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**ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS ON STUDENTS
LEARNING ACTIVITIES IN THE UNIVERSITY OF GHANA AMIDST COVID-19**

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Abstract

The study investigated the impact of social media platforms on students learning activities among distance learning students of the University of Ghana amidst COVID-19. The study was based on the following objectives; to find out some of the devices used in accessing social media platforms, to ascertain the dominant reasons for using social media by distance learning students, to assess the impact of social media platforms on students' academic activities and to found out the challenges in the use of some social media platforms. The study made use of a survey approach and a questionnaire was used to gather data for the study. A sample size of 158 respondents was used, representing (20%) of the total population (790). The findings of the study were that, even though amongst the devices used in accessing social media platforms are iPad, Pocket Computers, Laptops, and Smartphones, the most used is the smartphone. Also, the study found a decrease in students' learning academic activities as it serves as destruction. Further, it was revealed that, the most occurring challenge faced by students when in use of social media platforms is the issue of privacy concerns. Per the findings obtained, the study made several recommendations, amongst which include: introduction of sustained education on the benefit of social media by school authorities, and the negatives in the use of social media, and effective ways of utilizing available social media tools to enhance their academic activities especially amidst of COVID-19.

Keywords: Mobile learning, Smartphones, Undergraduate, Distance Education, University of Ghana.

1.1 Introduction

Since the last few decades, technology, the most adopted means of communication by individuals especially the millennials or the youth is the social media platforms, that have been made available due to the immense growth of technology. The term media was however derived from the Latin word ‘Medium’ and is defined as one of the main routes, channels, or instruments for communication and/or entertainment (Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus, 2009). This definition, therefore, broadens the general scope and regard for the concept of media. Insight of this, the radio, television, newspapers, magazines, together with the internet have been jointly regarded by many as the ‘media’. The word socio is also a Latin word; socius, which is referred to as ‘friend’. According to Collins English Dictionary (2016), it refers to “things relating to human societies, communities, or groups of persons living together or doing things together”. Also, socius can be viewed as “relating to or involving activities in which people spend time talking to each other or doing enjoyable things with each other” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online, 2016).

Having both “Socius and Medium’, Latin Words, we could, therefore, generate the definition of social media to be the interaction amongst individuals in which they create, share, and/or exchange ideas and information in virtual societies and networks (Ahlqvist et al., 2008; Asare-Donkoh, 2018). The presence of these social media platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter have therefore helped to connect people both afar and near together through the exchange of text, photos, music, videos, and much more. Comparatively, with the old means of communicating with people within and outside our environs, social media has reduced the communication barriers that used to exist through technological development as new mediums are being developed to connect worldwide audiences. The use of social media platforms as a tool for educational purposes has been acknowledged by researchers (Buhari, 2014; Ansari & Khan, 2020).

Amongst the benefits of social media platforms is that, it enhances communication amongst students and instructors; helps students to get access to course materials; increases chances for networking among students; facilitates speedy sharing of resources; exposes students to skills and technologies that may improve their employment opportunities (Asare-Donkoh, 2018). Though social media usage can span a varied range of feasible activities, the majority of the youths and teenager's population which is the constituent of the student population in the University of Ghana use it for mainly social interacting. In reference to research conducted, it was estimated that more than ninety percent (90%) of university students (undergraduates) utilize social media platforms (Mehboob, 2012).

This development has therefore risen major concern in this era of massive technological advancements as social media sites are becoming more updated and popular amongst the students of the University of Ghana. The concern has therefore been whether or not the usage of these social media platforms has an impact on the academic performance of undergraduate students of the University of Ghana. The question has since remained that, what is the impact of social media on students' academic performance? In light of this, the objective of the study is to assess the impact of social media on the academic performance of undergraduate students of the University of Ghana.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

What is of much need to both parents and lecturers of the University of Ghana is the academic success of their students. It is in this regard they will front the support of all means that will contribute to the academic success of their students significantly. Amongst the approved means to

facilitate the academic progress of students include the usage of social media platforms, which have been acknowledged by authors (Buhari, 2014). Bennett (2008) is also an example of a study that proposed that using social media can enhance students' academic performance.

Contrary to the assertions of the benefits of social media by the above educators, a study conducted by Maya (2015) revealed that the use of social media contributes to poor academic performance, lower self-image, and less interest in college-oriented issues. Thus, a majority of academic failures can be attributed to the massive usage of social media. Moving forward, other studies posit that the usage of social media tends to affect strongly the ability of students to express themselves in English, either in writing or speaking; the use of short- handwriting to chat with friends and families subsequently becomes a habit thereby reproducing the same mistakes during examinations (Obi, Bulus, Adamu and Sala'at, 2012). The development of these inconsistencies has therefore left unclear in the minds of many parents as to what role social media plays as a contributory factor in students' performance on campus (Ansari & Khan, 2020).

Also, several research with regards to the impact of social media on the academic performance of students has been done globally, such as that undertaken by Mowafy (2018) on Nile University Students, but few have been done in Africa, especially in Ghana (Asare-Donkoh, 2018). More of these researches conducted also focus on the use of social media but few on the impact on distance learning students. Again, as the world is experiencing the new normal due to COVID-19 where most learning activities are done online, it is very imperative to found out how social media is affecting students learning activities (Sahni & Sharma, 2020). It is in this regards the researcher of this study sought to contribute significantly to the already existing literature by clearly zooming in the impact and the level of the impact social media has on the academic performance of distance learning students in the University of Ghana.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of this study are:

1. To ascertain the dominant reasons for using social media by undergraduate students in the University of Ghana.
2. To assess the influence of social media sites on students' academic performance in the University of Ghana
3. To find out some of the challenges in the usage of some social media platforms.

1.4 Conceptual Framework

This study adopted the Shikawa model, often called the fishbone diagram. This is a model developed by the Kaoru Ishikawa that demonstrates the origins/causes of a specific event (Talaue, 2018). It also helps sought ideas into useful categories.

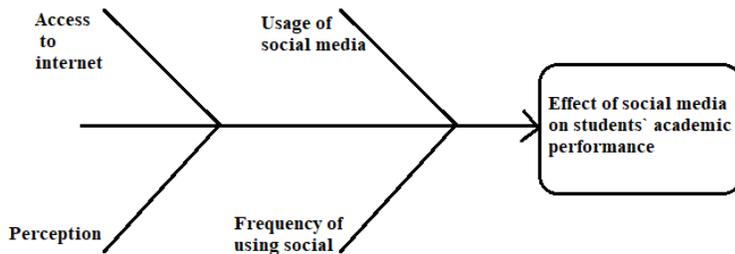


Figure 1.0: Conceptual Framework of the Study

From figure 1.0, it can clearly be seen that amongst the elements of social media that impede students' smooth academic performance include students' perception of social media, access to the internet, students' frequency on the usage of social media, and the usage of social media. With the aid of the diagram, social media was analyzed with regard to its impact on students' academic performance.

2.1 Literature review

The collective understanding of a reader can only be catered for if the researcher or the scholar reviews the previous works which have been done under the topic, appreciates them, weighs the strengths and weaknesses (Deepa & Priya, 2020).

2.1.1 The Concept of Social Media

A lot of studies have been done concerning the use of social media, and this has resulted in a variety of definitions of the term; social media. What this means is, there is no definite definition for social media. However, tracing the development of social media is dated back to Bruce and Susan Abelson's Open Diary (20 years ago), an early social networking platform that brought together online journal writers into a single community (Asare-Donkoh, 2018). When Open Diary was founded, the name social media was alternated with the term 'weblog'. The name was later changed to 'blog'.

The advancement in technology and the availability of great speed internet access, therefore, facilitated the fame of the concept which eventually led to the development of social networking sites such as Facebook in 2004 and Myspace in 2003 (Deepa & Priya, 2020). This brought out the term Social Media, which is now widely known. Associated concepts with social media are Web 1.0 and Web 2.0. Web 1.0 consists of personal online web pages, content publishing content publishing, and Encyclopaedia Britannica Online. It was however replaced in 2004, with Web 2.0, also called World Wide Web (www) - "a platform whereby content and applications are no longer created and published by individuals, but instead are continuously modified by all users in a participatory and collaborative fashion" (Kaplan, 2010).

Web 2.0 is a sites for the advancement of social media that represents “the ideological and technological foundation - User Generated Content (UGC), regarded as the totality of ways through which people use social media” (Kaplan, 2010). Social media in that regard became very popular in the years 2005, as it was used to describe the diverse forms of media contents that are created by users which are publicly available. Amongst the social media platforms used in creating and sharing media content are Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter, and Tumblr.

With the importance of social media, it is thus no surprise that numerous individuals around the globe, including youth specifically students, make use of it (Asare-Donkoh, 2018). Research indicates that approximately 250 million people utilize Facebook every day, with Twitter having fifteen million users sending sixty-five million messages every day (Asare-Donkoh, 2018). On YouTube, studies indicate that there are over two billion people who watch YouTube video clips daily while “24 hours of video content are uploaded every hour” (Research, 2011). Analyzing the data above is an indication that, most of the students that make use of the social media platform are undergraduate students. In that, at the undergraduate level, the majority of the students have access to smartphones and laptops with access to all social media platforms. Following the belief that social media has an impact on undergraduate students, the impact could either be positive or negative hence this study; to help assess the kind of impact the usage of social media has on undergraduate students.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), further classified social media platforms into six groups; Collaborative project (Wikipedia), Content communities (YouTube), Social networking sites (FB, 2go, BB chat), Blogs and microblogs (Twitter), Virtual game World (world of warcraft) and Virtual second world (second life). Find below in brief, the forms of social media adopted by Mowafy (2018).

Forms of social media

Social networking sites (SNS)

Social networking sites are sites whereby users create a profile to establish some connection with friends or other users, who have related experiences or interests (Sharma & Godiyal, 2016). The account contains the users' personal information. SNS provides specific ways for users to interrelate with themselves. Some examples of SNS include LinkedIn and Facebook.

Bookmarking sites

Services that allow users to search, save and organize links to several websites and Internet resources (Al Rasheed & Berri, 2014). Some services allow the tagging of links to enable their contents to be shared easily. Examples of bookmarking sites are Delicious and Diigo.

Micro Blogging Sites

These are services that merge SNS and blogging, however, messages interchanged are limited in size. Users have to subscribe to the services. An example of micro-blogging platforms also includes Twitter (Yazdanifard, Obeidy, Yusoff & Babaei, 2011).

Media Sharing Platforms

These are services that enable media users to upload and also share media content like photos and videos as well as offering users to tag and comment (Sharma & Godiyal, 2016). Some of the examples of media sharing platforms include; Flickr and YouTube (Yazdanifard, Obeidy, Yusoff & Babaei, 2011).

Social News Sites

These are services that enable other users to choose from news items and links, posted by other users. The articles that receive numerous votes are exhibited more frequently on the available site. Some examples of social news platforms include Reddit and Digg (Deepa & Priya, 2020).

Blogs and Forums

Blogs are similar to online diaries that allow individuals to post remarks on the blog (Yazdanifard, Obeidy, Yusoff & Babaei, 2011). Forums enable users to have chats with other users by posting messages. Some examples of blogging platforms include Blogger and WordPress.

Social media and Ghanaian Education

The introduction of social media has attracted several users from several countries across the globe. The wide usage of social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter resulted in the world being divided into both offline and online platforms (Yazdanifard, Obeidy, Yusoff & Babaei, 2011). Its existence connected people from afar and near together. A lot of relationships have been established amongst people in various settings. With the help of social media, students across different academic fields are able to communicate with each other, share lecture notes, read books and share images and videos across different countries (Asare-Donkoh, 2018).

Even though the creation of social media was for all countries, African countries at large were slow at getting used to the pace at which it was growing. This could be a result of Africans not getting themselves abrupt with current technological trends. In this regard, Ghana as an African country started accessing social media at a later period. However, it has managed to grow steadily

over a period of time. According to a report by the Ghana National Communication Authority-GNCA (2016), the “total mobile subscription has increased by 1.3% from 36,138,706 in the first quarter of 2016 to 36,613,987 at the end of the second quarter”. In this regard, the total number of data subscribers in Ghana has also increased significantly as a subscription for the second quarter of the year 2016 was over eighteen million-a massive rate of 67.7% (Asare-Donkoh, 2018).

What this means is, as technology advances in relation to an increase in the population spectrum of every country, there will be a relative increase in the access to the internet which includes social media platforms. The study was undertaken by Owusu and Agatha (2015), titled “use of social media and its impacts on academic performance of tertiary students” showed that the majority of students in Ghana were occupied with social networking sites. Further in the study, it was also revealed that users of the social media platforms use them for downloading and chatting purposes hence, affecting their academic performance negatively. Just as the findings of Mingle and Musah (2015), the findings of Owusu and Agatha (2015) also revealed that the majority of participants in their research experienced negative influences such as late submission of projects, poor grammar spelling, less study time, and subsequently poor academic performance. Even though some benefits with regards to the use of social media in various academic fields were highlighted, it is also important to highlight the negative effects of using social media in an academic setting.

3.1.2 Devices used in accessing social media platforms by distance undergraduate students

The wide usage of social media platforms has brought about the existence of a variety of technological tools that can be used to access social media platforms. These tools afford undergraduate students multiple options of accessing social media platforms, provided there is internet connectivity (Tokunaga, 2010).

To be able to identify some of the devices used by the distance undergraduate, the questionnaires presented to them entailed four dominant devices that can be used to access all social media platforms. These devices are; pocket computers, laptops, smartphones, and iPads. Responses from the respondents are to help draw a conclusion as to which of the devices is most used by distance undergraduate students in accessing the social media platforms (Hamade, 2013). A study conducted by Elsafi1 (2018) also made known some of the devices used in accessing social media platforms. These devices include laptops, pocket computers, iPads, and smartphones of various sizes (Areket , Okewole, Oguntunde, & Osilama, 2017).

3.1.3 The level of social media usage by distance undergraduate students.

Amongst the objectives of this study is the analysis of the level of usage of social media by undergraduate students. In order to obtain clear results with regards to this objective, the researcher of the study presented to the respondents a list of questionnaires to fill. With regard to this, the undergraduate students were given the opportunity to select from a group of answers; the period with which they have been using social networking platforms. However, some studies such as that conducted by Hamade (2013) revealed that fifteen percent of students open social media account once per day, and 7% of them open their profile a few times each week. Further on the obtained results were that 39% of the students spend three hours per day on social media sites, while 40% of the students spend ten hours on social media sites per week. A breakdown of the analysis is clearly a piece of evidence that most of the students make use of Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Orkut, LinkedIn, Imo, and many other social media platforms.

A study conducted by Kuzma & Wright (2013) to find out the level of social media usage also confirms the results obtained. The majority of people make use of social media platforms to the

point where they even feel no need to meet. Starting as a fad for many computer users, it has now graduated to become a norm and lifestyle for college students around the globe (Owusu-Acheaw & Larson, 2015).

Obtaining results from the respondents with regards to this objective would allow future researchers and students at large to get to know how frequently social media is been used by distance undergraduate students. Upon knowing the level of social media usage by distance undergraduate students, the reasons as to why they use the social media platforms would be sought for.

3.1.4 Dominant reasons for using social media by distance undergraduate students.

The reasons for students' social media usage varies, so amongst the options provided in the questionnaire are; the use of social media to make friends, the use of social media only to stay updated with trending issues, the use of social media to collaborate, and study with other friends and finally, the use of social media as a source of recreation and relaxation.

A study was recently conducted by Alsaif (2016) which also sought to investigate the impact of social media on students. From the study, it was obtained that the dominant reason for the use of social media is to socialize and make new friends. This was also confirmed by another study conducted by Zhong (2020) who sought to assess the implication study of social media literacy at school. The main reasons billions of students use social media networking platforms are to make friends and satisfy their social media needs.

3.1.5 The impact of social media on distance students' academic performance

A study was conducted by Ijeoma and Burke (2013), to determine the consequences and practical progress of social conduct and scholastic advancement of social media. The study showed that consistent use of social media can make the understudy turn into a possible social media addict thereby, low academic performance. Further results from the study revealed that social media has a bad impact on students, as it causes students to indulge in terrible slangs and also causes them to disregard folk educators and the laws in the general public. A study was also conducted by Mahas (2014) who contended that the usage of social media has an impact on student's privacy, as these social media networks consist of hackers ready to hack the personal information of students. They can damage the privacy contacts of students (Mahas , 2014).

3.1.6 Challenges in the use of some social media platforms by undergraduate students

There are some challenges that are likely to be faced in the use of social media platforms. Some of the challenges in that regard were listed in the questionnaires to allow the respondents to choose amongst the list of challenges, which is dominant in the use of social media platforms. Amongst the listed challenges are as follow:

Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying in the use of social media platforms has to do with the actions by either an authorized or unauthorized user to put a fellow user in an uncomfortable situation. Cyberbullying is defined as "any behavior performed through electronic or digital media by individuals or groups that repeatedly communicates hostile or aggressive messages intended to inflict harm or

discomfort on others” (Tokunaga, 2010). It is considered as one of the most very challenging problems mostly faced by social media users.

Online Harassment

This is another challenge faced by a majority of social media users. This could occur through the post of inappropriate pictures, videos, and audios. The rate at which people disseminate fake information is very high, and this calls for alarm (Samra, 2016). It is however very difficult to control such actions. This is because people are at liberty to post and say what they want over the internet.

Privacy concerns

Also, individuals’ private information is being shared in public, and malevolent people take advantage to commit all kinds of actions violating the rights of the victim. Sharing of other private information without their concern is an act of private concerns hence, must be managed diligently (Tokunaga, 2010).

Technological Challenges

Technological challenges are also one of the areas which demand much attention. These challenges are said to occur when the device used in accessing the social media platforms fails to respond. Technological challenges could also be; instability in the internet connectivity or, the social media platforms not responding as expected (Areket , Okewole, Oguntunde, & Osilama, 2017).

Even though these studies reveal the impact social media has on students, the conclusions are mostly limited to institutions outside Ghana. It is in this regard that the researchers of this study intends to contribute to the knowledge established by other researchers, by helping to clearly determine the kind of impact social media has on distance student`s academic performance in the University of Ghana.

3.1 Methodology

The survey method was adopted to undertake this research expedition. The subjects of this study were made up of the level 300 undergraduate students from the Department of Distance Education. The intent was that majority of the students make use of social media as a means of communicating with their peers, instructors, and tutors.

Table 1.0: Study Population

PROGRAMMES	TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS
Bachelor of Arts in Nursing	316
Bachelor of Science in Administration	224
Bachelor of Arts	199
Bachelor of Science in Information Technology	51
Total	790

Source: Field Data, 2020

With regards to the total number of students that is made up of the Department of Distance Education at the University of Ghana, the researcher made use of 158 students. According to

Maguenda & Maguenda (2003), an approximate sample should be between 10%-30% of the population of the study (Maguenda, 2003). Owing to the size of the sample frame, a twenty percent (20%) sample size was selected for the purposes of this study.

$$\text{Sample size of students} = \frac{20}{100} \times 790 = 158.$$

The researcher employed the convenience sampling technique to obtain the samples. The convenience sampling technique is a type of non-probability sampling technique whereby participants are selected based on their convenient availability (Acheampong, 2016). The choice of convenience sampling technique was fuelled by the fact that the distance learning students are busy and will be difficult to get them usually as a whole. Thus, whoever was present was considered for the study.

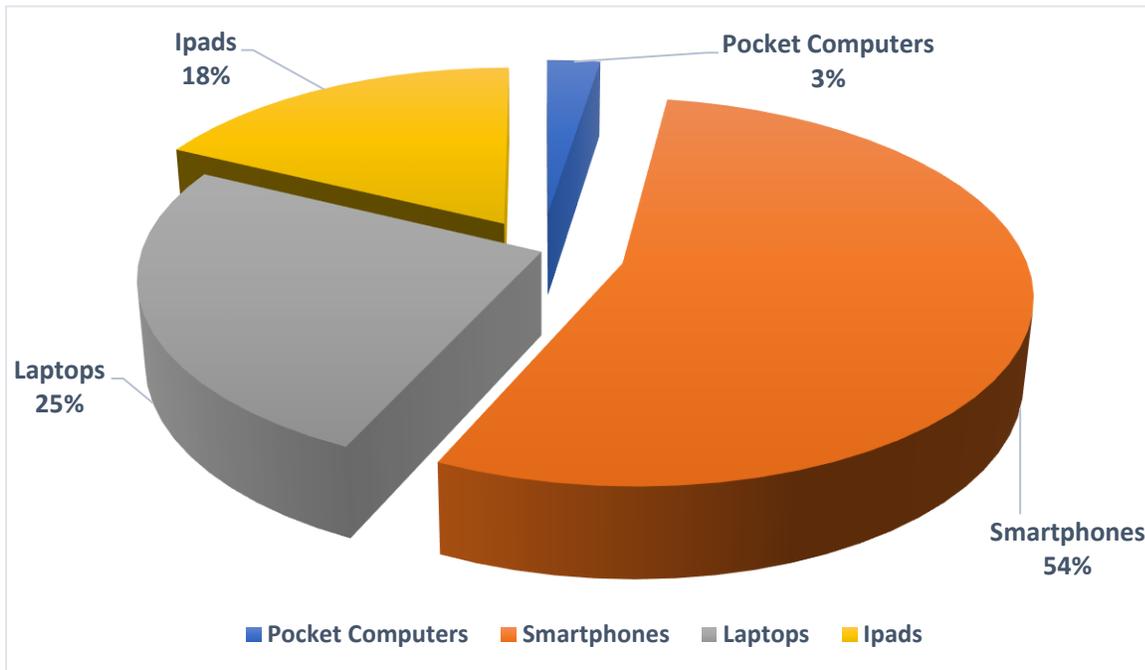
A questionnaire was the central research instrument. After the collection of the primary data from the target audience, the data obtained was imputed and computed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). With the use of the SPSS software, it is easier to define the variables, input data, and generate concise results that are easy to comprehend. The software facilitated the analysis by helping to generate frequency distribution tables and charts, measurement of central tendencies, and hypothesis testing (when necessary). Presentation of data analysis was done using tables, pie, and bar charts. In order to ensure easy identification and ratification of omitted items, completed questionnaires were numbered from 1-158.

4.1 Major Findings and Discussion.

3.1.1 Devices Used in Accessing Social Media Platforms

Amongst the specific objectives of the researcher was to find out some of the devices used in accessing the social media platforms, predominantly. This is shown in Figure 3.1

Figure 3.1 Frequently Used Devices in Accessing Social Media Platforms



Source: Primary Data 2020

From the results obtained from the analysis of the obtained data above, it was evident that amongst the devices used in accessing the social media platforms are; Pocket Computers, Smartphones, Laptops and iPads. However, the most dominant amongst the enlisted devices are smartphones. This is represented by eighty-six students (54.4%) being those who make use of smartphones in accessing the social media platforms, with a frequency of 86. This is directly followed by about forty respondents (25.3%) being those who access the social media platforms using laptops, with a frequency of 40, followed by twenty-eight participants (17.7%) representing those who make

use of the iPads in accessing the social media platforms, with a frequency of 28, whereas only four students (2.5%) were those who access the social media platforms using their pocket computers.

In view of this, the results obtained clearly brought out the fact that there are several devices that can be used in accessing social media platforms. However, the dominant amongst the devices used in accessing the social media platforms is the smartphone. Other identified devices used in accessing the social media platforms, in order of importance, are laptops, iPads, and pocket computers.

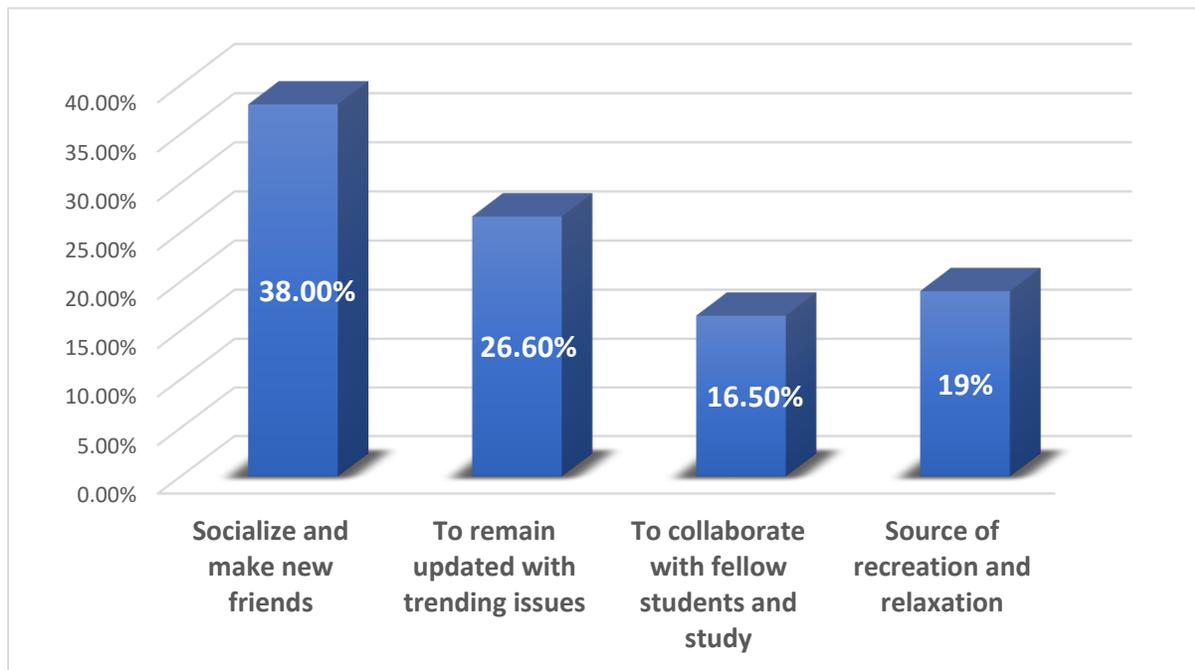
3.1.2 Reasons for Using Social Media

Another specific objective of this study was to determine amongst several reasons, the dominant amongst them, that which necessitates students' usage of the social media platforms. This is to help understand the essence of using the social media platforms by the undergraduate students in the University of Ghana. In view of this background, the researcher asked the respondents several questions in relation to why they use social media platforms. Amongst the reasons was a dominant reason; using social media to socialize and make new friends.

A breakdown of the respondents were that; sixty students (38%) were those who use the social media platforms to socialize and make new friends; followed by 42 respondents (26.6%) representing those who use the social media platforms in order to remain updated with trending issues. Twenty-six students (16.5%) used social media platforms to collaborate with fellow students, whereas thirty respondents (19%) represented those who use the social media platforms

as a source of relaxation and recreation. A presentation of this breakdown is shown in Figure 3.2 below.

Figure 3.2 Dominant Reason for Using Social Media Platforms



Source: Primary Data 2020

From the results obtained, the researcher found out that, the dominant reason for the usage of social media platforms is to socialize and make new friends. Further reasons, in order of importance, are; to remain updated with trending issues, to collaborate with fellow students and study, and to serve a source of relaxation and recreation. The findings from this study corroborate with that of Warren

(2013), Alsaif (2016) and Zhong (2020). Participants of these studies mentioned that their primary reasons for using social media was to socialize and connect with both new and old friends.

3.1.3 Impact of Social Media on Students Academic Activities

The researcher also sought to assess the influence of social media on academic activities. In light of that, the respondents were asked a couple of questions with respect to the influence of social media on the performance of students. Inferring from the responses obtained from the field, it was revealed that the major influence of social media on students` performance is the fact that, it decreases academic activities, followed by the fact that it helps students to access lecture materials online using their smartphones. What this means is, even though social media decreases the academic activities of students, which could be regarded as a negative impact, it also helps students to access lecture materials online using their smartphones anywhere at any time.

Per the core objectives of this study, the researcher sought to assess the impact social media has on students` academic activities as shown in Table 3.1

Table 3.1 Impact of Social Media on Academic Activities

Variables	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Social media makes it easy to obtain notifications from libraries.	150	1.00	5.00	3.59	1.023
Helps to accomplish my coursework more quickly.	150	1.00	5.00	3.84	1.685
Social media has decreased my academic activities.	150	4.00	5.00	4.86	.347
social media helps to gain extra skills and experiences outside the classroom.	150	1.00	5.00	4.44	.786
Helps to access lecture materials online with my smart phone anywhere and at any time	150	3.00	5.00	4.72	.676
Composite Score	150	2.00	5.00	4.29	0.9034

Source: Primary Data 2020

As part of the objective of this study, the researcher intended to find out whether or not social media makes it easy to obtain notifications from libraries. Upon analyzing the obtained data under this objective, it was found that the majority of the respondents were those who were mildly neutral to the fact that social media helps students to obtain notifications from libraries. This was given by Mean = 3.59, and Std. Deviation = 1.023.

The researcher also sought to find out whether or not the usage of social media helps students to accomplish their course work more quickly. From the responses, the majority of the respondents were those who mildly agree with the fact that social media helps students to accomplish their coursework more quickly. This was given by: Mean = 3.84, and St. Deviation = 1.685.

The researcher of the study also sought to find out whether or not the usage of social media decreases academic activities. From the analysis conducted on the obtained data, it was evident that the majority of the students were those who strongly agree to the fact that the usage of social media platforms decreases academic activities. This was therefore given by: Mean = 4.86, and St. Deviation = 0.347.

Further, the researcher also sought to find out whether or not using social media helps students to gain extra skills and experiences outside the classroom. Results obtained in that regard revealed that the majority of the students were those who agree to the fact that social media helps them to gain extra skills outside their classrooms. Thus, the use of social media helps them to acquire the practical of which is been taught to them in class. This was given by the mean: 4.44, and St. Deviation = 0.786.

Also, the researcher of the study sought to find out whether or not social media helps students to access lecture materials online anywhere and anytime. From the analysis conducted on the data obtained from the field, it was revealed that the majority of the students were those who agree to the fact that social media helps them to access lecture materials online anywhere and anytime. This was given by: Mean = 4.72, and St. Deviation = 0.676. See Table 4.3, below, for presentation.

Table 4.3 clearly indicates that all the outlined variables are the impacts of social media on academic activities as indicated by the mean composite score of 4.29. However, the dominant amongst them is the fact that social media decreases academic activities.

Per the analysis of the data obtained, it was found that even though the dominant impact of the usage of social media is the fact that, it decreases the academic activities of students, it also helps

students to access lecture materials online using their smartphone anywhere and at any time. In a study by Ijeoma and Burker (2013) and Owusu and Agatha (2015), students noted that social media platforms eased teaching and learning as it engaged them during the teaching and learning process, confirming this present study.

3.1.4 Challenges in the Use of Social Media Platforms

The researcher of the study also sought to find out some of the challenges students face when using social media platforms. In view of this, a number of challenges were enumerated just so the respondents will choose amongst the listed challenges, the dominant challenge faced by the students. From the analysis conducted on the data collected from the field, it can be inferred that the most dominant challenge faced by the students in the use of social media platforms is the issue of privacy concerns followed by technological challenges. This is shown in Table 3.2

Table 3.2 Challenges Faced in Using Social Media Platforms

VARIABLES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Cyberbullying	6	3.8
Online harassment	7	4.4
Privacy concerns	55	34.8
Technological Challenges	46	29.1
Loss of concentration in class	44	27.8
Total	158	99.9

Source: Primary Data 2020

A breakdown of the results obtained is that; fifty-five (34.8%) of the respondents were those who believe that the dominant challenge faced by students is the issue of privacy concerns, followed by forty-six (29.1%) of the respondents were those with the belief that technological problem is the next dominant challenge faced by students who make use of the social media platforms. Further, forty-four (27.8%), seven (4.4%), and six (3.8%) represented those who believe that the next dominant challenges faced by the students who use the social media platforms are loss of concentration, online harassment, and cyberbullying, respectively

From the results obtained from the analysis conducted, it is clearly evident that the dominant challenge faced by students is the issue of privacy concerns. Other identified challenges are cyberbullying, online harassment, privacy concerns, technology challenges, and loss of concentration. Similar to a study by Tokunaga (2010) and Zhong (2020), social media users admitted to being cyberbullied, verbally, and sexually abused. Others also mentioned that invasion of privacy was a primary source of concern for social media users (Areket, Okewole, Oguntunde & Osilama, 2017).

4.1 Conclusion and Recommendations

To draw down the curtains, this research expedition has shown the critical importance of assessing the impact social media has on students learning activities. Holistically, the study brought to bear that, the use of social media enhances students learning activities however when left unguided will leads to negative consequences. This is essential because knowing the impact would make the students realize the judicious ways of utilizing media to enhance their learning activities.

Specifically, the study revealed that the most used device in accessing social media platforms is the smartphone, as it is handy, and produces a friendlier user interface. The study also found that the distance learning students of the University of Ghana use social media platforms for several reasons. Amongst the reasons that necessitate their use of the social media platforms include; mingling and creating new networks, remaining updated with trending issues and important messages on academic activities such as information on assignments, lectures, library activities, and its collections. Also, to serve as a source of recreation and relaxation, and collaborating with fellow students for studies. However, the most dominant reason for student`s usage of social media platforms is socializing and making new friends. On the flip side, the use of social media is more intense amidst COVID-19 as it creates the platform for students to access different kinds of information online to meet their informational needs however it is lumbered with some challenges which include; online harassment, privacy concerns, and loss of concentration in class.

In view of the findings obtained for this, the following recommendations were made.

- i. Introduction of a sustained education on the benefit as well as drawbacks of social media by school authorities.
- ii. Introduction of effective use of social media in the curriculum activities by the Ministry of Education and Ghana Education Service.
- iii. Organizing seminars in various academic institutions to enlighten the students about the possible implication of the use of social media platforms on their academic performance.
- iv. Redirecting assignments and debates on social media sites to help increase their habit of relying on social media platforms for assignments, other than just to socialize and make new friends.

- v. Restricting students in accessing certain social media platforms when on campus to avoid distractions. The policy of restriction is very important because a majority of the social media platforms distract students` attention during hours of study.

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