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Influence of social networking sites on students’ academic and social lives: The Ghanaian Perspective.

Nasir Koranteng Asiedu
University for Development Studies, Ghana, nasmo2005@yahoo.com

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Influence of social networking sites on students’ academic and social lives: The Ghanaian Perspective.

ABSTRACT

This study investigates and analyses the positive and negative effects of social media on students’ academic and social lives. With the adoption of survey methodology, 204 students from University of Ghana and Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology were randomly selected to participate in this study. The results of this study indicate that the positive effects of social media outweigh its negative counterpart hence, students should not be entirely discouraged from visiting social media sites.

Among the following are some of the positive and negative effects of social media revealed in the study; the ability to seek the views of course mates on a certain topic at the comfort of their rooms, the opportunity to make more friends than in real life and the ability to be able to participate in group discussions were found to be the positive effects of social media on students in both institutions while reduction in the level of concentration in class, wasting of valuable time that could have been used to study, reduction in physical interaction (face-to-face interaction) and the promotion of shorthand writing which has the ability to affect the writing of good grammar were also found to be the negative effects of social media usage on students in both institutions.

Keywords

Academic, Social lives, Social networking sites, University of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology
Introduction

Social media as a concept has been variously defined. One of such definitions describes it as a multi-purpose platform and a web-based technology which has the ability to allow the sharing of videos, text, sound and images in a more collaborative and interactive manner (Kaplan and Haelein, 2010).

Indeed, the introduction of social media in this digital era has really enhanced interactions and communication globally. The dependence and reliance on social media sites by people across the globe in their day-to-day activities make it necessary for researchers to always find out more about the effects of these sites on users. Although people across all ages depend or rely on social media sites, it is well understood and captured in literature that students over rely on this tool in their social engagements. For instance, literature indicates that students spend several hours on social media sites everyday as part of their daily activities (Refuel, 2013 & Yazdanfar & Aghili, 2012)

Unarguably, it is also known that the advent of handheld devices especially smartphones have contributed immensely towards the frequent and rapid usage of these social media sites by students. This, however could be attributed to the convenience nature the devices have presented to users especially students in their visit to social media sites (Campus Quad, 2014).

It is believed that the emergence of social networking sites like Facebook has received a lot of attention and patronage by all ages across the world but significantly people around college or university going age are mostly found on this social network. Valenzuela, Park & Kee’s study (2008) attest to this claim as it was found that students between the ages of 18-29 years have accounts on facebook and use the online network daily.
On the hand, the emergence of instant messaging sites like WhatsApp, snapchat, twitter, Instagram and the rest have all contributed and still play a key role either positively or negatively on students’ academic and social lives (Campus Quad, 2014)

As much as these sites have effects on students, they also pose some challenges. However, preliminary investigations conducted by the researcher in both Universities disclosed that notwithstanding the effects that social media poses on the students social and academic lives, they still can’t desist from visiting these social media platforms. This revealing information makes it necessary to probe further and find out more the kind of effects these social networking sites have on students.

**Literature review**

A study conducted in the United States on college women’s engagement in social media revealed that high usage of social media among college women negatively affects their grades (Davis 2013). The study also revealed that in a day, students spend 12 hours on social media sites. Charlene Li et. al., (2007) also indicated that students visit social networking sites every day or even more.

A study conducted in India which adopted the survey approach on the usage of social networking sites among college students came out that majority of students spend between one to ten hours on social networking sites weekly (Manjunatha, 2013).

Social media has enhanced social networking activities among students. This has made it possible for people to communicate with one another notwithstanding the age barrier. With the emergence of social media sites, people would rather text or even email than to meet in person or face-to-face with one another (Keller, 2013).
In a survey study conducted by Baym, Zhang & Lin. (2004) on social interactions of college students across all media, 51 participants were randomly selected to partake in the study. Among the results of the study was that majority of the students’ preferred face-to-face interaction whilst few preferred making social contacts through the internet. On the contrary, Bargh & Mckenna (2004) asserted that students prefer communicating to friends online more than in person or face-to-face.

A different study conducted disclosed that social media allows collaborative learning to take place among students where students do not have to be only in the classroom to be able to share ideas on their courses (Chen & Bryer, 2012). Heafner & Friedman (2008) supports this assertion by indicating that social media ensures and provides opportunity for students to freely engage in discussions.

A survey conducted by Ellison, Steinfeld & Lampe (2007) proved that students use social networking sites 30 minutes within the day as part of their normal activities. Students on the other hand also spend between one to two hours daily on the internet (Yazdanfar & Aghili, 2012). Wang, Chen & Liang (2011) did a survey involving 48 participants made up of 22 females and 26 males, randomly selected. The results of this study indicated that students spend over six to eight hours daily on social media sites. The results further revealed that the least number of hours students spend on social networking sites was two hours.

Sheldon (2008) concluded in a study that students visit social networking sites several times in a day. Junco, Helbergert &Loken (2011) conducted a study which adopted the survey strategy. 2,368 students were randomly selected to participate in the study. The study found that students who participate in discussions on social media obtain high grades as compared to those who are not on social media. Annette et al, (2009) also gave an indication that the amount of time
students spend on social media sites networking can negatively affect their grades. Similarly, Hurt et. al, (2012) indicated that social media has the potential of distracting students from concentrating on their course works at school.

A study conducted by Faculty Focus (2009) revealed that students spend over 31 minutes on social networking sites every day. According to the same study students who are heavy users of social networking sites spend over 60 minutes daily networking with friends.

On the other hand, the effects of internet and social media usage over the years have received mixed results. A study conducted by Anderson (2001) showed that increased usage of social media would result in a decrease in social engagements whilst a study conducted by Campbell, Cummings & Huges (2006) revealed that increased usage of the social media would rather cause an increment in social engagement.

In Africa, a study conducted on the effects of social media on students revealed that students have more friends on social networking sites than in real life and they are able to express themselves very well on social media platforms especially in the case of students who are shy. Students also attested that social media has affected the way they write because of the shorthand or short form they use when they are on the social media platforms. Furthermore, the same study indicated that majority of the students agreed that because of social media they are not able to even have full concentration on their studies (Ededegbe, 2013).

Oche (2010) contends that students in Nigeria see social media to be one of the ways that allow group discussions to take place which also give students the opportunity to freely share their views and thoughts. Moreover, a study which was conducted in South Africa revealed that students engage in online activities for about 16 hours within a day (Walter et al., 2012).
Furthermore, Onyeka, Sajoh & Dalhatu (2013) indicated in a survey study that students in tertiary institutions in Mubi and Adamawa state, Nigeria, revealed that frequent use of social media has no effect on their academic performance. A’lamElhuda & Dimetry (2014) conducted a research on medical students at Khartoum University, Sudan on the topic; Impact of facebook and other social networks usage on academic performance and social life among medical students. The research was a cross-sectional study which involved 275 medical students. Simple random sampling technique was used in the selection of the students to participate in the study. The results of this research showed that there is relationship between students’ social media usage and their academic performance and that students’ continuous use of social media negatively has the potential of affecting their academic performance. Their research also revealed that students agreed that they visit social networking sites when lectures are in progress and unarguably accepted that social networking sites reduce their level of concentration in class and at the laboratory as well.

In Ghana, Sarpong (2014) reported that social media has affected the way English is written and even spelt. In the same report, it was also revealed that many educationist believe that social media has affected English grammar and correct spelling of words.

Aforo (2014) opines that social media is of great importance to students but it also affects their academic performance negatively. According to Internet Users Population and Facebook statistics for Africa 2012, the number of internet users in Ghana by the end of June, 2012 was 3,568,757 representing 14.1%. Facebook users in Ghana as of 2012 were 1,630,420. Ghanaian youth spend lots of hours on social media sites due to the high level of internet penetration in the country when compared to previous years (Amoah-Darkwah, 2014).
**Research methodology**

This study made use of the survey methodology. With this, a total of 204 students majoring in Sociology were proportionately sampled from both institutions to participate in the study. The 5 point Likert scale was also adopted to rate students’ view on the topic. 30% of the total population of the Sociology students (679) was used in this study. The table below gives a summary of the sample sizes for both institutions.

To get the proportionate sample sizes for both Universities, this formula was used:

\[ P.S = \frac{\text{Number of final year Sociology students in each school}}{\text{Total number of Sociology students in both schools}} \times 204 \]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>UG</th>
<th>KNUST</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td>428/679×204=129</td>
<td>251/679×204=75</td>
<td>129+75=204</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data collection**

The researcher sought the assistance of the course representatives from both institutions in the collection of the questionnaire from the students.

Out of the 204 questionnaires that were sent out to solicit for subjects' views, 197 were retrieved representing a response rate of 97%.
Analysis and Findings

The demographic and background characteristics of the respondents included in this study are gender and age. The following tables display the characteristics of the respondents.

Table 2: Gender of respondents in both institutions

Respondents were asked to indicate their gender and the results are shown in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>KNUST</th>
<th>UG</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>N=204</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of Students</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Number of students</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>47.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>63.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: field data, 2015

The Table shows that 42.1% of those who responded to the questionnaire in Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology and University of Ghana were males whilst 57.9% who answered the questionnaire were females. This implies that there were more female respondents than male respondents.
Effects of social media on students

Positive and negative implications

Subjects were asked to indicate by answering either Yes or No whether in their opinion they saw social media as having both positive and negative implications or not. This question was asked to seek confirmation from the students on how in their own perspective they viewed social media. The results are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3: Responses on whether social media has positive and negative implications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do social media contain both positive and negative implications?</th>
<th>KNUST</th>
<th>UG</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Total percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>63 (32.0%)</td>
<td>107 (54.3%)</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>86.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>5 (2.5%)</td>
<td>22 (11.2%)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the Table, 170 respondents representing 86.3% answered Yes. Thus in their opinion social media has both positive and negative implications. On the other hand, a total of 27 (13.7%) respondents answered No, indicating that social media has no good side and bad side. The possible explanation for majority of the respondents who answered Yes is that, it shows that they are aware of the good and bad side of social media whilst the most likely explanation for those who answered No is that they may just be passive users of social media sites and so haven’t taken notice of the good and bad side of social media.
The bottom line of this is that majority of the respondents from the two Universities accept that social media has both positive and negative implications.

**Effects of social media on students’ academic and social life**

After indicating that social media has both positive and negative implications, subjects were asked to indicate some of positive and negative implications of social media on their academic and social lives on campus. Table 4 present the views of the respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATEMENTS</th>
<th>RESULTS FROM KNUST AND UG</th>
<th>N=204</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>STRONGLY AGREE NEUTRAL DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE</strong></td>
<td><strong>AGREE</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media usage has increased the rate at which students participate in class group discussions</td>
<td>47(23.9%)</td>
<td>51(25.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating in group discussions on social media platforms has helped in improving my understanding of certain topics that are taught in class</td>
<td>37(18.8%)</td>
<td>74(37.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media makes learning easy for me because I can easily seek the views of my course mates and other friends on a particular topic at the comfort of my room</td>
<td>72(36.5%)</td>
<td>72(36.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media usage has the ability to distract and reduce the level of concentration in class</td>
<td>110(55.8%)</td>
<td>54(27.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media usage promotes the use of shorthand writing which intend has the ability to affect the writing of good grammar</td>
<td>97(49.2%)</td>
<td>57(28.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media usage has the ability to negatively affect grades</td>
<td>45(22.8%)</td>
<td>55(27.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media allow people to make more friends than in real life</td>
<td>72(36.5%)</td>
<td>74(37.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media usage has the potential of wasting valuable time that could have been used to study</td>
<td>70(35.5%)</td>
<td>76(38.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media allow introverts to easily participate on group platforms</td>
<td>64(32.5%)</td>
<td>92(46.7%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
On a scale of 1-5 (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree) where one is strongly agree and five is strongly disagree respondents from both institutions were asked to share their views and indicate on how much they agreed or disagreed on various statements regarding effects of social media on students.

“Social media usage has increased the rate at which students participate in class group discussions”. The results gathered from the respondents on this statement showed that 49.8% (23.9% strongly agree and 25.9% agree) agreed to the statement whilst a small proportion of the respondents 25.4% disagreed (12.2% disagree and 13.2% strongly disagreed). 24.8% of the respondents also remained neutral to this particular statement. The result from the analysis shows that slender majority of respondents shared a similar view that social media usage has increased their rate of participating in class group discussions.

Respondents from both institutions were also asked to indicate the extent they agreed or disagreed to the statement, “Participating in group discussions on social media platforms has helped in improving my understanding of certain topics that are taught in class”. The breakdown of the results revealed that 56.4% respondents agreed to the statement (18.8% strongly agreed and 37.6% agreed) whilst 26.4% disagreed (16.8% disagreed and 9.6% strongly disagreed). 17.2% of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed to this statement. The above outcome implies that majority of the respondents were in support of the statement.

“Social media makes learning easy for me because I can easily seek the views of my course mates and other friends on a particular topic at the comfort of my room”. This question was posed to the respondents to seek their opinion. The results indicate that 73% of the respondents
across cases agreed to the statement (36.5% strongly agreed and 36.5% agreed) whereas 9.7%
disagreed (5.1% disagreed and 4.6% strongly disagreed). 17.3% of the respondents chose to
remain neutral to this statement. On the whole, the results show that majority of the respondents
are in full agreement with this statement.

Again, the opinions of the subjects were sought on the statement, “Social media usage has the
ability to distract and reduce the level of concentration in class”. The results revealed that 164
respondents across cases forming a percentage of (84.2%) agreed to the statement whilst 20
respondents also forming a percentage of (10.2%) disagreed. Finally, 13 respondents forming a
percentage of (5.6%) opted to remain neutral to this statement.

“Social media usage promotes the use of shorthand writing which intend has the ability to affect
the writing of good grammar”. With this statement, 78.1% respondents across institutions agreed
(49.2% strongly agreed and 28.9% agreed) whereas 11.2% respondents disagreed (4.1%
disagreed and 7.1% strongly disagreed). It was also revealed that 10.7% respondents neither
agreed nor disagreed to this statement. This result confirms that a significant number of the
respondents were of the same view that social media usage promotes the use of shorthand
writing which also has the ability to affect the writing of good grammar.

The study on the other hand also sought the views of subjects on the statement “Social media
usage has the ability to negatively affect grades”. The results across institutions showed that half
the number of the respondents agreed to this statement with a response rate of 50.7% (22.8%
strongly agreed and 27.9% agreed) while few of the respondents 20.3% disagreed (10.7%
disagreed and 9.6% strongly disagreed). 29.0% respondents also decided not to agree nor
disagree to this statement.
“Social media allow people to make more friends than outside the social media world” was part of the questions that were asked. The response rate for this question revealed that 74.1% (36.5% strongly agreed and 37.6% agreed) respondents agreed and accepted this statement to be true. In the light of this huge acceptance by majority of the respondents from the two institutions, the study still witnessed 10.2% of the respondents disagreeing to the statement (6.1% disagreed and 4.1% strongly disagreed). 15.7% respondents also preferred to remain neutral to this statement.

“Social media usage has the potential of wasting valuable time that could have been used to study”. With this statement, majority of the respondents 74.1% agreed (35.5% strongly agreed and 38.6% agreed) whilst 13.7% of the respondents disagreed (7.1% disagreed and 6.6% strongly disagreed). 12.2% respondents indicated that they are neither in favour of this statement nor against it.

Respondents were asked to express their views on the statement, “Social media allow introverts to easily participate on group platforms”. The results that were gathered across institutions revealed that significant number of the respondents 79.2% agreed to this assertion (32.5% strongly agree and 46.7% agree) whilst 10.2% of the respondents disagreed (6.1% disagree and 4.1% strongly disagree). It came to the fore that 10.6% respondents neither agreed nor disagreed to this statement.

Finally, respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement, “Social media usage has the power to reduce the level of physical interaction (face-to-face)”. Results gathered from the respondents across institutions showed that 76.1% agreed (35.5% strongly agreed and 40.6% agreed) while 9.6% of the respondents disagreed (5.1% disagreed and 4.6% strongly disagreed). 14.3% respondents chose not to agree nor disagree to this statement.
The responses that were gathered across institutions clearly indicate that respondents are aware of the positive and negative effects that social media exerts on their academic and social lives. The following positive and negative implications of social media usage by students were therefore deduced from the analysis.

Positive implications of social media deduced from the analysis:

➢ It increases the rate at which students participate in group discussions
➢ Participating in group discussions on social media platforms helps in improving the understanding of certain topics that are taught in class.
➢ Social media makes learning easy because students can easily seek the views of their course mates and other friends on a particular topic at the comfort of their rooms
➢ Social media makes it possible for introverts to easily participate on group platforms
➢ Social media gives people the opportunity to make more friends than in real life

Negative implications of social media deduced from the analysis:

➢ It causes distractions and reduces the level of concentration in class
➢ Social media usage waste valuable time that could have been used to study
➢ Social media usage reduces the level of physical interaction (face-to-face interaction)
➢ Social media usage promotes the use of shorthand writing which intend affects the writing of good grammar.

Discussion

Effect simply deals with change that arises as a result of an action. Change on the other hand could either be positive or negative. Social media which is known to be a very influential
communication tool has brought a lot of changes in the academic and social lives of students in so many ways.

However, this study found out that students are aware of the positive and negative implications of social media. In spite of this, they attested that one of the positive effects of social media usage on their academic lives is that, it has increased their rate of participating in group discussions and thus contributed to their understanding of certain topics that are taught in class. This attestation from the students showed how wrongly it would be for an individual to quickly judge the relevance of social media in learning or in education as a whole. Based on this evidence, it could easily be deduced that with the help of social media students who are within campus and outside campus are able to hold discussions on various social media platforms. In the light of this, Heafner & Friedman (2008) asserted that social media ensures and at the same time provides opportunity for students to freely engage in discussions.

Another positive effect of social media students strongly agreed to was that it has made learning easy for them to the extent that they can easily seek the views of their course mates and other friends on a certain topic at the comfort of their rooms. This revelation by the students clearly shows that there are no boundaries or restrictions in social media use. People could be reached wherever they are and information could also be sought with ease. This result corroborates Chen & Bryer’s (2012) study. They indicated that social media allows what we call collaborative learning to take place where students in particular do not have to be in the classroom only before they can share ideas on their courses.

One positive effect of social media on social life of students that was revealed in this study was that, social media has made it possible for introverts to easily participate on group platforms and has also given students the opportunity to make more friends than in real life. Ededegbe (2013)
clearly indicated that students have more friends on social networking sites than in real life and they are able to express themselves freely on social media platforms. This shows the extent to which social media has impacted on the lives of people who are shy and find it difficult to openly share their views. Making friends on social media is the one of the most interesting aspect of this tool because it makes life so easy to the extent that one could be a friend to many people as he/she wants and luckily for students making friends on social media sites easily leads to the sharing of academic ideas.

However, the findings of this study revealed the following negative implications of social media use on students.

Firstly, it was found that social media distracts and reduces the level of concentration in class. This as a result renders the students incapable of paying attention in class and as indicated in Hurt et. al’s (2012) study social media has the potential of distracting students from concentrating on their course works at school. A’lamElhuda & Dimetry (2014) also added that medical students at Khartoum University, Sudan, visit social networking sites while lectures are in progress and this reduces their level of concentration in class and the laboratory as well. In as much as social media helps students in their academic activities, it also has its bad side which can cause some challenges for students by not allowing them to follow what is being taught in class.

Unfortunately, it was found that valuable time that could have been used to study by the students is wasted on social media sites. This shows that so much time is spent on social media sites by students at the expense of their academic work. When this happens the most likely outcome may only be that students grades could negatively be affected (Annette et. al, 2009).
This study found out that, social media usage reduces the level of physical interaction (face-to-face interaction). The most likely explanation for this could be attributed to the instant feedback people receive by using social media. With this, one does not need to always have a physical interaction with others because communication could conveniently take place on a digital platform. In a way, this has made people lazy particularly students whom majority were born around this digital age prefer to communicate online to having a physical interaction. In an African environment like Ghana where face to face interactions have always been the order of the day, the high acceptance of this powerful tool by the young adults has led to a decline in the normal way of life of the African where communication was purposely based on a face to face interaction. This result corroborates Bargh & Mckenna (2004) previous study on social media which brought to the limelight that students prefer to communicate with friends online to communicating in person. Keller also (2013) revealed that with the emergence of social media people would rather prefer to text or send an email than to meet in person.

One major finding of the study that came up not surprisingly was that social media usage promotes the use of shorthand writing which in turn has the ability to affect the writing of good grammar. Social media upon its emergence has indeed affected the way English is written especially among young adults as indicated by this study. It could even be possible that this behaviour is taken to examination halls where students are likely to produce answers to examination questions in shorthand. It is as a result of this same anomaly that prompted Sarpong’s (2014) recent study on social media. He however, reported that social media has affected the way English is written and spelt.

According to the findings of this study students in Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology spend more than 6 hours on social media sites as part of their day-to-day activities
whilst students in University of Ghana spend 2-3 hours. The major difference with this result is that students in Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology spend a lot of time on social media sites as compared to students in University of Ghana. The most possible explanation for this could be that, students in Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology rely so much on social media sites in their day-to-day activities than students in University of Ghana. However, this could also be attributed to the fact that students in Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology are so much addicted to the use of social media sites than students in University of Ghana. This same finding later disclosed that on the average students from both institutions spend at least thirty minutes to one hour on social media sites. This result shows how much students are into this new communication tools and therefore behave as if their whole lives depend on them. For example, Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe (2007), Sheldon (2008) and Faculty Focus (2009) shared similar views in their various studies on social media and indicated that students visit social media sites several times in a day and spend 30 minutes and over on the platform as part of their normal daily activities.

**Conclusion**

In Africa, particularly Ghana, social media usage according to past studies and the findings of this study, the youth who form majority of University going age have really come to accept this new technology and as a result visit these sites several times within a day. In as much as social media usage has its own challenges and effects, the findings of this study have also indicated that students get pleasure from using the tool and so they should not be discouraged from using it especially on campus because its benefits on their academic and social lives especially on campus override its negative counterpart. For instance, students indicated in this study that with the coming of social media they have been able to freely participate in group discussions and
they have also been able to seek the help of their course mates on a particular topic at the comfort of their rooms.

Social media usage in academic environments should be promoted because it contributes to the easy sharing of information between off-campus students and those who stay on campus. All these revelations in the study show that social media usage indeed contains mixed blessings to students.

References


