

Strengthening the Academic Usage of Social Media in Teacher-Learner Interactions in Wa Polytechnic, Ghana

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Abstract: The lack of effective social media use between faculty staff and student engagements in instructional delivery among undergraduate classes has been reported to be a contributory factor to the fall in student performance in Wa Polytechnic, Ghana. Consequently, the study explored how faculty staff and students in the institution use the potential opportunities inherent in social media applications to enhance teaching and learning. Social media was focused on because it is an upcoming, important tool for collaboration and interaction among educators. As an institution, Wa Polytechnic must take advantage of this current increasing momentum. A descriptive survey was conducted through systematic random sampling technique with quantitative data collected from 135 student respondents and 28 staff respondents. Evidence collected revealed that 45.56% of the students and 57.14% of the staff do not use social media in teacher-learner collaboration. It is recommended that school staff and students sharpen their skills in the use of social media tools for effective interaction and collaboration. When students and staff acquire social media usage skills and become stakeholders of their own learning, education will be truly revolutionalized in the institution.

Keywords: Collaboration, personalization, potential opportunities, revolutionalized, social media, social networking.

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of teachers doing all of the talking in classrooms is in direct contrast to the philosophy that learning is primarily a social activity [1]. As early as 1984, [1] wrote “the data from our observations in more than 1,000 classrooms support the popular image of a teacher standing in front of a class imparting knowledge to a group of students”. Frey, Fisher, and Allen [2] observed that “students are expected to sit hour after hour, taking notes, and answering the occasional question with little interaction with peers” (p. 70). To resolve this situation whereby teachers talk and talk while students listen ineffectively, social media has been adopted by many tertiary institutions. The concept of social networking, online video and blogging dates back to the earliest days of the World Wide Web 2.0 when online video, blogging, texting and the exchange of content effectively began according to [3]. That era dawned collaboration, personalization, and some form of interaction through the use of social media. Today, the influence of social media on contemporary, technology-based academic society is undeniable. It is a phenomenon that changes the communication habits of people in school, creates opportunities for students, provides publicity for various school organizations and individuals and equally encourages sharing of information which affects life in various ways. Learning is more meaningful when students can create and build their own knowledge. According to [4] the activities in social media provide students with an active process that gives a significant meaning to them. Social media tools have a significant role to transform teaching and learning process because they provide specialized services for learning including blogs, micro blogs, social bookmarking, media sharing and social media sites. Universities and colleges today engage innovative Information Technologies to improve the

academic relationships between staff and students in teaching and learning. Students increasingly require their instructors to use social media as an educative tool to assist them to acquire new information, facilitate collaborations with them and improve their academic performance. Consequently, some academic staff of today have successfully been communicating and engaging students in their work while students take advantage of social media tools to drive change in institutional leadership and coursework. It is reported that faculty professional use of social media in most institutions has lagged somewhat behind their personal use but the former has increased each year. Current research amply suggests that social media may be used to improve communication between students and instructors in a higher education setting. Strengthening relationships between students and educators in institutions using social media may be academically rewarding in terms of class performance. For instance, in 2015, 21% of University of Wisconsin students said that they want their instructors to use social media as a learning tool more frequently, compared to 10% in 2012 according to [5].

2. PROBLEM DEFINITION

It has been observed that students in Wa Polytechnics do not take full advantage of the various online teaching and learning platforms including social media portals even though it is believed that social media can promote effective teaching and learning between staff and students at the tertiary level of education. What worsens the situation is the lack of research on the use of social media in Wa Polytechnic. This study therefore endeavors to fill this apparent research gap by exploring the various ways and the purpose for which staff and students academically use the potential opportunities inherent in social media. It further sought to find out the challenges that confront them as they use of social media in teacher-learner interactions.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Global Digital Statistics [7], there are 2.95 billion (41% of total population) people who are active internet users with 2.03 billion penetrations of active social media users, and 1.56 billion of them access social media applications through their mobile devices[7]. With the academia, we have faculty who still strongly believe the traditional classroom teaching method as the only effective way collaborate with their students. But with the repaid and astronomical increase in educational demand, limited classroom space is increasingly becoming a learning barrier. Non-traditional student population is increasing on a daily basis. Social media can therefore be used as a tool for education – personal learning environment[8], open distance education[9], improving teaching and learning experience[10]; Social media may help managing schedules and making announcements – ‘send out reminders, upcoming, events and schedule changes’, which will be seen by students at the times appropriate to them [11]. Reports of recent statics at the University of Houston, indicate that only about 10% of students live on campus and about 90% of students create and build their own knowledge,[12]. Batchelder [13], continues to explain that activities in social media provide students with an active process that gives a significant meaning to them. Social media tools have a significant role to transform teacher- learner processes due to their specialized services for learning including blogs, micro blogs, social bookmarking and media sharing. The use of social media has the ability to promote collaboration and cultural understanding among students and school staff.. Social media has a great potential as an educational tool to support the interactions between students and lecturers according to [14]. Kabilan et al. [15] reports that university students consider Facebook as a useful and meaningful online environment that can support and improve their learning of English. Faculty professional use of social media has lagged behind each year. Use of social media for teaching purposes has lagged even more, but like the other patterns of use, it has increased every year as indicated by[16]. There has been a growing interest among students to use social media as earning tools. In 2015, 31% of University of Wisconsin students said they felt they would be more effective if better skilled at using social media as a learning tool, up from 28% in 2014 (p=0.029).The percentage of students who indicated that they use social media, or Facebook specifically, as a learning tool increased from 33% in 2011 to 56% in 2015. The study also found out that 94% of the students were familiar with social media concept varying at different levels. Students knew about twittering, but the results show that there were 25% of students who did not have knowledge about it at all, and 45% of students had somewhat knowledge about it. Only 8% of students were very knowledgeable about it. As predicted, Wiki tool is very popular among students, as high as 77% of students were knowledgeable about this tool. Virtual worlds have been pretty hot in recent years; the most well-known application to[16].

3.1. Challenges of using social media sites:

Brady, D. [17] conclude that Social Networking sites challenges include privacy and safety issues which were also raised by several authors including [18]. Similar results were found by [19] that the educational community has been noticeably reluctant in allowing teachers to adopt social networking sites in their classrooms mainly due privacy and safety concerns involving students. It is important to not forget that social media represents “anything goes” communication channel [20]. All social media sites possess various fine functions, which can be used for improving teaching and learning experience; however, due to their overwhelming quantity, teacher or student can unknowingly share private content [21]. Social media may also give a bad influence on student engagement in learning. Students who spend more times and involve in multitasking would have lower GPA, [22] and significantly associated with lower performance [22]. These applications may also a source of distraction and can effect or divert students’ attention from their academic goals as stated by [23] and evidenced by findings in [24] claim that the most commonly cited reasons for not allowing students to use social networking sites in educational environments include perceptions associated with exposing students to inappropriate online content, fears of online sexual predators and student-based cyber bullying or online student harassment.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A survey methodology was used to obtain data from the respondents. A simple random sampling procedure was used to select a sample of 125 respondents from a population of 269 students and a sample of 21 faculty staff was obtained from 36 staff population. The simple random sampling method was used to avoid selection biases. The data collection instrument used was a questionnaire. The sampling units were Higher National Diploma students of HND ICT, HND in Accountancy, HND in Mechanical Engineering, HND in Civil Engineering and Diploma in Business Studies.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Social media has a great potential as an educational tool to support the interactions between students and lecturers according to 1.[14]. Equally, [15] reports that university students consider Facebook as a useful and meaningful online environment that can support and improve their learning of English. However, evidence gathered from the study indicates that majority of the faculty staff respondents (57.14%) do not use social media to support coursework with reference to table 3. Similarly, referring from the table 1, majority of the student respondents (74.63%) do not use social media to support coursework. Therefore the opportunities provided by social media have been completely lost by this majority of the respondents who do not use social media for learning activities in the institution. However, there is a glimmering hope as table 2 indicates that majority(98%) of the student respondents who do not use social media have the intention to use social media to support coursework.

Table 1: Students’ use of social media for learning activities

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Yes	34	25.37
No	100	74.63
Total	134	100

Table 2: Students’ intention to use of social media for learning activities

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Yes	98	98
No	2	2
Total	100	100

Table 3: Faculty Staff’s use of social media for learning activities

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Yes	12	42.86
No	16	57.14
Total	28	100

Table 4: Faculty Staff's intention to use of social media for learning activities

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Yes	12	75
No	4	25
Total	16	100

Referencing from figures 1 and 2, devices mostly used by both staff and student respondents are mobile phones with (40%) percent for faculty staff and (71.65%) for student respondents. This is not surprising as it is reported that mobile subscription in the world is fast reaching a point with at least one mobile subscription per person with penetration quoted to be around 128% of the population. The revelation that respondents mostly use mobile phones is important as the use of those devices as learning tools has a wide range of educational attributes such as spontaneity, informality, portability, personalisation, ubiquity, pervasiveness and the functions such as voice, text, video, radio, and the internet [23]. The most important good news is that both staff respondents and student respondents use multiple devices ranging from mobile phones through laptop computers to desktop computers. In case of a device breakdown, a user can switch to another device which will allow a smooth flow of teaching and learning interaction without an interruption.

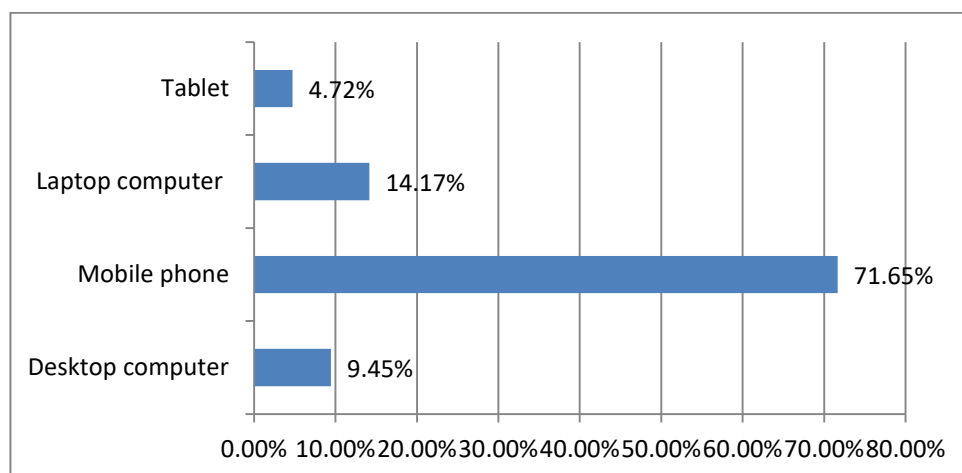


Figure 1: Devices used by students to access social media

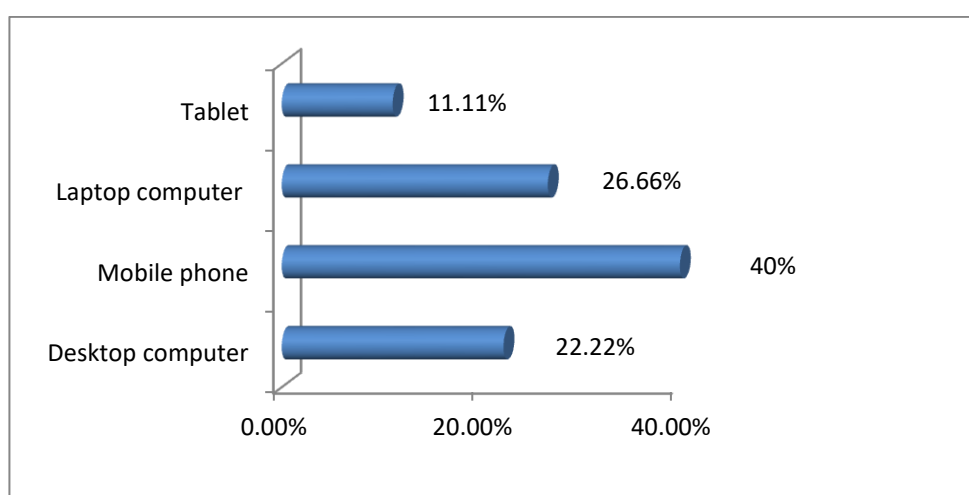


Figure 2: Devices used by Staff to access social media

With the exception of Google groups which is used by only staff respondents, figures 3 and 4 indicate same social media tools being used by both staff and student respondents with WhatsApp and Facebook being the most dominant tools. WhatsApp and Facebook usage are 44% and 55% respectively for faculty staff respondents and 55% and 66% respectively for student respondents. This is not surprising looking at the widespread popularity of the two of late.

However, with the limited text editing capabilities of whatSapp, effective text processing content cannot be effectively handled. The similarity of the multiple social media tools used by both staff and students will enable content to be shared on same platforms with ease without infringing on ethical boundaries, data sharing laws and rules and regulations enforced by social media organizations.

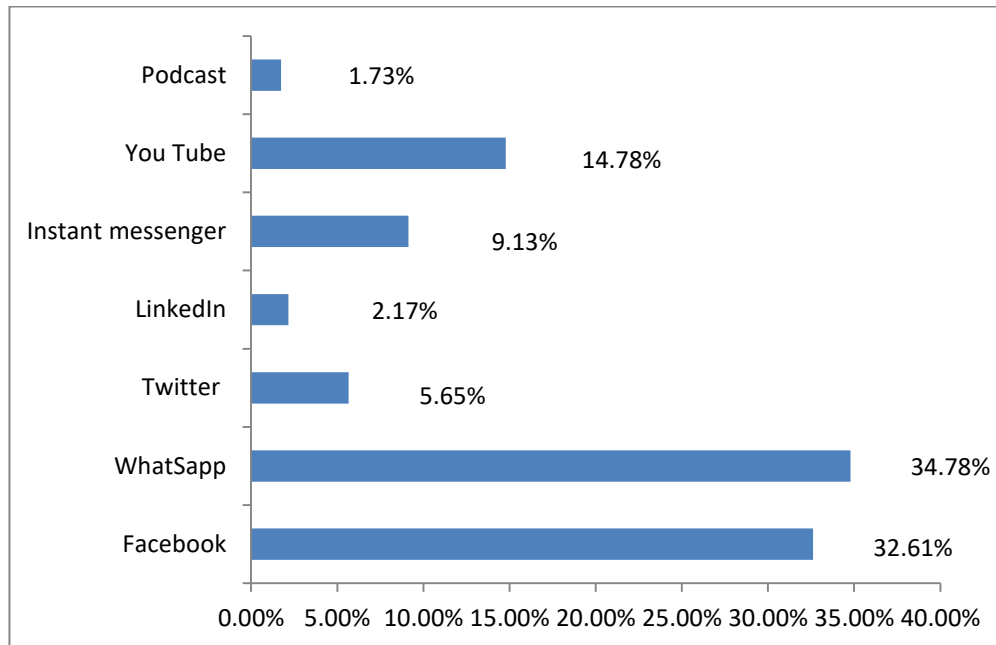


Figure 3: Social media tools used by students to interact with staff

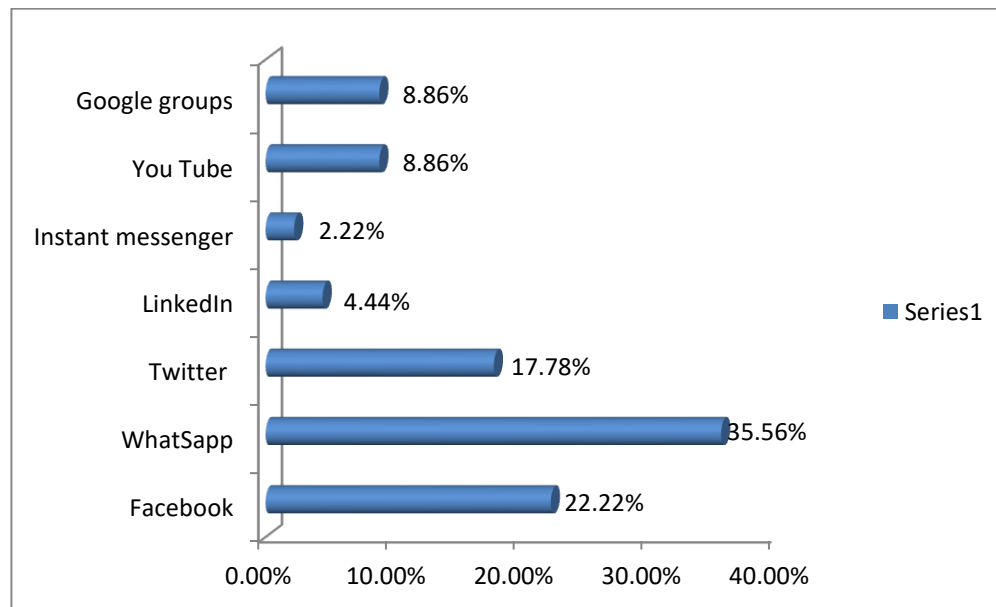


Figure 4: Social media tools used by staff to interact with staff

Social media tools have great interactive functionalities for creating and sharing learning versatile content. Reports of recent statics at the University of Houston, indicate that about 90% of students create and build their own knowledge, Youmei Liu [12]. The creation of content by students has also been validated in this study as figure 5 indicates that respondents who use social media create varieties of learning content such video and photo sharing (32%), study groups(45.60%), submitting assignment(8%). In the same vein, staff respondents equally use social media to create interactive content with research activities being the predominant activities performed by staff (41%) while video and photo sharing followed closely by with a percentage value of (30%).

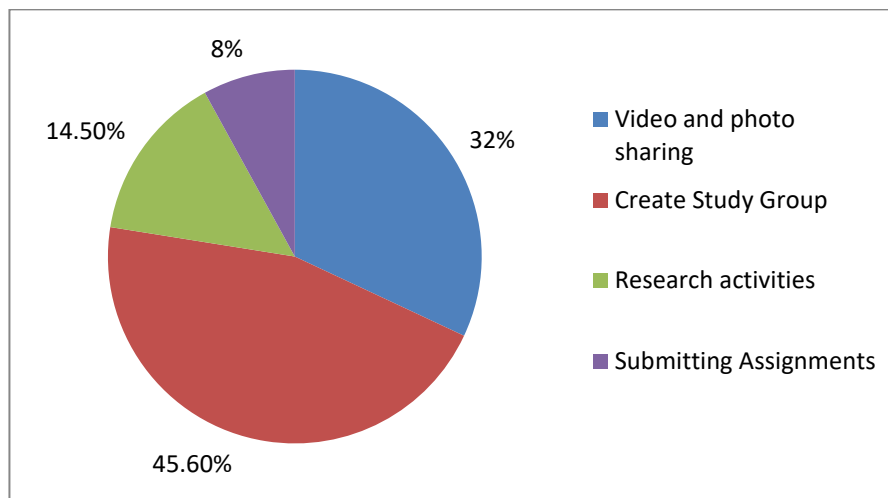


Figure 5: Learning content created and used by students on social media

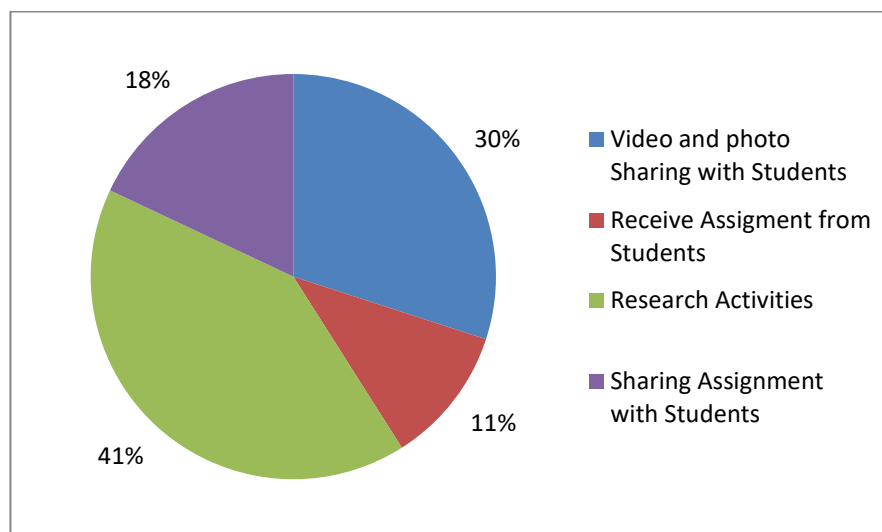


Figure 6: Social media content created by staff

The study found out some key challenges that confront faculty staff and students as they use social media to engage in teaching and learning. Such challenges include the unavailability of the internet at all times on campus, device breakdown, information overload and the rest as indicated in table 5. Further, when internet service did not pose any challenge, data unavailability (3.35%), device Misuse of tools during instructional time (3.38%), inadequate time and inadequate skills were some of the challenges respondents complained of.

Table 5: Major challenges staff and students face in their use of social media

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Internet service challenges	52	29.2
Data not available	60	3.35
Device breakdown	2	1.12
Lack of Time	6	33.52
Difficulties in using social media capabilities	5	0.78
There is no privacy and personal details are prone to abuse	10	5.56
Misuse of tools during instructional time	15	8.38
Information overload	13	7.26
Irrelevant content	16	8.94

6. CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Access is essential because “exclusion will mean severely limiting life chances” [25]. This situation has been revealed in this study as some staff and students have been excluded in social media application in teaching and learning in Wa Polytechnic. Evidence collected showed that 45.56% of the students and 57.14% of the staff do not use social media in teacher-learner collaboration. However, most of the staff (66.67%) and students (98%) who do not use social media for learning have the intention to use social media. Further, majority of the staff and students who use social media for teaching and learning do so with various devices with whatsapp and Facebook as the leading social media tools. Respondents have lack of data as their biggest challenge. If the internet problem is tackled, among others, it will enhance social media use in coursework and collaboration. It is recommended that school staff and students sharpen their skills in the use of social media tools for effective interaction and collaboration. The future integration of social media in education should focus on what students use instead of what the school wants them to use to guarantee maximum efficiency. When students become the stakeholders of their own learning, education will be truly revolutionalized through effective collaboration between faculty staff and students.

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