps us inform ahead of time, also when there is a class presentation, the order is been posted on our WeChat group and it makes things easier. (Participant 6)

Almost all the participant mentioned Facebook WeChat WhatsApp and YouTube, however one participant (participant 7) pointed out that she quit using Facebook when he started school in China. She stated:

> I used to be on Facebook during my undergraduate studies, because we had a class page as a platform of discussions after every lecture, but I quit when I arrived in BNU.Lately I have discovered WeChat and LinkedIn and I have being making good use of them because there they are very popular in china. Most of my class schedules and relevant information's pertaining to classes are being communicated through WeChat.

ii. *Discussion and assignments*

Some of the participant affirmed that they use social media as a medium of discussion and working on their assignments.

Participant 3 a world economy student who mostly uses Skype stated:

> I used social media a lot, WeChat and WhatsApp has been part of my life on campus here in BNU. But I would say Skype is on top because I have a friend I skype with in Hong Kong who is reading economic, I would say he is my study partner because he assist me in my assignments and final papers, he even assisted me in coming up with my thesis topic.

Participant 5 a comparative education student stated:

> I use them, I usually use Imo and Facebook but right now I am in china so I use WeChat with my class mates, especially I communicate a lot with my best friend on WeChat concerning my assignment. We discuss our assignment together even in late hours in our various closets.
>
> For me WeChat is the medium of communications between my supervisor and I, I remember when he was out of campus we were still in contact and he was given me directions as to how to go about with my thesis proposal. (Participant 4)

iii. *Receive and sends information*

Entirely all the ten respondent asserted that social media has been a medium of receiving and sending information in their school life

Participant 1 stated that:

> Yes but not too much, I receive information from a group chart that has been created for our Chinese language class that we usually post and receive information and also share our ideas and problems with the TA for assistance.
>
> Okay some of my classmate forwards articles on our WeChat class page for other to read, some also sends websites and links concerning academic conferences and other professional document on our page. (Participant 3)

Participant 5 further stated that

> It is not only on WeChat I also make use of YouTube a lot and sometimes too Wikipedia, I watch videos lessons on YouTube most especially explanations of theories by others that has been uploaded on YouTube. I get access to information's too on Wikipedia; I remember I was able

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to retrieve information on HIV/AIDS in Africa through Wikipedia.

iv. *Connections and exploration*

Participant 10

With how I use social media, I would say I use LinkedIn basically for connections; I connect with people who share the same interest in terms of educations and jobs on LinkedIn after reading their profile.

I explore social media for professional connections, meet new friends, intellectuals ones as a matter of fact, I explore their ambitions, aspirations and their interest and try to follow them up as role models. (Participant 8)

b) Research question 2: To what extent has social media help enhance student academic performance?

In order to answer this question also, respondents were asked whether they believe social can enhance their learning, and to what extent has social help in their academic life and finally they were asked to rate social media with regards to their academic life whether it is "good or bad". Most of the ten participants emphatically responded "yes" to the question "do you believe social media can enhance your learning"? However, on the whole social media was rated by all the participants as being good with regards to their academic work. But as to how social media has enhanced their academic performance, participants 1stated:

Yes I believe that, because sometimes we have discussions on certain matters concerning certain topics that have been given in class, for e.g. I have joined two groups that were formed basically for our assignments; because knowledge does not rest in one person's head. we have discussion through WeChat. Even since I started my study in china I have been using social media to get access to information and assistance form my classmates.

On WhatsApp and Facebook sometimes I get the chance to discuss with my friends some of the topics and some of the things I don't understand, we sometimes share our ideas together and help each other to gain understanding of pertinent issues; I would say I have been benefiting from social media a lot. (Participant 5)

I for my part I believe in group work because two heads are better that one , so in using social media I get a lot of ideas and information from the people am dealing with. (Participant 10)

Another respondent (participant 7) also asserted that aside using WeChat as a medium of a discussion on campus here she also uses Imo. She stated:

You know, when I first arrived in BNU, I didn't have too many friends, even choosing courses was conflicting but with the help of Imo, I talked to my brother who is a lecture in Haiti and he gave me the needed assistance. Mostly all my research works and final papers, I discuss them over with my brother who gives me advice and directions. so you see without this Imo, school life would have been tougher even though it had not been easy but it better with social media.

Other respondent gave responses that were not directly accepting the notion that social media can enhance their academic performance but rather a two edge sword something, they emphasized on the issue of privacy and personal space. A female participant stated:

This is a two way something, it could and could not, with it helping my academic I believe that when I get the chance to discuss issues that I don't understand with my friends or with my tutors it gives me the chance to understand the more and then sometimes too social media can act as a form of distraction and sometimes too infringes on my private life because everyone else in the class see every post and every moves that you make especially with Facebook, there are times I will log in to Facebook and before I realized oh my heaven I have exhausted all my time. (Participant 3)

Even though I don't necessarily see social media directly assisting in my academic work but to some extent it does, because after a long day of work and studying I resort to social media like Facebook, WeChat and WhatsApp to refresh my mind, release some tension and get my senses back on track to carry on with my academic work. There are times I even pick vocabularies and other statements from people's posts to enrich my write ups. (Participant 6)

A Female higher education student also pointed out that she cannot rely on social media in term of her academic performance. She stated:

For me this WeChat and Facebook thing is doing me more harm than good, because I see myself to misuse social media a lot, I spend a lot of time charting with my friends and family member on either WhatsApp, Facebook or even WeChat, much of my time spent on these platform are never related to my academic work. I even recommended WeChat to some of my friends back home so you can draw the line. I sometimes too don't get along with social media because I don't have a personal space in terms of social media everything about me is been watched. (Participant 2)

Participant 8 on the other hand gave an impressions by stating emphatically that social media has not enhance his academic life.

Just as I said, I mostly use social to explore my world of friends and social connections I get hook ups with new people, share pictures, videos and the likes, I don't really use social media in my academic works as far as I am concern. (Participant 8)

V. Discussions, Summary and Conclusions

a) Discussions

The study findings demonstrate how social media is being used by students of higher institutions and the significant influences and contributions it has on

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students' academic lives. Based on the findings you realized that students are conversant and familiar with social media most importantly social network. Just as (Gurman 2015) said: "social media zips through our campuses" somewhere in the literature, Social network has dominated with regards to the use of social media among students. Social networks such as Facebook, WeChat, WhatsApp, and LinkedIn are mostly use by all the students.

In general students uses social media as a platform of discussions for their assignment and other course work, they gets feeds on class schedules, class venues, receives and sends information's among their peers, explore issues related to their course work and a host of others. This have supports form (Boyd and Ellison 2007) idea that social media allow people identify other users with whom they have a connection, read and react to postings made by them on the site, and send and receive messages either privately or publicly.

Looking at the number of responses, and making an inference from the literature, the study can validate that social media provides students a new mechanism for a familiar exercise. It provides students a direct medium by which to publicly evaluate and comment on their campus environments, institutional policies, classes, professors, and administration and fellow students in real-time. Social medial can therefore be associated with an increased tendency for young people to multitask, to rely on a digital juggling of daily activities and commitments as asserted by (Subrahmanyam and Šmahel, 2011). However, the possible threats associated with social are too great, because student engaging in a private relationship outside the classroom circles begs for inappropriate behavior to commence (Gurman 2015).

b) Summary and conclusion

This study focused on the impact of social media on student academic life in higher education. After studying the phenomena that are of interest to the study, and transcribing the various responses of the participants, even though some of the responses were not transcribed because they were all communicating same idea, the results reveals that social media is widely used by students of higher institution. At least every student makes use of one social media. Moreover, data revealed that, participant are in support of the idea that social media contribute a significant quota to the development of their academic life.

c) Limitation of the study

The limitation of this study is the number of participants involved since only 10 students were randomly assigned to participate in this study. Even though detailed information is collected using face-to-face interviews, the concentration should also be on the quantity of the participants. The result of the study is rather limited in a sense that an all-inclusive re-presentation cannot be obtained from such a small group. A greater number would have increase validity.

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Appendix

Interview guide

1. What are you currently studying?

a) How do students use social media?

2. Are you conversant with social media?
3. Which social media are you conversant with and which one do you use most?
4. Do you use social media in your academic life?
5. How do you use social media in your academic life?

b) How has social media supported your learning / academic life

6. To what extent has social media supported your learning /academic life?
7. Do you have any challenges associated with social media?
8. How would you rate social media in terms of your academic life good or bad?

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