

The effects of social networks on the academic performance of the Ghanaian student

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Abstract

The proliferation of Social Networking Sites (SNSs) has obviously had an effect on the academic performance of students. Historically, social network sites have progressed from the days of telegraphs to the current age of mobile devices. SNSs have taken the world and by extension Ghana by storm and are in no doubt becoming part and parcel of our everyday life. They are not only used purposely for communication but can also be used for other purposes such as education and finance. The main objective of this research paper is to analyze the effects of SNSs on the academic performance of students. In order to fulfill this objective and pursue the right information needed for an effective analysis, the researcher adopted quantitative research methodologies involving administration of questionnaires to (210) student of various university students using random sampling. The research study revealed that 54.8% of respondent agreed that social networking site has affected them since it has decreased their GPA. Secondly it revealed that 55.2% of respondent used more than three (3) social network sites. The researcher recommends that since social network has come to stay, it is prudent for student to use it judiciously.

Keywords: Social Networking Sites (SNSs), Internet, academic performance

1. Introduction

Social Network Sites (SNSs) have been a massive part in the daily lives of most Ghanaian students. Since their introduction, Social Network Sites (SNSs) have attracted millions of users all over the world. Technology have given us a great deal and helped us with our tasks and made everything easy. Social Network Sites like (Google+, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, WhatsApp, Myspace) has introduced many methods that can connect people easily. Social Network Sites had been a popular means to connect with other people over the Internet.

We define Social Network Sites as 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, view and navigate the list of connections made by others within the system. (Ellison & Doyd 2008). The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site. While we use the term 'Social Network Site' the two terms are often used interchangeably. (Ellison & Doyd 2008).

Nemetz, Aiken, Cooney and Pascal (2010) stated conclusively that students use Social Networking Sites frequently and extensively. The first popular Social Media Site, Six Degrees, was created in 1997. The site enabled its users to upload a profile and make friends with the other users (Hendricks, 2013). By 2006, Facebook and Twitter both became available to users throughout the world. These sites still remain as the most popular social network on the Internet. After the success of these Social Media Sites, other sites like orkut, whatsApp, LinkedIn and flicker began appearing to fill specific social network niches. Given the history of social media, there are still many social media sites appearing on the internet. The most famous social media site now is facebook. Facebook, which was invented by Mark Zuckerberg launched a website called “Thefacebook” on February 2004.

Social media has become a big part of all people. Nowadays, almost all people have social media accounts. Social media sites had been used in almost all areas from business markets to academics. Students have used social media sites as tools to help them upload lecture notes to groups and relay messages from teachers to their classmates. Social Media Sites especially, Facebook, enable people to interact with each other. Since it helps with almost everything from messaging to video calls, Social Media Site isn't as well-known as they were in the '90s. Considering these Social Media Sites around us, it only leaves us to question whether social media sites affect the students' grade and are social media sites an effective tool to boost a student's academic performance.

Statement of the problem

University students have great interest in social media. For this study, the definition advanced by Bryer and Zavatarro (2011, p. 327) will be used: “Social Media are technologies that facilitate social interaction, make possible collaboration, and enable deliberation across stakeholders. These technologies include blogs, wikis, media (audio, photo, video, text) sharing tools, networking platforms (including facebook), and virtual worlds.” Its use among university students can produce both positive and negative consequences, according to Nielsen Media Research study, in June 2010. Almost 25 percent of students' time on the Internet is now spent on social networking websites (Jacobsen, & Forste, 2011). Facebook is the most used social network by college students, followed by YouTube and Twitter. Moreover, Facebook alone reports that it now has 500 million active users, 50% of whom log on every day. In 2007, the number of students who used Facebook was already enormous: 92 percent of college students had an account. By 2008, 99 percent of students had an account on Facebook. That is quite a large amount considering the service was only opened in 2006 to everyone. Wang, Chen & Liang (2011).

The above literature shows that most of the users of the various Social Media Networks are students and mostly found online. Furthermore, the literature shows that much research has been dealt within the western world to seek the effects that social media networks has on students. The researchers in this effect wanted to add to the body of knowledge the effects of the various social media on the performance of students in Ghanaian tertiary institutions. Therefore this research seeks to determine how students in Ghanaian tertiary institutions use the Social Network Sites and its effects on their academic performance.

In order to achieve this broad objective, the following specific objectives will be considered;

- To identify the common social networks students use.
- To find out why students mostly use these social networks.

- To determine how often (number of hours) students visit these social network sites.
- To find out the effects of social network on student academic performance.

Research questions

The research is guided by the following questions:

- What are the common social networks that student use?
- Why do students mostly use these social networks?
- How often (number of hours) does students visit these social network sites?
- What effects do these social networks have on students' academic performance?

Significance

The result of the study will help researchers, lecturers, students to know the effects of these social network sites on academic performance.

1. Literature Review

History of social network

The first recognizable Social Network Site launched in 1997, 'Six Degrees.com' allowed users to create profiles, list their friends and surf the friends lists. Each of these features existed in some form before Six Degrees. Profiles existed on most major dating sites and many community sites. AIM and ICQ buddy lists supported lists of friends, although those friends were not visible to others. 'Classmates.com' allowed people to affiliate with their high school or college and surf the network for others who were also affiliated, but users could not create profiles or list friends until years later. 'Six Degrees' was the first to combine these features and promoted itself as a tool to help people connect with and send messages to others. While 'Six Degrees' attracted millions of users, it failed to become a sustainable business and, in 2000, the service closed. Looking back, its founder believes that 'Six Degrees' was simply ahead of its time (Weinreich, 2007).

However, while people were already flocking to the Internet, most did not have extended networks of friends who were online. Early adopters complained that there was little to do after accepting friend requests, and most users were not interested in meeting strangers. From 1997 to 2001, a number of community tools began supporting various combinations of profiles and publicly articulated friends. 'AsianAvenue', 'BlackPlanet', and 'MiGente' allowed users to create personal, professional, and dating profiles. Users could identify friends on their personal profiles without seeking approval for those connections (O. Wasow, personal communication, August 16, 2007). Likewise shortly after its launch in 1999, 'LiveJournal' listed one-directional connections on user pages. 'LiveJournal's' creator suspects that he fashioned these friends after instant messaging buddy lists (B. Fitzpatrick, personal communication, June 15, 2007)—on LiveJournal, people mark others as friends to follow their journals and manage privacy settings. The Korean virtual worlds site 'Cyworld' was started in 1999 and added SNS features in 2001, independent of these other sites (see Kim & Yun, this issue). Likewise, when the Swedish web community 'LunarStorm' refashioned itself as an SNS in 2000, it contained Friends lists, guestbooks, and diary pages (D. Skog, personal communication, September 24, 2007). The next wave of SNSs began when 'Ryze.com' was launched in 2001 to help people leverage their business networks. Ryze's founder reports that he first introduced the site to his friends—primarily members of the San Francisco business and technology community, including the entrepreneurs and investors behind

many future SNSs (A. Scott, personal communication, June 14, 2007). In particular, the people behind 'Ryze', 'Tribe.net', 'LinkedIn', and 'Friendster' were tightly entwined personally and professionally. They believed that they could support each other without competing (Festa, 2003). In the end, Ryze never acquired mass popularity, Tribe.net grew to attract a passionate niche user base, LinkedIn became a powerful business service, and Friendster became most significant, if only as "one of the biggest disappointments in Internet history" (Chafkin, 2007, p. 1).

In recent years, Social Networking Sites (SNS) like Facebook, Twitter, Myspace, and LinkedIn have become the most visited websites in the world, with Facebook topping the list. With over 90 million active users in 2009, Facebook boasted an 85% market share at universities and colleges in the United States (Hendrix, Chiarella, Hasman, Murphy, & Zafron, 2009). In 2010, Facebook increased its traffic by nearly 70% with more than 115 million unique visitors. Myspace ranked second while Twitter soared immediately after it (Friedman, 2010; Nielsen Market Research, May 4, 2010).

The current statistics also show that: (1) 50% of Facebook users log on in any given day, (2) an average user has 130 friends on their friends list, (3) there are 900 million objects that people interact with (including pages, groups, events, and community pages), (4) more than 70 translations are available on Facebook site, and (5) there are more than 350 million active users currently accessing Facebook via their mobile devices. As of January 4, 2010, there were 26,075,960 users on Facebook who belonged to the 18-24 demographic, showing a 51.7% growth in number as compared to January 4, 2009 (istrategylab.com, 2010). With this huge number of young users, it is presumed that Social Networks may have some impacts on college students' academic performance.

Negative effects of social networking

A conference paper by Karpinski (2009) received much media attention with findings that college Facebook users have lower GPAs than students who are not users of the site. Karpinski offers several hypotheses for these findings. "Our findings indicate that electronic media use is negatively associated with grades. We also find that about two-thirds of the students reported using electronic media while in class, studying, or doing homework (Jacobsen & Forste, 2011)." This multitasking likely increases distraction, something prior research has shown to be detrimental to student performance. As social media websites, such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter gain popularity, they are also becoming increasingly dangerous as they create modes to procrastinate while trying to complete homework. Hence, in a survey of 102 students, 57% stated that social media has made them less productive. Additionally different institutions even nowadays are developing groups on several websites (Mehmood, 2013). The improved usage of websites has become a worldwide phenomenon for quite some time. What began out as being a hobby for several computer literate people has converted to a social norm and existence-style for individuals from around the globe (Ellison, 2007). Teens and teenagers have especially recognized these internet sites to be able to contact their peers, share information, reinvent their personas, and showcase their social lives (Ellison, 2007). According to Khan, (2009) facebook users often at times experience poor performance academically. Similarly, Englander et al (2010). Posit that social media is negatively associated with academic performance of student and is a lot more momentous than its advantages. Internet addiction consequently gave rise in internet usage within the last couple of decades.

Nalwa & Anand (2003) recommended that addicted users prefer using internet setting back their personal and professional responsibilities which ultimately leads to poor academic performance. According to Karpinski, (2009), facebook users devoted lesser time to their studies in comparison to non-users did and subsequently had lower GPAs. Karpinski & Duberstein (2009), also mentioned that among various unique distractions of every single generation, Facebook remains a major distraction of current generation.

Positive effects of social networking

The positive aspect of online communities is that youths can utilize them for academic assistance and support (Lusk, 2010). Due to the ability of social media to enhance connections by making them easily accessible, social media can yield many benefits for the young, including providing a virtual space for them to explore their interests or problems with similar individuals, academic support, while strengthening online communication skills and knowledge. "Students who may be reluctant to speak up in class are participating in book discussion blogs and writing for real audiences. There are new Web tools emerging all the time that are enhancing learning (Brydolf, 2007)."

By publishing and presenting their work to a wide audience through blogs, wikis, or podcasts, learners benefit from the opportunity to appropriate new ideas, and transform their own understanding through reflection (Dale, & Pymm, (2009)). Students especially at higher level of learning can function collaboratively through exploring the opportunities given by online social atmosphere to resolve certain academic issues or issues with their peers (Andreas. Kaplan, & Haenlein, M. (2010).

Academic performance

Academic performance by Tuckman (1975) defined performance as the apparent demonstration of understanding, concepts, skills, ideas and knowledge of a person and proposed that grades clearly depict the performance of a student. In addition, academic performance defined by Kobal and Musek, (2001) refers to the numerical scores of a student's knowledge, representing the degree of a student's adaptation to school work and the educational system. Besides the above mentioned view there is yet an arena of knowledge that holds the view that every student is unique in their own way; some are able to express themselves openly are termed as extroverts while others are shy in nature are called introverts(Kalra1.& Manani,2013).

Social networks and academic performance

Social networking facilitates open communication, leading to enhanced information discovery and delivery. In addition, it does not require one to voice out their opinions and ideas. Individuals are able to choose the preferred option and that is to communicate through social networks. (Kalra1. & Manani, 2013). Social Networking Sites have brought both good and bad to the present generation. Social Networking Site has helped many students to acquire knowledge from one another over internet without necessarily have to meet physically. On the other hand, Social Networking Sites have caused many problems. For instance many students have lost their interest in their studies as they spent most of the time on these sites (Kalra1,& Manani,2013). What started out as a hobby for some computer literate people has become a social norm and way of life for people from all over the world (Boyd, 2007). The youth use Social Networking Sites as a

means of interaction, socializing, and for purely entertainment purposes. Although many people do not think of it, social networking sites harbor many unsafe elements and many people are concerned about some major problems that they contain, which includes education and poor academic performance (Kalra1 & Manani, 2013). Banquil, & Chua, 2009), came up with a conclusion that Social Networking Sites do affect one's academic performance adversely. It directly causes the gradual drop of grades of students. It directly affects a student's academic performance if the student invests his time in social networking sites instead in his studies. Paul, Baker, & Cochran, 2012), in his research on effect of online social networking on student academic performance found that there is statistically significant negative relationship between time spent by students on online social networks and their academic performance. Other researchers have found that recreational Internet use is strongly correlated with impaired academic performance (Kubey, Lavin, & Barrows, 2001).

Approximately 10-15% of study participants reported feeling not being in complete control of their Internet use, and that it has hurt their schoolwork. Students who reported Internet-caused schoolwork problems were found to have spent five times more hours online than those who did not, and they were also significantly more likely to report that their Internet use caused them to stay up late, get less sleep, and miss classes (Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010).

2. Methodology

The Presbyterian University College, Agogo in the Asante Akyem district of the Ashanti Region was the tertiary institution used as the case for the research work. Quantitative approach was used in order to know the nature of social media and its effects on academic performance at of students. The Nursing and Physician Assistantship departments of the University College were used as the target population with approximately six hundred and seventeen (617) students. 10 item questionnaires were distributed to 210 selected students randomly from the department OF Nursing and Physician Assistantship from which all the 210 questionnaires were returned for analysis. Data were analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 17 (SPSS) to obtain the common measures of central tendency like the means and distribution.

3. Analysis of Results

In order to achieve the research objectives, series of activities were carried out in the quest for the acquisition of information. This activities ware done by using the responses of the questionnaires administered to the 210 respondents.

Demographical data of the study

TABLE 4.1 demographic data

VARIABLES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE %
GENDER		
MALE	33	15.7
FEMALE	177	84.3
Total	210	100.0
AGE		
15-24 YEARS	203	96.7
25-34 YEARS	6	2.9
35-44 YEARS	1	.5
Total	210	100.0
RELIGION		
CHRISTIANITY	208	99.0
MUSLIM	1	.5
TRADITIONAL	1	.5
Total	210	100.0
LEVEL		
LEVEL 100	67	31.9
LEVEL 200	80	38.1
LEVEL 300	35	16.
LEVEL 400	28	13.3
Total	210	100.0
MARITALSTATUES		
MARRIED	4	1.9
SINGLE	206	98.1
Total	210	100.0
GRADE POINT		
1.0-1.99 (PASS)	3	1.4
2.0-2.44 (THIRD CLASS)	23	11.0
2.5-2.99 (SECOND CLASS LOWER)	50	23.8
3.0-3.59 (SECOND CLASS UPPER)	124	59.0
3.6-4.0 (FIRST CLASS)	10	4.8
Total	210	100.0

Source: Field Work, 2015

From the table 4.1 which indicates respondents' demographic data, it was revealed that 84.3% were females while 15.7% were males, showing that majority of respondents (84.3%) were females. It was discovered also that 96.7% of respondents were between the ages 15-23 years, 2.9% were between 24-34 years, and 0.5% between 35-44 years. 99% were Christians, 0.5% were Muslims and 0.5% Traditional 38.1% were in level 200, 31.9% were in level 100, 16.7% were in level 300 and 13.3% were in level 400. 98.1% were single whilst 1.9% were married. 59% had grade point between 3.0-3.59, 23.4% between 2.5.-2.99, 11% between 2.0-2.44 and 1.4% between 1.0-1.99.

Table 4.2 Social network sites used

SOCIAL NETWORKSITES USED	RESPONSES /FREQUENCY	
	RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE% OF CASES
YOUTUBE	133	63.3%
TWITTER	62	29.5%
FACEBOOK	194	92.4%
WHATSAPP	201	95.7%
VIBER	127	60.5%
INSTAGRAM	95	45.2%
SKYPE	85	40.5%
LINKEDIN	16	7.6%

Source: Field Work, 2015

It was revealed from table 4.2 that 95.7% of the respondents used Whatsapp, 92.4% used Facebook, 63.3% used you tube, 60.5% used Viber, 45.2% used Instagram, 40.5% used Skype, 29.5% used Twitter while 7.6% used Linkedin. This shows that majority of respondents (95.7%) use Whatsapp.

Table 4.3 Reasons for the use of social network

USE OF SOCIAL NETWORK	RESPONSES /FREQUENCY	
	N (210 in each case)	PERCENTAGE%
DOWNLOADING MUSIC	147	70.0%
DOWNLOADING VIDEO	141	67.1%
POSTING PHOTOS	150	71.4%
BLOGGING CREATION	48	22.9%
MAKING NEW FRIENDS	160	76.2%
SUBMITTING ARTICLES TO WEBSITES	113	53.8%
COMMUNICATION WITH TEACHER AND CLASSMATE	165	78.6%
UPLOADING MUSIC	97	46.2%
UPLOADING VIDEOS	98	46.7%

Source: Field Work, 2015

It was evident from the table 4.3 that 78.6% of the respondents used social network sites for communication with teachers and classmates, 76.2% used it for making new friends, 71.4% for posting photos, 70% for downloading music, 67.1% for downloading video, 46.7% for uploading videos, 46.2% for uploading music and 22.9% for blogging creation. This shows that

majority of respondents (78.6%) used these social network sites for communication with teachers and class mates. Teens and teenagers have especially recognized these internet sites to be able to contact their peers, share information, reinvent their personas, and showcase their social lives (Ellison, 2007).

Table 4.4 Means of visiting the sites

MEANS OF VISIT	RESPONSES /FREQUENCY	
	N (210 in each case)	PERCENTAGE% OF CASES
SMART PHONES	198	94.3%
LAPTOPS	151	71.9%
TABLETS	52	24.8%
NOTE	16	7.6%
DESKTOPS	37	17.6%

Source: Field Work, 2015

It was revealed from the table 4.4 that, 94.3% of respondents visited these social network sites by means of smartphones, 71.9% by laptops, 24.8% by tablets, 17.6% by desktops and 7.6% by note. The majority (94.3%) used smartphones as a means to visit these social network sites.

Table 4.5: Access to the internet

ACCESS TO INTERNET	RESPONSES /FREQUENCY	
	N (210 in each case)	PERCENTAGE% OF CASES
MOBILE DATA	204	97.6%
PUBLIC WIRELESS	18	8.6%
BOARD BAND	18	8.6%
INTERNET CAFÉ	16	7.7%
CAMPUS WI-FI	62	29.7%
COMPUTER LAB	14	6.7%

Source: Field Work, 2015

Also, from the table 4.5 97.6% of respondents accessed the internet through mobile data, 29.7% through campus Wi-Fi, 8.6% through public wireless and broad band, and 7.7% through internet cafés. This shows that the majority of respondents (97.6%) accessed the internet through mobile data. The table shows that the means to which the users access the various social network sites and the internet is mostly through the use of mobile data according to the finding above

Table 4.6: Time spent on social network site

TIME SPENT ON SITES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE %
LESS THAN 30 MINUTES	30	14.3
30 MINUTES	60	28.6
1 HOUR	29	13.8
MORE THAN 2 HOUR	91	43.3
Total	210	100.0

Source: Field Work, 2015

From the table above, 43.3% of respondents spent more than 2 hours on social media sites, 28.6% spent 30 minutes, 14.3% spent less than 30 minutes while 13.8% spent hour, this reveals that the majority of respondents (43.3%) spent more than 2 hours on social media sites.

Table 4.7 Social networking sites are affecting the way you speak and write in your everyday life

SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES ARE AFFECTING THE WAY YOU SPEAK AND WRITE IN YOUR EVERYDAY LIFE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE %
YES	120	57.1
NO	90	42.9
Total	210	100.0

Source: Field Work, 2015

From the table 4.7, majority of respondent (57.1%) said social networking sites affect the way they spoke and write whereas 42.2% said no

Table 4.8: Effects it had on you

EFFECTS IT HAD ON YOU	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE %
INCREASE IN GPA	95	45.2
DECREASE IN GPA	115	54.8
Total	210	100.0

Source: Field Work, 2015

From the table 4.8, 54.8% of respondents who were the majority indicated that social networking sites affected them as it decreased their GPA whilst 45.2% said it increased their GPA (Grade Points Average)

4. Discussion

Discussion in relation to the literature review based on the various findings on the various topics under the effect of social media both negative and positive, According to Karpinski (2009), Facebook users devoted lesser time to their studies in comparison to how non-users did and subsequently had lower GPAs. Karpinski & Duberstein. (2009).

The findings of the study also reported that access to social media for active participation and usage creates opportunities for effective learning. Linked with the principle of collaborative development among learners, social media enable learners and teachers to share and publish information as a result of the learning activity (e.g., course materials such as course syllabus, course notes, assignments, test cases, etc.)

Also by publishing and presenting their work to a wide audience through blogs, wikis, or podcasts, learners benefit from the opportunity to appropriate new ideas, and transform their own understanding through reflection (Dale, C., & Pymm, J. (2009). Students especially at higher level of learning can function collaboratively through exploring the opportunities given by online social atmosphere to resolve certain academic issues or issues with their peers (Andreas M. Kaplan, & Haenlein, M. (2010). This is indicative that through collaborative or team learning through integration of social media, students can establish positive contact, using the goal of working towards particular final results, both offline and online modes (Lockyer, L., & Patterson, J. (2008).

Although many people do not think of it, social networking sites harbor many unsafe elements and many people are concerned about some major problems that they contain, such as promoting poor academic performance (Kalra¹, K.R., & Manani, P. (2013). Banquil, K., & Chua, N. A. (2009), came up with a conclusion that social networking sites do affect one's academic performance adversely. It directly causes the gradual drop of grades of students. It directly affects a student's academic performance if the student invests most of his time on social networking sites instead of his/her studies. Paul, J.A., Baker, H.M. & Cochran, J.D. (2012), in his research on effect of online social networking on student academic performance found that there is statistically significant negative relationship between time spent by students on online social networks and their academic performance.

In view of the various points listed out by these other researchers it shows significantly how these social network has effects on the academic performance of the student, and from the research, the findings brought out that indeed there is a significant decrease in the students GPA which is an indication that indeed it affect students' academic performance.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

The findings show that, the extent to which students of the Presbyterian University College use the various social media affect the performance of the students negatively. Though some students make good use of the social media, it was known from the responses that most of the students waste too much time on social media chatting instead of learning and researching.

As proposed by various pas researchers, school should make use of the various social network sites and use it as a means of good communication to the student and lecturers and also embrace the use of it since it has much to offer the school as a whole if it's properly utilized.

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