



Social media, a tool for academic learning: A multiple case study of Valley View University, Techiman Satellite Campus, Bono East Region, Ghana



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ABSTRACT

The study was focused on investigating social media as a tool for academic learning at Valley View University, Techiman Satellite Campus in the Bono East Region of Ghana. In order to accomplish the purpose of the research, multiple case study design was adopted. The concurrent nested mixed method research approach informed this study. That is all types of data were collected and analysed but one particular data gained dominance. Data collected through interviews and questionnaire were descriptively and thematically analysed. Convenience and simple random sampling procedures were employed in the selection process. The study revealed that students' were familiar with all social media networks but identified WhatsApp as students' preference. Students' perceptions about social media were found out to hover largely around privacy, self-judgmental skills, distractions, negativity, freedom of expression and creativity, innovation and imaginative skill. It was realized that regardless the challenges accompanying social media, the concepts can still be used as a tool to improve academic learning among students since they promote creativity and literacy, facilitate peer teaching and offer good sources of reliable information as well. The study recommends an integration and intensification of ICT and media studies across departmental disciplines in tertiary institutions, government and stakeholder support and commitment to promoting ICT instruction as well as students' commitment to embrace 21st century technology.

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INTRODUCTION

Apparently, the rate at which social media dominates in terms of number and usage across the globe is remarkable. It appears obvious that the hikes relating to the use of this new technology can be traced to all manner of countries regardless of their economic statuses. Undoubtedly, social media, which rallies on internet accessibility and availability, has informed lifestyles of people of all walks of life ranging from business, vacations,

research projects, communication and interaction. The phenomenon has made it possible for people to express their views in distinct ways such as through image and video exchange, news sharing, blogging and engagement in digital platform conversations. Another merit associated with the use of social media and social networking sites can be found in the opportunity they offer individuals and socially recognized groups such as government agencies, parliamentarians, companies among others to reach out to many people at the same time.

To Dewing (2010), social media should be seen as the wide range of internet-based and mobile services that permits subscribers to partake in digital interactions, bring

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forth subscriber-designed content, or join online communities. This basically positions social media broadly as websites and applications that are designed to allow people to share content quickly, efficiently and in real-time.

Considering the unexpected upsurge in the use of social media and social networking sites, individuals in the academic spheres especially those in higher education have begun to see the need to take advantage by exploring the exciting opportunities new technologies bring to institutions, educators and students. Arguably, educators have identified that websites, applications, social networking sites, social media and other related new technological dimensions have the tendency to make learning space instruction more captivating (Agyeman, 2016). Consequently, online and digital platforms such as Facebook, Zoom, Twitter, WhatsApp, email have become part of the teaching and learning process.

Vural (2015) maintain that Facebook has the capacity to facilitate online communication, interrelation, and cooperation among students and course tutors. A large number of students rely on Facebook as a means to get in touch with friends thereby promoting academic discussions among peers. This shows what potential Facebook has as a method for online learning. Apparently, it is highly likely to prove advantageous to students should it be capitalized on as part of the learning process.

The academic world and its members thereof hold that the future of education lies with online learning (Knoebel and Lankshear, 2015). Having the option of taking online classes and studying on their own time is critically important. At the same time, many state institutions are unable to accommodate all those who want to take classes on campus, as the need for online learning tools. Lifelong learning must now be a part of everyone's career plans. In today's job market taking online courses help workers remain competitive, and they do not need to take time off from their jobs to do this.

This presupposes that social media and social networking sites offer individuals the convenient platform to upgrade themselves as opposed by several other studies heralding the phenomena as having comparatively greater dark sides (Zeitell-Banks and Tat, 2014).

Myriads of research works on social media have constantly sought to investigate student capital and literacy development (Agyeman, 2016). Nonetheless, studies remain limited to unearth explicitly instructional characteristics (assistive and adaptive features) as well as the academic potentials that are associated with social media use in learning spaces in tertiary institutions. It is against this background that the study intended to investigate social media as a tool for academic learning.

Objective of the study

The study was purported to examine the use of social

media as a tool to complement traditional academic learning specifically to determine the most used social media among Valley View University students at Techiman Satellite Campus, explore perceptions and attitudes of students toward social media for academic learning and assess challenges and benefits associated with the use of social media as a tool for academic learning.

Scope of the study

The study was carried out at the Valley View University, Techiman municipality satellite campus in the Techiman municipality in the Bono East Region of Ghana. Discussions largely hovered around only two concept (variables) specifically social media and academic learning tool. Study subjects were categorically defined to include only students from the study setting and that no other subjects of the university other than those mentioned were considered.

Justification of the study

Social media has been criticized for many lapses identified in academia in our country, but its benefit outrages the criticism. Student share information among themselves, this information is in the form of funny videos and audios, text messages, tricks, riddles among others. The question therefore is why not for formal learning? Social media is redefining human communication and is influencing the way people relate and present themselves in their interaction with others. It is believed that social media has transformed the teaching and learning process through modern communication.

The cost involved in using these social media platforms is not expensive since almost all of them are made free by the providers. In the context of education, the economic value of social media on the lives of students are obvious in that, there tends to be little or no pressure on monies saved for books, journals and other literature since they have been made available and free by some providers online. Furthermore, students are able to advertise and market their special abilities to the outside world to secure their prospects of getting jobs in the future.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social learning theory and teaching and learning

Bandura (1971) confirms in his social learning theory that human beings construct knowledge through their relationship and encounter with others in the social milieu (Smith and Berge, 2009). Even though the theory was Robert Sears' attempt to explain human behavior psychoanalytically (Grusec, 1992), Bandura, however,

positions the theory to move beyond both constructivism and behaviorism. He blends these two concepts to explain human behavior (Smith and Berge, 2009). He expresses that new forms of behavior are assimilated in the social learning system, through direct experience or watching the behaviors' of other people. Bandura believes that these learned behaviors' are mainly regulated or governed by a series of motivational effects that accompany any given action. This implies that the kind or the amount of reinforcement(s) that accompany the teaching and learning processes determines the learning outcome which is likely to take place.

According to Bandura (1971), learners' surroundings play a crucial role in the learning process. He opines that environments are loaded with potentially lethal consequences that befall those who are unfortunate enough to perform dangerous errors. Some of the key concepts in Bandura's social learning theory such as modelling are based on the idea 'Observational Learning' (Smith and Berge, 2009; Bandura, 1971), which contends that human beings often cannot learn for themselves (Smith and Berge, 2009). Learners watch and study the behaviors of others and eventually begin to construct knowledge for themselves based on what has been observed. With this, it is obvious that when certain methods of teaching like demonstration are adopted for the teaching and learning process, students tend to acquire a great deal of knowledge for themselves. Moreover, this theory positions teachers as experienced adults whose actions go along to both inform and influence series of students' learning behaviors.

Last but not least, Bandura (1989) proposes self-regulatory capacities to explain learner autonomy. He believes that learners eventually develop the required instincts that control their behaviors. They are able to guide their thoughts and actions independently without suffering any interferences from adults. Students, in the same way, are able to construct their own knowledge confidently. Cooper et al. (2012) confirm by stating emphatically that the current trends of technology that students are presented with have impacted positively on the confidence level in student literacy.

The advent of social media

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) as cited in Van Dijck (2014) describes social media as a group of internet-based application that builds on the ideological and technological of Web 2.0, and allows that the creation and exchange of user-generated content form a new online layer through which people organize their lives. However, there exists a number of notions regarding how social media came into being. Carson (2009) as cited in Edosomwan et al (2011) mention that throughout much of human history, we have developed technologies that make it easier for us to

communicate with each other. The emergence of social media dates back to 1792 when telegraphs were used to convey and receive messages over long distances. In 1876, Show Bell invented the first ever telephone transmitter otherwise known as the 'microphone'.

Meanwhile, other electronic avenues such as the radio were as well invented in the late 19th century to take care of social interactions. Borders (2010) assert that digital communication somewhere in the 1960s took a relatively new dimension when the face of email emerged. Before the adventure of public internet (World Wide Web) in 1991 (Van Dijck, 2014), emails were initially used to carry messages across from one computer to the other without the help of the internet. Edosomwan et al. (2011) also report that in the 1970s, social media was gradually expanding when MUD (Multi-User Dungeon) and BBS (Bulletin Board System) was created in 1978 to read the news, exchange messages, access and participate in online chats, play games and manage software. The tireless efforts to make the web more social (Van Dijck, 2014) saw many social networking sites emerge in the 1990s (Edosomwan et al., 2011). Many of these sites include Six Degree (Vural, 2015), Black Planet, Third Voice which later was banned when its opponents accused them of having inappropriate comments. These sites were created for music file sharing, peer interaction, blogging, reading and creation of products (Edosomwan et al., 2011).

Although Van Dijck (2014) maintains that the initial period of the fresh millennium comparatively witnessed a remarkable paradigm shift in Web 2.0 technology, in the prime of the second millennium, various social networking sites and other social media platforms including LunarStorm (Europe's first digital online community) and Wikipedia were created. Between 2001 and 2003, other famous online community platforms such as MySpace, hi.5, and LinkedIn also emerged. In 2004, the most popular social networking site, Facebook was mounted as Facebook Harvard by Mark Zuckerberg (Stanciu et al., 2012; Ahmed, 2011; Edosomwan et al., 2011). It was created basically to digitally connect students and staff on the Harvard University campuses online. Former engineers of Yahoo, Brian Acton and Jan Koum in 2009 founded the WhatsApp Inc. that developed WhatsApp Messenger the second most admired messaging application next to Facebook (Carlson, 2013). Van Dijck (2014) as cited in Agyeman (2016) concludes by stating that media have historically coevolved with the public that uses them, as well as the larger economy of an inscription.

Social media technologies (tools) and social networking sites

Social media, in view of Monica-Ariana and Anamaria-Mirabela (2014) as cited in Agyeman (2016), comes in

many folds which include internet forums, social blogs, music, videos, microblogging, podcasts, wikis, weblogs, and many others. However, there exists a plethora of platforms and mobile devices through which these can be logged on today. Among the many popular social media tools and social networking sites that have caught the attention of students in Ghana today are as follow.

Facebook

According to Fact Sheet (2012) as cited in Lane and Lewis (2013), Facebook is a social media platform utilized by people who want to stay in touch with friends and family, and by organizations (companies, political groups, religious organizations, universities, etc.) that want to market and advertise their products, services, and viewpoints. It was founded on 4th February 2004 by former Harvard students, Mark Zuckerberg, Dustin Mosko, Eduardo Saverin, Andrew McCollum and Chris Hughes (Alsanie, 2015; Zeitel-Bank and Tat, 2014). It was created for students on the campuses of Harvard but later extended to cover university workers and eventually expanded to the public to be used by people above 13 years.

Twitter

Alsanie (2015) describes Twitter as an online digital community service that allows members to read and convey short messages across the platform using not more than 140 characters. Twitter was established and launched in July, 2006 by Jack Dorsey, Evan Williams, Biz Stone and Noah Glass (Alsanie, 2015; Tur and Marin, 2015), and it is by far the most popular and well-patronized microblogging service that WEB 2.0 technology has ever produced (Stanciu et al., 2012).

YouTube

YouTube, as some writers may posit, is mostly self-made video excerpts unlike professional video filming or television (Prensky, 2006). It was created by Hurley, Chen, and Karim and launched in 2005 but was bought by Google in 2006 (Lin et al., 2009; Prensky, 2006). YouTube is also a form of human communication in every way despite the fact that it does pave way for chat rooms and synchronous dialogues (Prensky, 2006).

WhatsApp

Alsanie (2015) defines WhatsApp as an exclusive, inter-platform instant messaging subscription service designed

for smartphones and supported mobile phone devices. Though was founded in 2009 by former Yahoo engineers, Brian Acton and Jan Koum (Alsanie, 2015), today, the application has gained grounds in the lives of people, most especially young ones. According to Carlson (2013), WhatsApp is the second most admired and recognized messaging application next to Facebook, and the most globally famous instant messaging app (Alsanie, 2015).

Academic instructional (teaching and learning) techniques

Teaching as a main component of academic activity in its broadest sense is a process that facilitates learning (Sajjad, 2012). The choice of learning activities whereby the goals of education are realized in the school is the responsibility of the teaching profession. Nevertheless, there are countless ways of delivering instruction. Sajjad (2012) outlines the following as the common instructional methods used by teachers across all classrooms and the reason for their adoption:

- a. Lecture: This is a talk or verbal presentation given by a lecturer, trainer or speaker to an audience. Suitable for large class size. It creates new ideas, and the teacher is experienced and has mastery on a subject, explain all points and can answer all questions raised by students. Student gives their input as well.
- b. Group discussion: It is a free verbal exchange of ideas between group members or teacher and students. Students can make their own notes. Students exchange ideas.
- c. Individual presentation: It increases confidence among students. Students do a lot of research. Students first thoroughly understand the topic before giving a presentation.
- d. Assignment: Written assignments help in the organization of knowledge, assimilation of facts and better preparation of examinations.

Other techniques mentioned include seminars, workshop, conferences, brainstorming, role play and case study.

Benefits of social media technologies in academic teaching and learning

Relatively, a huge number of factors has influenced teaching and learning over the years. Even before the advent of technology various skills, attitudes and abilities needed to teach or learn were highly still manipulated either by external or internal factors. Nevertheless, as individuals and societies pass through changing times (digital age/technological era), their conventional way of viewing the concept of teaching and learning modifies

(Vural, 2015). The good side of social media technology vis-à-vis teaching and learning are many. It ranges from strengthening the skills, knowledge, and attitudes of the learner to enhancing the capacity and capabilities of the teacher. Teaching and learning are basically about communication between the less experienced (learner) and the experienced adult (teacher). Le Baron-Earle (2014) and Tham (2011) support this by arguing that the emergence and easy access of social networking sites (SNS) have dramatically changed the way we communicate and interact with each other. These scholars believe that social media technology has transformed the teaching and learning process through sophisticated communication.

Furthermore, studies have revealed that social media technologies like Facebook and WhatsApp have made teaching and learning more participatory (Bouhnik and Dshen, 2014). These technologies have activated the teaching-learning process in that teachers and learners alike are always enthused to learn more as they collaborate to engage in online discussions. Thurairaj et al. (2012) as cited in Thurairaj et al. (2015) maintain that certain social media tools and other related digital online platforms are suitable for literacy acquisition and language learning classrooms. According to them, certain major social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and YouTube support second language teaching and learning. Vural (2015) asserts that social media by virtue of the internet have taken over the role of the teacher. He believes that students are doing more learning outside the classroom by themselves. Students' experiences are getting better and better each day as they constantly engage themselves in online and other digital activities.

Challenges of social media technologies in academic teaching and learning

In as much as social media technologies are influencing teaching and learning for the better, the fact still remains that they are on the other hand taunting the educational and instructional process with their dark sides. Media scholars believe that social media technologies are hunting formal communication. For instance, Eisenstein (2013) posits that "there is abundant non-standard of spelling on the internet." Language use on the internet is inaccurate and lacks precision unlike other forms of language use (Bouhnik and Dshen, 2014). Vural (2015) supports that spelling mistakes occur when people develop the notion that social media platforms are a sort of informal environment for communication and learning. These language experts are of the view that the teaching and learning process gets distorted when language precision has defected from normalcy.

Social media has taken too much attention from students. According to Rouis et al. (2011) "Students spend

an average of 30–35 minutes per day surfing Facebook. Others acknowledge spending up to 8 hours a day on the website." The long hours spent on these major social media platforms are not good for conducive teaching and learning since much of students' attention and focus are substituted for these online practices.

The 21st century classroom is anticipated to accommodate students who can think outside the box. However, the nature of social media technologies has not done enough to improve the critical and analytical thinking skills of students which are prerequisites as far as teaching and learning is concerned (Tur and Marin, 2015). Students often lack proper evaluation skills regarding online contents. Scholars are also refusing to rule out the fact that social media technologies are not equipping students to speak well (Tur and Marin, 2015). Effective teaching and learning can only take place when students are motivated to speak more. However, social media platforms like Twitter is failing to produce fluent users.

METHODOLOGY

A multiple case study design was adopted for the study. Ideally, the design was purported to investigate the role social media as a tool play in academic learning. The study employed the concurrent nested mixed method approach to research inquiry. This involved either using a survey method with a relatively large sample simultaneously with qualitative interview for exploratory purposes so that the researcher can generalize results to the population or vice versa. Generally, the approach ensured that both quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analysed, and that one of the two research dimensions specifically the quantitative approach dominated in the study. The chosen mixed method design helped in determining the most used social media handle among Valley View University students, exploring perceptions and attitudes of students toward social media for academic learning and identifying challenges and benefits associated with the use of social media as a tool for academic learning at Valley View University, Techiman Satellite Campus in the Bono region of Ghana.

Questionnaires and semi-structured interview guide were used to obtain data from respondents. The questionnaire was used to determine the most used social media platforms among university students and as well assess benefits and challenges associated with their use in academic learning space. The questionnaire was self-administered to all the respondents. Respondents were to indicate the degree of agreeability to each question item using a generated five-point Likert Scale (Strongly Agree [S.A.], Agree [A], Indifferent [I], Disagree [D] and Strongly Disagree [S.D.]). Semi-structured interview guide on the other was adopted to explore university students' perception about social media at Valley View University,

Table 1. Demographic information of participants: Sex distribution.

Respondents (%)	Frequency	Percentage
Female	44	55
Male	36	45
Total	80	100

Source: Field Data (2021).

Table 2. Age distribution.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
18 – 24	12	15
25 – 31	32	40
32 – 38	22	27.5
38 and above	14	17.5
Total	80	100

Source: Field Data (2021).

Techiman Satellite Campus in the Bono region of Ghana. Responses given in the interview were recorded in audio, video and audio-visual format. Detailed notes were also taken in the course of the interview session. Repeated playbacks of recorded responses were done afterwards to ensure voice clarity and to pave way for transcription as well. Codes were generated and assigned to data gathered from the interview. Quantitative data were analysed using frequency distribution and simple percentages; however, qualitative data were subjected to thematic analyses. Eighty (80) students comprising forty-four (44) females and thirty-six (36) males were randomly sampled. The criteria used for the sample identification and selection was based on participants' exposure in social media. Moreover, the study had more females than males because females are believed to have considerably intensified obsession for social media than their male counterparts. At this stage, majority of them were presumed to have been exposed to social media.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings from the study were presented in accordance with the data type. Tables were used to discuss quantitative results from survey whereas qualitative results from in-depth interviews were also interpreted thematically. Table 1 shows participants' demographics.

Table 1 represents the sex distribution of participants. From the table, forty-four (44) respondents representing fifty-five percent (55%) were females whereas thirty-six (36) forming forty-five percent (45%) were males. This implies that the study considered more females than males

because of their (females') obsession with social media tools. Table 2 shows the age distribution of participants sampled for the study. Out of the total eighty (80) respondents sampled, majority of them were found within twenty-five and thirty-one age brackets (25 – 31) followed by thirty-two to thirty-eight (32 – 38) while the age brackets of eighteen to twenty-four (18 – 24) recorded the least. The age distribution of respondents became necessary because certain major social media platforms and digital online tools require that users attain certain age before they can subscribe to them.

Analysis of Questionnaire

Most used social media in terms familiarity

Most used social media in terms of familiarity across respondents was analysed in Table 3. The motive behind the measurement of participants' familiarity with social media tools was to find out the most used social media tools among participants. The responses gathered show that forty-six (46) respondents representing 57.5% and twenty-six (26) respondents forming 32.5% respectively claimed that they are familiar with YouTube. Meanwhile, five (5) respondents representing 6.25% and three (3) respondents forming 3.75% respectively asserted that they are not familiar with the said platform. Furthermore, sixty (60) respondents representing 75% and eighteen (18) respondents making 22.5% respectively said that they are familiar with Facebook whereas two (2) respondents representing 2.5% claimed they are not sure about their familiarity with the platform. WhatsApp platform exposure

Table 3. Most used social media platform – familiarity (n = 80).

Tool (Platform)	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
YouTube	S.A	46	57.5
	A	26	32.5
	I	5	6.25
	D	3	3.75
	S.D	0	0
Facebook	S.A	60	75
	A	18	22.5
	I	2	2.5
	D	0	0
WhatsApp	S.D	0	0
	S.A	57	71.25
	A	18	22.5
	I	5	6.25
Twitter	D	0	0
	S.D	0	0
	S.A	34	42.5
	A	33	41.25
Instagram	I	8	10
	D	4	5
	S.D	1	1.25
	S.A	31	38.75
SnapChat	A	26	32.5
	I	13	16.25
	D	8	10
	S.D	2	2.5
Others	S.A	26	32.5
	A	27	33.75
	I	16	20
	D	7	8.75
	S.D	4	5
	S.A	23	28.75
	A	18	22.5
	I	16	20
	D	13	16.25
	S.D	10	12.5

Source: Field Data, 2021.

also recorded some amount of responses from respondents. Out of the eighty respondents sampled, fifty-seven (57) representing 71.25% and eighteen (18) respondents forming 22.5% respectively pointed out that they are familiar with WhatsApp whilst five (5) respondents representing 6.25% claimed they are also not certain about their familiarity with the platform.

The Twitter platform was also measured in terms of respondents' familiarity and exposure in the platform. Thirty-four (34) respondents representing 42.5% and thirty-three (33) respondents comprising 41.25%

respectively disclosed that they are familiar with Twitter whereas eight (8) respondents representing 10% also posited that they are certain about their familiarity with the platform. Meanwhile, four (4) making 5% and one (1) respondent comprising 1.25% respectively stated that they are not familiar with the Twitter platform. Respondents' familiarity with Instagram was also measured next. Thirty-one (31) respondents representing 38.75% and twenty-six (26) respondents representing 32.5% respectively said that they are familiar with Instagram whilst thirteen (13) respondents representing 16.25% also claimed that they

cannot tell whether they are familiar with the platform. However, eight (8) making 10% and two (2) respondents comprising 2.5% respectively stated otherwise that they are not familiar with the Instagram platform.

Furthermore, responses gathered from Snap Chat measurement showed that twenty-six (26) respondents representing 32.5% and twenty-seven (27) respondents forming 33.75% respectively disclosed that they are familiar with Snap Chat; however, sixteen (16) respondents representing Le Baron-Earle (2014) and Tham (2011) and social media platforms apart from the already stated ones.

The responses gathered have revealed that respondents are familiar with certain major social media platforms like Facebook, Whatsapp, Twitter, Instagram, SnapChat, Twitter and YouTube. This is because the majority of respondents disclosed their familiarity in almost all the social media tools mentioned. Based on the gathered responses, we can conclude that students of Valley View University, Techniman Campus are familiar with social media platforms and other related digital online platforms.

Most used social media in terms preference

Table 4 presents most used social media in terms of preference across sections of participants. The rationale behind social media preference measurement was to find out the most used and preferred social media tools among participants. The responses gathered show that ten (10) respondents representing 12.5% and nineteen (19) respondents forming 23.75% respectively claimed that their preferred social media tool is YouTube. Meanwhile fifteen (15) respondents representing 18.25% stated the platform is neither their preferred nor last resort; nevertheless, twenty (20) respondents forming 25% and eighteen (18) representing 22.5% respectively otherwise asserted that YouTube is not their favorite platform.

Furthermore, fifty-six (56) respondents representing 70% and fourteen (14) respondents making 17.5% respectively said that Facebook is their preferred digital online tool whereas two (2) respondents representing 2.5% claimed they are indecisive about making Facebook their preferred tool. Meanwhile, six (6) respondents representing 7.5% and two (2) respondents forming 2.5% claimed that Facebook is not their preferred platform. Again, out of the eighty respondents sampled, sixty-one (61) representing 76.25% and fifteen (15) respondents forming 18.75% respectively disclosed that WhatsApp is their preferred social media tool whilst two (2) respondents representing 2.5% claimed that they are not certain about making WhatsApp their preferred platform. However, one (1) respondents representing 1.25% and another one (1) respondent making 1.25% pointed out that WhatsApp is far from being their preferred platform.

The Twitter platform was also measured in terms of respondents' preference in the platform. Thirty-three (33) respondents representing 41.25% and thirty-four (34) respondents comprising 42.5% respectively disclosed that they prefer using Twitter to using other platforms whereas eight (8) respondents representing 10% also posited that they are not certain about making the platform their preferred one. Meanwhile, four (4) making 5% and one (1) respondent comprising 1.25% respectively stated that they cannot make Twitter their preferred social media tool for some reasons. Respondents' preference in Instagram was also measured. Fourteen (14) respondents representing 17.5% and twelve (12) respondents representing 15% respectively said that Instagram is their preferred tool whereas nine (9) respondents representing 11.5% also disclosed that they cannot tell whether the platform is their preferred. However, twenty-five (25) making 31.25% and twenty (20) respondents comprising 25% respectively responded otherwise that Instagram platform has never been their favorite.

Furthermore, responses obtained from Snap Chat preference measurement disclosed that eighteen (18) respondents representing 22.5% and sixteen (16) respondents forming 20% respectively answered that Snap Chat platforms have been their preferred social media tool; however, ten (10) respondents representing 12.5% said that they do not have a clear stance when it comes to prioritizing the platform. Meanwhile, twenty-seven (27) respondents comprising 33.75% and nine (9) respondents forming 11.5% claimed that their favorite platform is not Snap Chat. Preferences in other related digital online and social media platforms were also measured. Out of the eighty respondents sampled, twelve (12) respondents representing 15% and eight (8) respondents forming 10% respectively pointed out that their preferences are in other social media platforms whereas sixteen (16) respondents representing 20% claimed they cannot tell whether other platforms are their favorite. Thirteen (13) respondents representing 16.25% and ten (10) respondents forming 12.5% respectively however pointed out that other online and social media platforms apart from the already stated ones have never been their preference. These findings confirm the report that WhatsApp is the second most admired and recognized messaging application next to Facebook, and the most globally famous instant messaging app (Alsanie, 2015; Carlson, 2013).

The responses gathered suggest that respondents have their preferred social media platforms. The obtained responses disclosed that majority of respondents prefer WhatsApp to other social media tools followed by Facebook, Twitter, Snap Chat, Instagram, other platforms and YouTube respectively. From the responses, it can be concluded that the most used and preferred social media tools among students of Valley View University, Techniman Campus are WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Snap Chat,

Table 4. Most used social media platform – Preference.

Tool (Platform)	Percentage (%)	Response	Frequency
YouTube	S.A	10	12.5
	A	19	23.75
	I	15	18.25
	D	20	25
	S.D	18	22.5
Facebook	S. A	56	70
	A	14	17.5
	I	2	2.5
	D	6	7.5
	S.D	2	2.5
WhatsApp	S. A	61	76.25
	A	15	18.75
	I	2	2.5
	D	1	1.25
	S.D	1	1.25
Twitter	S.A	33	41.25
	A	34	42.5
	I	8	10
	D	4	5
	S.D	1	1.25
Instagram	S.A	14	17.5
	A	12	15
	I	9	11.5
	D	25	31.25
	S.D	20	25
Snap Chat	S.A	18	22.5
	A	16	10
	I	10	12.5
	D	27	33.75
	S.D	9	11.5
Others	S.A	12	15
	A	8	10
	I	16	20
	D	25	31.25
	S.D	19	23.75
Total	n = 80	n= 100%	

Source: Field Data, 2021.

Instagram, anonymous platforms and YouTube respectively.

Analysis of Interview

This aspect focuses on interviews conducted with some selected respondents soliciting their views regarding users' attitudes and perceptions towards social media use among Valley View University students in the Techiman

campus. Responses gathered from the interview were analyzed thematically through these six major themes: privacy, self-judgmental skills, distractions, negativity, freedom of expression and creativity, innovation, and imaginative skill.

Privacy

Respondents were asked in the interview to express their

views regarding social media and users' privacy and confidentiality on the platform. Majority of those interviewed disclosed that they were not happy about the way their accounts had been getting hacked all the time. Section of respondents stated that:

"I encountered a lot of hackings in the Facebook account."
– (Respondent 4)

"It's very bad! You may think your contents are in safe hands.....next time you realize, they are showing everywhere. Too many sex tapes....Where do you think they come from? Anonymous hackers upload them from people's account of course!" – (Respondent 5)

Meanwhile, a few respondents argued that social media and online privacy depended solely on the user. They claimed that the only user had the power to manipulate their own accounts. Intruders were highly restricted. A participant argued that:

"I believe that hackers are real but when it comes to social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp and others, I don't think hackers can go that extreme. There are privacy and security features which allow users to protect their contents the way they want it." – (Respondent 2)

The responses gathered implied that social media platforms were sensitive to privacy, security, and confidentiality. It can be said judging from the majority that students of VVU see social media platforms as unreliable in terms of security and privacy protection.

Self-judgmental skills

Respondents were asked in the interview to find out their perception regarding the role of social media platforms in one's self-judgmental skill. On this, majority of the respondents responded that users were often restricted to the concepts and ideas of people who post contents on social media platforms without any proper evaluation. Section of participants had this to say:

"I have been forwarding so many contents such as pictures, videos, etc. to others without cross-checking their authenticity." – (Respondent 8)

However, a small section of participants asserted that social media did not in any way influence the way they judge contents and other online materials. One respondent posited that:

"I don't get forward what I read or receive from others. I make sure to verify them to be sure." – (Respondent 1)

The responses gathered suggested that social media had a relationship with respondents' self-judgmental skills.

Basing on the responses from the majority, it can be concluded that students of VVU see social media platforms as tools which do not adequately encourage or promote self-judgmental skills among users.

Distraction

Respondents also showed concern for the distractive features of some major social media platforms. Majority of them affirmed that a lot of social media platforms had notification features that easily swayed away attention from profitable activities. Some gave emphatic responses like this:

"You get loud notification tone thinking that it's something important.....but in the end, it's a friend request from Facebook or other sites." – (Respondents 2)

"Whenever there is a notification tone, I stop whatever I'm doing and attend to it. It's funny at times to find out that another person has the same notification tone." – (Respondents 4)

Meanwhile, one respondent opined otherwise that the distractive features of some social media platforms never bothered him. He said:

"My phone is always on silent I'm somewhere important. So I'm not concerned much about whatever is happening."
– (Respondent 1)

The responses gathered denoted that social media platforms were prone to distractions. It can be deduced that students of VVU perceive social media and online platforms to have distractive features like notification tones that are capable of swaying users' attention from their daily activities.

Negativity

Almost all responds were worried about the inappropriateness of some contents that surfaced across social media platforms. This is what some had to say:

"People intentional post awkward stuff like alleged leaked sex tapes and other things." – (Respondent 7)

"I can confidently say that scammers learn their tricks from here." – (Respondent 3)

These responses implied that respondents saw social media platforms as an embodiment of social vices. The conclusion can be made from these responses that students of VVU believe that social media platforms are

subjected to negativities.

Creativity, innovation and imaginative skills

Respondents stated that social media and online platforms had improved creativity, ensured innovation and improved imaginative skills among users. Majority of respondents stated emphatically in the interview that:

“Somebody created social media, and a lot of people are following the concept to create more. Others are also improving upon existing ones.” – (Respondent 2)

“Now, there are so many versions of some major social media platforms. You know you can’t have a version of something that hasn’t been created. Right? Today, we have WhatsApp3+, Ayo WhatsApp, WhatsApp Plus, Facebook Lite, etc.” – (Respondent 1)

These responses implied that respondents were aware of the creative, innovative and imaginative skill impact of social media platforms among users. From the responses gathered, we can conclude that students of VVU believe that social media platforms positively inform users’ creative, innovative and imaginative skills.

Freedom of expression

Almost all respondents again reacted to the openness of social media platforms in terms of the various modes of language users preferred in order to get their messages reached their audience. On this, respondents reiterated that:

“You are able to say whatever you want to everyone on Facebook walls, through WhatsApp statuses, and so on.” – (Respondent 6)

“People get to understand your state of being from whatever you put across on platforms.” – (Respondent 2)

“We have the opportunity to ask the questions we want to ask without fear or panic.” – (Respondent 5)

These responses suggested that respondents had been enjoying social media platforms because they offer them the chance to freely express themselves. From this, we can conclude that students of VVU perceive social media platforms as avenues which ensures freedom of expression among users. Based on the responses gathered, it was concluded that students of Valley View University, Techiman Campus have negative attitudes and perceptions towards social media platforms in areas like privacy and security, self-judgmental skill, distraction and

negativity but positive with regards to creativity, innovation and imagination as well as freedom of speech.

Analysis of questionnaire: Benefits and challenges of social media

Analysis in Table 5 shows benefits and challenges of using social media as a tool for academic learning. The aimed was to assess the promising and dark sides associated with social media platforms should they be adopted as a tool to promote academic learning. The responses gathered showed that forty-six (46) respondents representing 57.5% and twenty-five (25) respondents forming 31.25% respectively responded that social media as a tool are beneficial because they serve as a source of information. Meanwhile, five (5) respondents representing 6.25% said that social media as a tool is beneficial but they are unsure whether they serve as a source of information. Three (3) respondents forming 3.75% and one (1) representing 2.5% respectively otherwise claimed otherwise that social media is purposeful but not in terms sourcing information.

Furthermore, fifty (50) respondents representing 62.5% and twenty-four (24) respondents making 30% respectively said that social media improve creativity and enhance literacy skills whereas five (2) respondents representing 6.25% claimed they are indecisive about the platforms’ ability to improve creativity and literacy with one (1) respondent representing 1.25% disagreeing to the statement. Again, out of the eighty respondents sampled, thirty-eight (38) representing 47.5% and thirty (30) respondents forming 37.5% respectively posited social media facilitates peer teaching whilst eight (8) respondents representing 10% claimed that they do not know whether or not social media can ensure peer teaching. However, three (3) respondents representing 3.75% and another one (1) respondent making 1.25% pointed out that social media do not facilitate peer teaching.

In respect to challenging issues associated with social media as a tool, thirty-seven (37) respondents representing 46.25% and eighteen (18) respondents comprising 22.5% respectively said incompetence level of instructors likewise negative attitudes towards the concept can make social media application in academic learning unsuccessful. Meanwhile, thirteen (13) respondents representing 16.25% also posited that they are not sure whether attitude and competence levels have anything to do with it. Nevertheless, nine (9) making 11.25% and three (3) respondent comprising 3.75% respectively stated that competence level and negative attitudes are not barriers. Lack of logistics was also measured. With that, thirty-nine (39) respondents representing 48.75% and twenty (20) respondents representing 25% respectively said that lack of logistics can make social media academically ineffective whereas eleven (11) respondents representing 8.75%

Table 5: Benefits and challenges of social media.

Category	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Benefits			
Source of information	S.A	46	57.5
	A	25	31.25
	I	5	6.25
	D	3	3.75
	S.D	1	1.25
Creativity/Literacy	S.A	50	62.5
	A	24	30
	I	5	6.25
	D	1	1.25
	S. D	0	0
Peer teaching	S.A	38	47.5
	A	30	37.5
	I	8	10
	D	3	3.75
	S. D	1	1.25
Challenges			
Competence and attitude	S.A	37	46.25
	A	18	22.5
	I	13	16.25
	D	9	11.25
	S.D	3	3.75
Lack of Logistics	S.A	39	48.75
	A	20	25
	I	11	13.75
	D	7	8.75
	S.D	3	3.75
Unreliable source of information	S.A	38	47.5
	A	27	33.75
	I	10	12.5
	D	2	2.5
	S.D	3	3.75
Total		n = 80	n= 100%

Source: Field Data, 2021.

could neither agree nor disagree to this assertion. Meanwhile, seven (7) respondents forming 8.75% and three (3) respondents comprising 3.75% respectively claimed otherwise that lack of logistics should not be a hindrance to the successful application of social media as a tool in academic learning. Last but not least, social media as a breeding ground of unreliable information was measured. Thirty-eight (38) respondents representing 47.5% and twenty-seven (27) respondents forming 33.75% respectively opined that information sources are often not reliable especially when they are from social media.

Meanwhile, ten (10) respondents representing 12.5%

said that they neither agree nor disagree to such claim but, two (2) respondents comprising 2.5% and three (3) respondents forming 3.75% claimed information emanating from social media are always reliable. These findings corroborate with the argument put forward by Thurairaj et al. (2015) and Bouhnik and Deshen (2014) that social media technologies such as Facebook and WhatsApp are suitable for literacy acquisition and language learning classrooms, and such online spaces have made teaching and learning more participatory.

From the responses gathered, it was clear that respondents had been exposed to the effects of social media as a tool in many aspects of their academic lives.

The conclusion was drawn therefore that regardless of the few challenges accompanying social media, the concept can still be used as a tool to improve academic learning among students of Valley View University, Techiman Campus because they enhance and promote creativity and literacy, ensure and facilitate peer teaching and offer good sources of reliable information as well.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and the conclusions drawn, the following recommendations have been made:

1. The institution (Valley View University) through the various departments should intensify ICT studies across all disciplines taught in the school. As much as possible, aspects of ICT studies should form an integral part of every course. With this, there is an indirect initiation of social media concepts in the teaching and learning process.
2. Students ought to avail themselves for the changing world and prepare themselves for future technologies as such. Since technology is increasingly changing and calling for changing attitudes among users as well, students should alter their attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions to meet the challenging demands of upcoming techs.
3. The government of Ghana must can and should do well and strengthen all policies regarding ICT studies. For example, computers and laptops are not enough to ensure that social media gain grounds in today's classroom. Like Rwanda, who recently launched a satellite into space so rural school going children could have access to the internet, the government of Ghana through the Ministry of Education can follow a similar path.
4. Cooperate bodies and stakeholders in ICT literacy education can also join hands in this computer/social media literacy evangelism. Let us make computer and social media literacy education attractive to stakeholders in education if we really want to get their attention and support.

Limitations

Firstly, Internet access was among the many major limitations as far as this study was concerned. In order to participate in online practices and several other major social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, YouTube, etc. participants needed to have internet access. There was limited access to some sections of the participants. Others also complained of high charges. Secondly, the researcher could not meet all students of Valley View University due to long distance and limited

time frame for each semester. Because of this, the researcher had to use a sample of the respondents to represent all students of Valley View University. Due to this, the generalizability of this study becomes very difficult when one considers the mass population of students in the university and the country at large. Again, during the data collection process, the researcher encountered sudden technological problems. Participants' recorded voice notes were not responding. Finally, some students were reluctant to participate in the study. Responses from such respondents were questioned in terms of their authenticity.

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