

Students' engagement with social media: A case study at Komenda College of education

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Abstract

This study sought to determine how students of Komenda College of Education in the Central Region of Ghana use social media. The motivation of the study was to find out the extent to which students use them, the reasons why they use them and whether social media is having a positive impact or otherwise on students. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select respondents. A total of 160 students took part in the study. Structured questionnaires were used to collect data from respondents. The study revealed that majority of the respondents (97.5 %) use social media. It was also found that, students use social media for a variety of reasons including, but not limited to the following: 1) to keep in touch with family and friends, to share information among themselves, and to keep abreast with both local and international current affairs among other things. Most respondents however indicated that they do not use social media for pornography, hacking and cybercrime.

Keywords: social media, family and friends, Komenda College of Education (Komenco), mobile phone

1. Introduction

Social media is interactive form of media which allows users to send text, pictures, videos and other forms of media to each other on the internet. It provides opportunities for people to share opinions, insights, experiences and perspectives in a two-way communication process. Apart from exchange of ideas and skills, it also allows instantaneous and spontaneous response and reactions from the users (Degadgor, 2010) ^[10]. Interactivity is what differentiates social media from the traditional forms of media like radio, television and newspapers which usually does not allow users to get feedback from the media. McQuail (2010) ^[23] differentiates social media from the traditional mass media when he noted that "traditional mass communication was essentially one-directional, while the new forms of communication are essentially interactive." This interactive aura of the new media confers an unprecedented popularity on them. Many students in many nations of the world use social media in a number of ways. Laird and Kuh (2005) ^[21] found that students use information technology regularly in both their academic and personal lives. However, students use social media more than other course related technologies because they are already familiar with the features and settings (Appel, 2012) ^[3].

There are many social networking services on the internet; a cursory look around will reveal that Facebook, Whatsapp, Twitter, Instagram, Viber, Imo and a few others are the popular social media platforms among Ghanaians. Students use social media for a variety of reasons; to connect with their family and friends, to read the news, to connect old classmates via group chats etc. Annetta et al, 2009 ^[2] argues that students who participate in social media as part of a class feel more connected to their peers than those students who do not participate in them. Tomai et al. (2010) ^[26] also found that students who use social media felt more emotionally connected to their peers because they felt as though they had people to talk to if they had a problem or if they needed help. Further, these peer connections encouraged participation by

students who initially felt intimidated by in-class discussions (Arnold & Paulus 2010) ^[4].

1.1 Statement of Problem

The use of social media is a growing trend not only in Ghana but around the entire world. Ghanaian students are not left out with this "new media explosion". Social media are used in both positive and negative ways by students. Baran (2010) ^[5] argues that "technology can be used in ways beneficial and otherwise. Technology is a double-edged sword, its power for good and for bad resides in the users." Social media could be used in ways that would enrich the lives of students or be an impediment to their academic work. It is for this reason that the study seeks to find out: 1) the extent to which students of Komenda College of Education use social media 2) the reasons why students of Komenda College of Education use social media and 3) whether social media is having a positive impact or otherwise on the lives of students.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are to find out: 1) the extent to which students of Komenda College of Education use social media 2) the reasons why these students use social media and 3) whether social media is having a positive impact or otherwise on students.

1.3 Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study: 1) to what extent do students of Komenda College of Education use social media? 2) Why do Komenda College of Education students use social media? 3) Is social media having a positive or negative impact on students?

2. Review of Related Literature

"Social networking sites are web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom

they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system". These sites are used to interact with friends, peers and others that are found in groups on these sites. The sharing of information ranges from news, debates, gossips, feelings or statement of mind, opinions, research etc. (Boyd & Ellison, 2007) ^[7]. People of all backgrounds use social media, the predominant group being students and young people. Some researchers have found that students' use of social media increases their academic performance. Junco (2011) ^[18], asserts that the use of social media in academic coursework can increase the learning achieved by an individual student. Students who participate in coursework that utilize social media demonstrate an increase in overall GPA when compared with students who do not participate in social media.

The use of social media by teachers for teaching and learning is an area still under research. Fewkes & McCabe (2012) ^[13] found that while some educators have found ways to include social media into their lessons, other educators are not utilizing social media for instructional purposes. Arnold and Paulus (2010) ^[4] found that even when social media is used for an educational purpose, students incorporate the technology into their lives in a way that may differ from the intentions of the course instructor. For example, off-topic or non-academic discussions occur on social media because of its primary design as a social networking tool (Lin et al., 2013) ^[22]. Teachers' incorporation of social networking into teaching and learning poses a challenge because most teachers, especially in the first and second cycle schools in Ghana are not using computers in their teaching and learning. Korsah (2012) ^[20] noted that business studies teachers in senior high schools are not using ICT applications and the internet in innovative ways to enhance their work. The integration of social media into teaching and learning then becomes an uphill task because most teachers are not conversant with the use of basic computer software and the internet.

There is a debate on whether or not academics should use social media for academic work. While some academics frown on the use of social media for formal academic discourses others advocates its use because of its popularity among young people and students. Those against the formal use of social media by academics argue that posting one's work on social media may be considered a risky practice because of the loss of control that eventuates (Beer 2013b) ^[6]. Consequently, academic reward systems have been slow to acknowledge the work that academics devote to social media outputs (Graham 2013 ^[15], Gruzd *et al.* 2011 ^[16], Kirkup 2010) ^[19]. Some research suggests reluctance on the part of academics to use platforms like Facebook either for personal or work reasons (Roblyer *et al.* 2010) ^[25]. A number of academics have been censured by their universities for what is viewed as inappropriate social media use or specific comments they have made or have been threatened with legal action (Gruzd *et al.* 2012) ^[17]. Advocates argue that there are so many tools on social media which if well managed can be of great benefit to both students and teachers. The following are some of the ways social media are being used innovatively by some academics:

Aggregating images and information to share with classmates or with interest groups

One early adopter was University of Southern California's

Andrew Lih, who, long before he and many others knew Pinterest would become a blockbuster, introduced it to online students in an entrepreneurial class to gather what he called a "mood board" for a project on public art. Lih explained that the students took advantage of Pinterest's easy-to-use clipping approach to create a densely packed visual scrapbook of public and street art to identify themes that would have easily been missed had they gathered individual photos in a folder (Glenn, 2012) ^[14].

Gathering and sharing data collected with mobile devices during field work or travel abroad.

Some academics use social media to collect and share information to their audience. For example, Professor Margaret Rubega uses Twitter for data collection and sharing in her Ecology and Evolutionary Biology class at the University of Connecticut (Brien, 2012) ^[8].

Creating a public profile to showcase personal research interests and to connect with a broad audience.

For example, Mark Anthony Neal in Duke University's African & African American Studies department uses a blog, Twitter, Facebook and other media to share his work with the public, while Misha Angrist in Duke's Institute for Genome Sciences and Public Policy is a regular contributor to the Public Library of Science blog. When MITx launched its open-access course in Spring 2012, it also provided an MITx Facebook page where instructors gather feedback from students and attract public attention to their new course model (Glenn, 2012) ^[14].

Using Twitter in class to keep students engaged and to get a sense of what students are thinking about during lectures.

Examples: Prof. Monica Rankin and students at University of Texas at Dallas created a video to show their use of Twitter in a large history course. Prof. Mark Sample at George Mason University offers a number of ways to use a Twitter backchannel to analyze a film with students (Brien, 2012) ^[8]. Clearly, these and other creative use of social media could greatly improve teaching and learning.

3. Methodology

The survey design was used for the study. This research method was chosen because the research was essentially to solicit information from students on how they use social media. The population for the study comprise of the entire Diploma in Basic Education (DBE) students of Komenda College of Education (Year 1-3). This excludes the sandwich students of the college. The entire DBE students of Komenda College are One Thousand Two Hundred and One (1,201).

3.1 Sampling

Stratified random sampling was used to sample first and second years for the study. Third year students were not on campus at the time of the study because they were on the out-segment of the in-in-out program; they were therefore exempted. The strata are as follows: General students, Math-Tech students, Science-Math students and Science-Tech students. With the help of the random number generator, forty students each were drawn from each stratum. In all, a total of 160 students were sampled for the study. Structured

questionnaires were used for data collection. The questionnaires were adapted from a similar study on how South-Eastern Nigerian students use social media. To ensure that the researcher will have access to most of the students, the questionnaires were given to each of the classes immediately after lectures. All the 160 copies of the questionnaires were returned. The questionnaires were made available to an expert in the area of mass media communication research to assess its face and construct validity.

3.2 Method of Data Analysis

Statistical Product for Service Solution, version 22 was used to analyse data. Mean and the Standard Deviation were found for each of the items on the questionnaires. The following benchmark was used on the questionnaire to solicit information: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Strongly Disagree (SD) Disagree (D) and Undecided (U). The options on the questionnaire are assigned values as follows: SA=4, A=3, SD=2, D=1, U=0. To get the Mean cut-off point = $(SA+A+SD+D+U) \div 5$, i.e. $(4+3+2+1+0) \div 5$; therefore, the mean cut-off point = $(10) \div 5 = 2$

To get the standard deviation cut-off point;

$$\begin{aligned} \text{St. De} &= \sqrt{[\sum(x-\bar{X})^2 / (n-1)]} \\ &= \sqrt{[(4-2)^2 + (3-2)^2 + (2-2)^2 + (1-2)^2 + (0-2)^2 / (5-1)]} \\ &= \sqrt{[(2^2 + 1^2 + 0^2 + 1^2 + 2^2) / 4]} = (4+1+0+1+4) / 4 \end{aligned}$$

Therefore the standard deviation cut-off point is $\sqrt{(10 \div 4)} = \sqrt{2.5} = 1.58$

4. Presentation of Results

Items 1, 2, 3 and 4 on the questionnaire were framed to answer research question 1: To what extent is social media used among Komenda College of Education students?

Questionnaire item 1: Do you use Social Media?

This question was asked to find out how many Komenda College students use social media. The data provided is presented in the graph below:

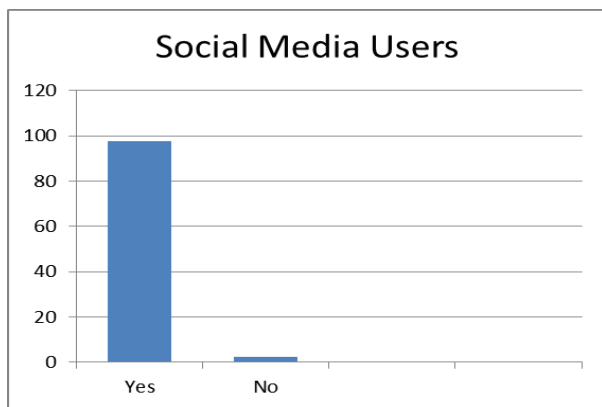


Fig 1

Figure 1 illustrates the number of Komenda College of Education students who use social media. It could be seen that 97.5% of the students answered “Yes” to this question while 2.5% answered “No”. This means that majority of the students use social media. This finding is consistent with a research by Pew Research Center (2015) [24] which stated that young adults have consistently been the heaviest users of social media by a substantial margin, and today... a staggering 90% of them use social media.

Questionnaire Item 2: Which device do you use to access social media?

This question was asked to ascertain whether apart from mobile phones, students use other devices to access social media. The result is presented in the chart below:

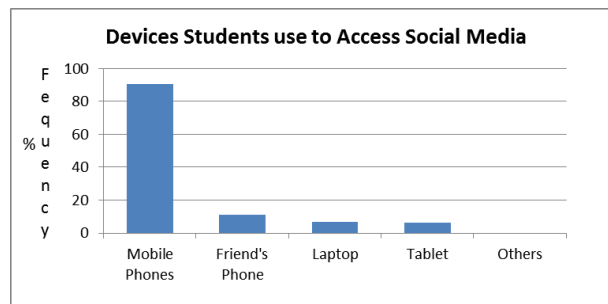


Fig 2: Devices that Students use to access Social Media

Figure 2 shows the various devices that students use to access social media. The results show that the vast majority (90.6%) of Komenda College students use their personal mobile phones to access social media. A few others use their friends’ phone (11.2%), laptops (6.9%) and tablets (9.2%) to join social media. A similar study on internet access in Ghana found that mobile phones are the most used device to access the web all the time in Ghana with smartphones leading in the category of phones used (Adasa & Carlo, 2015). [1]

Questionnaire item 3: Which social media service(s) do you use?

This question was to ascertain the predominant social media services that Komenda College students patronise. The data provided is presented in figure 3 as shown below:

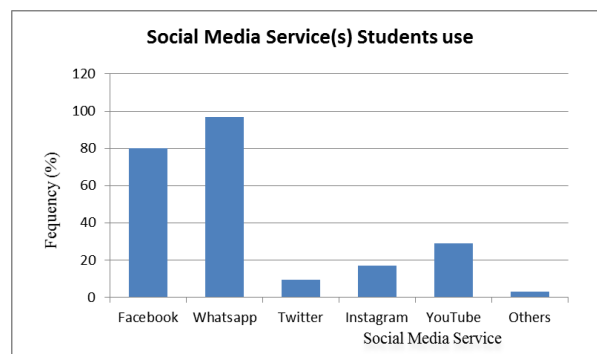


Fig 3: Social Media Service(s) Komenda College Students use

Figure 3 illustrates the various social media service(s) that students of Komenda College use. The results show that majority of the students use Whatsapp (96.9%), followed by Facebook (80%), Twitter (9.4%), Instagram (16.9%). Other less known platforms such as Imo, Tango, Kik and Viber occupied 3.1%. The result of the study therefore confirms the findings of the study conducted by Yeboah and Ewur (2014). Yeboah and Ewur (2014) reported that Whatsapp is the major social media service that students use for chatting.

Questionnaire Item 4: On the average, how many hours do you spend on social media in a day?

This question was asked to find out how much time students spend on social media in a day. The results are presented in the chart below:

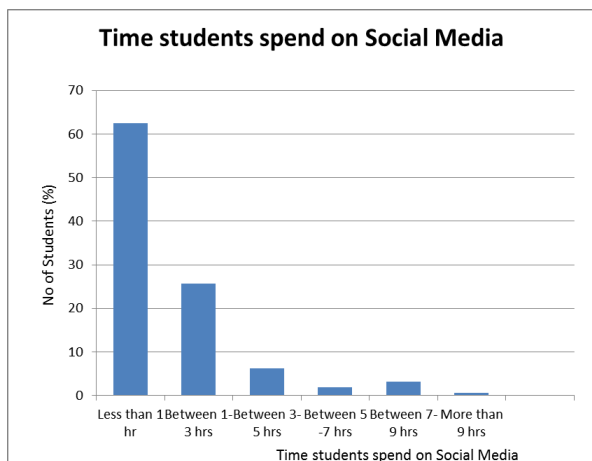


Fig 4: Time that Students Spend on Social Media

Figure 4 illustrates the amount of time that students spend on social media in a day. The result show that most Komenda College students (62.5%) spend less than an hour a day on various social media platforms. This contrast a similar study reported on CNN, which noted that “On any given day, teens in the United States spend about nine hours using social media for their enjoyment” (Wallace, 2015). To answer Research Question One, majority of Komenda College students use social media and most of them spend less than an hour a day using them.

Research Question 2: For what purposes do Komenda College students use the social media?

The items on the table below containing items 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 provided answers to research question 2. The table and the analyses of the contents are presented below.

Table 1: Items used in Research Question Two

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD	U	Mean	St.De	Decision
5	Komenco students use social media because they want to be in touch with their families and friends	69	75	12	3	1	3.30	0.74	Yes
6	Komenco students use social media because they want to be informed about current issues related to academic work like change in lecture time etc.	65	69	17	6	3	3.17	0.90	Yes
7	Komenco students use social media to contact tutors for further clarification on lessons and other academic-related issues	31	72	40	12	5	2.7	0.97	Yes
8	Komenco students use social media because they want to be informed about current national and international issues	1	83	65	5	6	3.42	0.73	Yes
9	Komenco students use social media because they want to be entertained	46	87	18	8	1	3.06	0.81	Yes

Questionnaire Item 5

“Komenco students use social media because they want to be in touch with their families and friends”. The responses have a mean of 3.30, which is above the mean cut off point for the study, thus the decision “Yes” on the table. The responses have a standard deviation of 0.74 which is less than the standard deviation cut off point, which means there is a high variability between the respondents who accepted it and those who rejected it. A similar research has shown that social media is a convenient means of communication which provides the ability to stay connected with friends and family at the discretion of the users’ own rate and time (Urista, Dong, & Day, 2009) [27].

Questionnaire Item 6

Komenco students use social media because they want to be informed about current issues related to academic work like change in lecture time etc. The responses have a mean of 3.17, which is above the mean cut off point for the study, thus the decision “Yes” on the table. The responses have a standard deviation of 0.90 which is less than the standard deviation cut off point, which means there is a high variability between the respondents who accepted it and those who rejected it. Ezeah, Asogwa & Obiorah, 2013 [12] found that South-Eastern Nigerian students chat on social media even at lecture halls.

Questionnaire Item 7

I use social media to contact tutors for further clarification on lessons and other academic-related issues. The responses have a mean of 2.7 which is below the mean cut-off point for the study, thus the decision “Yes” on the table. The responses

have a standard deviation of 0.97 which is more than the standard deviation cut-off point, which means there is a high variability between the respondents who accepted it and those who rejected it. Capelouto (2015) [9] noted that “upwards of 40 percent of university students use social media to stay in touch with university tutors and lecturers.

Questionnaire Item 8

Komenco students use social media because they want to be informed about current national and international issues. The responses have a mean of 3.42, which is above the mean cut off point for the study, thus the decision “Yes” on the table. The responses have a standard deviation of 0.73 which is less than the standard deviation cut off point, which means there is a high variability between the respondents who accepted it and those who rejected it. A similar study showed that South-Eastern Nigerian students use social media to for discussion on serious national issues like politics, economy and religious matters (Ezeah, Asgwa & Obiorah, 2013) [12].

Questionnaire Item 9

Komenco students use social media because they want to be entertained. The responses have a mean of 3.06, which is above the mean cut off point for the study, thus the decision “Yes” on the table. The responses have a standard deviation of 0.81 which is less than the standard deviation cut off point, which means there is a high variability between the respondents who accepted it and those who rejected it. Ezeah, Asogwa & Obiorah (2013) [12] showed that students in South Eastern Nigeria use social media for entertainment especially on YouTube.

To answer research question 2, students of Komenda College use social media for varied reasons including obtaining information about lectures, for general information about national and international issues and for entertainment.

Research Question 3: Is social media having a positive or negative impact on the students?

The items on the table below containing items 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15 provided answers to research question 3. The table and the analyses of the contents are presented below.

Table 2: Items used in Research Question Three

S/N	Item	SA	A	D	SD	U	Mean	St. De	Decision
10	Social media helps me to study	70	73	14	3	0	3.31	0.71	Yes
11	I have online friends on social media who help me with difficult assignments	33	73	33	17	4	2.71	0.99	Yes
12	I use social media to engage in pornography, hacking and cybercrime etc.	4	13	32	104	7	1.39	0.80	No
13	Social media is a distraction to my life; I will like to reduce the time I spend there	28	73	34	22	3	2.63	0.99	Yes
14	The use of shorthand typing on social media is affecting my spelling and grammar.	42	55	42	19	2	2.72	1.02	Yes
15	Social media has an overall positive impact on my life	32	84	26	13	5	2.78	0.97	Yes

Questionnaire item 10

Social media helps me to study. The responses have a mean of 3.31 which is above the mean cut-off point for the study, thus the decision “Yes” on the table. The responses have a standard deviation of 0.71 which is less than the standard deviation cut-off point, which means there is a high variability between the respondents who accepted it and those who rejected it. Ezeah, Asogwa & Oboirah, (2013) ^[12] found that social media per se have some good academic contents but the student-users apply them in negative directions.

Questionnaire item 11

I have online friends on social media who help me with difficult assignments. The responses have a mean of 2.71 which is below the mean cut-off point for the study, thus the decision “Yes” on the table. The responses have a standard deviation of 0.99 which is less than the standard deviation cut-off point, which means there is a high variability between the respondents who accepted it and those who rejected it. This contrasts a similar study conducted in South-Eastern Nigeria which found that most Nigerian students leave campus to contact their social media friends but not for academic purposes (Ezeah, Asogwa & Oboirah, 2013) ^[12].

Questionnaire item 12

I use social media to engage in pornography, hacking and cybercrime etc. The responses have a mean of 1.39 which is below the mean cut-off point for the study, thus the decision “No” on the table. The responses have a standard deviation of 0.80 which is less than the standard deviation cut-off point, which means there is a high variability between the respondents who accepted it and those who rejected it. This contradicts the findings of Ezeah, Asogwa & Oboirah, (2013) ^[12] who found that students use social media to expose themselves to pornography.

Questionnaire item 13

Social media is a distraction to my life; I will like to reduce the time I spend there. The responses have a mean of 2.63 which is above the mean cut-off point for the study, thus the decision “Yes” on the table. The responses have a standard deviation of 0.99 which is less than the standard deviation cut-off point, which means there is a high variability between the respondents who accepted it and those who rejected it. A similar study reported on CNN noted that “On any given day, teens in the United States spend about nine hours using media for their enjoyment” (Wallace, 2015) ^[28].

Questionnaire item 14

The use of shorthand typing on social media is affecting my spelling and grammar. The responses have a mean of 2.72 which is above the mean cut-off point for the study, thus the decision “Yes” on the table. The responses have a standard deviation of 1.02 which is less than the standard deviation cut-off point, which means there is a high variability between the respondents who accepted it and those who rejected it. A similar study conducted at Takoradi Polytechnic noted that most students feel lazy typing most sentences and words and retire to the short hand form of typing. This style of writing destroys the students’ spellings and grammatical construction of sentences. For example, words like ‘forward, come, tomorrow, goodnight’ and others are being written as ‘4wrdr, kam, 2mrw, and gud9t etc. (Yeboah & Ewur 2014) ^[29].

Questionnaire item 15

Social media has an overall positive impact on my life. The responses have a mean of 2.78, which is above the mean cut off point for the study, thus the decision “Yes” on the table. The responses have a standard deviation of 0.97 which is less than the standard deviation cut off point, which means there is a high variability between the respondents who accepted it and those who rejected it. Dunn (2011) ^[11] noted that social media has increased the rate and quality of collaboration for students. To answer research question 3, social media has an overall positive impact on students’ life however, some students admitted that the use of social media having certain harmful influences such as messing up their spellings and grammar.

5. Conclusion

The following are the findings of the study:

1. Most Komenda College students use social media; averagely they spend less than an hour a day using them.
2. Most students use social media to discuss national issues, to contact tutors on academic-related issues and for entertainment; the vast majority of the respondents however said they do not use them to indulge in pornography, hacking and cybercrime.
3. Most students said that social media is having an overall positive impact on their lives.

5.1 Recommendations for Policy and Practice

1. Tutors should be encouraged to increase their use of the various social media platforms to connect to students i.e. for supervising project works and sending important notices to students on academic related issues.

2. Access to “non-academic” social media sites should be restricted on the college network during lecture hours in order to discourage the use of social media by students during lecture periods.
3. Students should be encouraged to use the correct spelling and grammar when participating in social media.

5.2 Suggestions for Further Research

To further extend the literature on the use of social media by students, the following recommendations for further studies are made:

1. Further research should be conducted on how social media influences the academic life of students.
2. Further research should be done to find out how tutors at colleges of education are exploring various social media platforms for teaching and learning.
3. A research should be conducted to find out the influence of short-hand typing on the spelling and grammar of students.

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