

The Use of Social Media as a Means of Information Dissemination among Postgraduate Students: A Case of the University of Mines and Technology (UMaT), Tarkwa*

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Abstract

The introduction of social engineering technologies and applications has significantly altered the global communication of information. Social media has enabled a tremendous contribution to academic discourse in which faculty and students engage in academic activities with less face-to-face contact. It appears that graduate students make extensive use of these new technologies in their academic work. This study aims to determine the impact of graduate student use of social media tools at the University of Mines and Technology in Tarkwa (UMaT). This study aims to establish if Postgraduate Students at UMaT rely on social media or Web 2.0, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of using social media in their studies and research. Both primary and secondary data are used in the study. While secondary data was gleaned from academic publications, the primary data was gathered through the distribution of a questionnaire. The data collected were analysed using a simple descriptive analysis, and it was found that research and lectures were the most common academic applications of social media. The cost of an internet connection was a barrier to using social media platforms and was expensive and unstable.

Keywords: Social media, web 2.0, Communication of Information, Information Technology

1 Introduction

The term "Web 2.0" was invented and made well-known in 2004 by Tim O'Reilly and Dale Dougherty of O'Reilly Media to describe the trends and business models that survived the collapse of the technology sector in the 1990s (O'Reilly, 2005). They did this to describe the fashion trends and business concepts that withstood the financial crisis. In contrast to earlier forms of websites, Web 2.0 services, sometimes known as "social media" or "social networking sites," do not require web design or publishing expertise to participate. This is one way in which Web 2.0 services differentiate themselves from earlier types of websites. Because of this, it is now much simpler for individuals to create, publish, and distribute their work to the rest of the world (Anderson, 2007).

Anderson (2007) proceeded by adding that because of the nature of this technology, it is now possible to disseminate information to either a small group of people or a significantly larger audience, depending on the circumstances. These technologies, such as blogs, video-sharing platforms (such as YouTube), presentation-sharing platforms (such as SlideShare), social networking platforms (such as Facebook and LinkedIn), instant messaging platforms (such as Skype), and groupware platforms (such as Google Docs), have fostered a platform that is more socially linked. The use of mobile devices and social media platforms comes with a wide range of benefits and drawbacks, the most notable of which is the ease with which students may access course materials,

video clips, and the transfer of teaching notes, among other things. It is often believed that mobile devices and social media platforms are tools that are not only inexpensive but also handy for getting essential information.

In academic settings, social media has become an integral part of people's life. People utilised them for communication reasons, including reading, writing, sending messages, and generating material. Most full-time and part-time postgraduate students pursuing modular programmes in various professions have little choice but to embrace the social media revolution as a tool to learn and do research. The broad use of these new communication methods is gaining momentum, especially among college students. Academicians have had to use this to connect with their students, respond to their questions, enhance their instruction, and provide essential information. Bookmark pages and media sites such as Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Viber, and Tango are the most popular social networking resources in many academic settings (Chua and Goh, 2010). This study examines the sorts of social media apps used by graduate students, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of incorporating social media in their studies.

The School of Postgraduate Studies at the University of Mines and Technology (UMaT) offers low rates, appealing fee-paying schedules, realistically focused programmes, and contemporary laboratory facilities in addition to having the best student-teacher ratio in Engineering and Science in Ghana

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(UMaT, 2020). The college offers programmes leading to the Postgraduate Diploma (PgD), Master of Science (MSc), Master of Philosophy (MPhil), and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degrees that include coursework and research (PhD)

The School of Postgraduate offers both full-time and part-time programmes, which are classed under the respective sections of full-time and part-time courses. The duration of a full-time master's course is two years from the date of enrollment, whereas the duration of a full-time PhD programme is three years. A student enrolled in a part-time master's degree must finish it within three years, whereas a part-time doctoral programme takes four years to complete.

Full-time programme students are expected to enrol for at least three (3) modules every semester. Part-time students must register for at least three (3) modules every academic year. The minimum credit hours required for a postgraduate degree are twenty-four (24) for course work and nine (9) for research for PgD students, twenty-four (24) and eighteen (18) for MSc students, eighteen (18) and twenty-seven (27) for MPhil students, and thirty-six (36) for PhD students. Students must be present and on time for all lectures, laboratory work, tutorials, quizzes, and exams. In addition, students are required to prepare well in advance for each lecture and complete all course assignments/test papers etc. on time (UMaT, 2020).

Since most postgraduate students are employed in the mining and affiliated sectors, this is a challenging assignment. Their reasons for enrolling in school were to get degrees for promotion purposes and to understand other new and emerging mining techniques. It is nearly difficult to meet the School of Postgraduate Studies' programme requirements while simultaneously attending school and working. Due to the difficulties, students have as a result of juggling employment and school, instructors have adopted the widespread use of social media for nearly all their activities. This study aims to determine how Postgraduate students at the University of Mines and Technology have exploited social media to their academic advantage.

The objective of this study is to determine if Postgraduate Students at UMaT use social media and Web 2.0, and also identify the benefits and drawbacks of using social media in their studies and research.

1.1 Review of Relevant Literature

Many authors have dealt with various aspects of Web 2.0 or social media, but for this relevant literature was reviewed on the following themes:

- i. The concept of Social media/ Web 2.0
- ii. Benefits of social media
- iii. Challenges faced in using social media

1.1.1 The Concept of Social Media / Web 2.0

Social media is a medium for networking that enables individuals of many races and nations the chance to communicate with one another while also providing them with the chance to share hobbies, activities, backgrounds, and real-world contacts. Social media is a tool that helps individuals of different races develop social connections with one another (Surowieck, 2005).

The quick transition from Web 1.0 (static content) to Web 2.0 paved the way for the rise of social media and is strongly ingrained in and anchored in it (interactive web). The visitor was only able to receive information from Web 1.0 because it was a one-way communication street. However, with the introduction of Web 2.0, visitors are now able to communicate with websites on both sides, which has led to the creation of user-generated content. The communication between the users of various websites is made easier by the tools of social media, at which point users may quickly access information, contribute to the information, and create content (Murthy, 2013).

According to Murthy's hypothesis in 2013, the ease with which anyone can use the internet to publish information, access information, collaborate on a common effort, and build relationships can be explained by the prevalence of social media. In his study on the use of social media among professional institutions, Reuben (2008) concluded that Facebook and YouTube were utilized by more than half of the 148 higher education institutions. He attributed this finding to the proliferation of ICT and mobile devices. Despite this, a recent survey of 456 authorized schools in the United States found that all of them use at least one type of social media. Most significantly, 98% of them use Facebook, and 84% use Twitter for e-learning reasons, including contact with mentors (Barnes & Lescault, 2011).

Traditional or commercial media cannot compare to social media in terms of consistency, scope, speed, accessibility, immediacy, or durability (Agichtein et al, 2008; Graham, 2011). The term "social media" refers to a variety of platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, blogs, Instagram, LinkedIn, and others (Aichner and Jacob, 2015).

It could additionally be seen as a measure of people's ability to determine whether or not other uses are available, such as knowing where other people are in the real world and/or the virtual world as well as if they are accessible. This might be used in both the

virtual and physical worlds (Kietzmann and Kristopher, 2011).

Social media is defined in "5C" categories: contact, collaboration, connection, completion, and combination, which provide new resources for posting, storing, and publishing content, addressing and expressing views and affect communication, and are the preferred form of dissemination of information because it allows content creation and editing to be obtained without location and time restriction (Gyampo 2017; Vuori 2011).

Postman (2009) argues that social media could be identified with six attributes that are:

- Authenticity: the possibility of letting people's real voices come through;
- Transparency: the ability to publicize information;
- Immediacy: the willingness to connect and engage in online conversations;
- Participation: the right of anybody to participate in private websites like the company's website, private forums and online personal blogs;
- Connectivity: the ability to connect and share in thousands of locations; and
- Accountability: the ability to detect IP addresses of users and other information.

Additionally, the work done by (Vyas and Trivedi, 2014) identified that, historically, one-way information on the Internet used to be enough. Fast forward, to the advent of social media networks like Facebook, Twitter, etc. are inspiring new forms of social communication, conversation, sharing and collaboration. They further posit that social software in the Web 2.0 application has increased practical usability in the library.

1.1.2 Academic Performance of Students and Social Media

Social media platforms may serve as a medium for a variety of activities, including academic pursuits, commercial endeavours, and forms of entertainment. Not only does the power of social media have a huge influence on the social life and relationships of a student, but it also has a substantial influence on the student's health and academic achievement (Abraham, 2020). Kyoshaba (2009) brought to light the possibility that a student's activity on social media might affect their academic achievement. Many positive outcomes may result from integrating social media into educational settings (Lederer, 2012). To begin, giving students opportunities to openly express themselves in the

less scary context of social media may improve their capacity to communicate successfully. Secondly, the use of social media may improve the quality of communication between professors and students. Instructors can react to student queries, provide messages and updates, and engage in other types of information interaction. Finally, Lederer emphasizes the career opportunities made available by the use of social media.

Students have the opportunity to search for a prospective employer, upload their resumes, and do a variety of additional tasks that can make it simpler and more expedient for them to find placement. Some research, on the other hand, found that students' academic performance was severely influenced by their usage of social media. According to Malaney (2005), the quantity of time students devote to online platforms is closely associated with their grade reduction. While Bowen (2008) demonstrated that students' use of social media has a detrimental impact on their academic performance and can lead to unethical behaviour such as delaying assignments, he also observed that students' usage of social media enhances their chance of participating in unethical behaviour. As a result, some educators think that social media platforms are not always the best place to conduct instructional activities (Waycott et al., 2010).

According to Lederer (2012), student usage of social media can disrupt the learning process since it can distract students' attention away from being engaged in class and disturb the entire learning experience. Students are easily distracted by the various social networking sites available, despite the fact that social roles play a vital role in the educational process. They are more prone to participate in non-academic activities such as chitchatting, playing games, going shopping, and so on (Abbas et al., 2019). As a result, students' educational activities must be adequately managed, taking into account every element that may have a positive or negative impact on the student's academic achievement.

1.1.3 The Benefit of Social Media Use

Social media has become the fastest way to share information. As a result, academicians always use the medium to fast-track their work either to respective individuals or a group (Kim *et al.*, 2012). Social media has also become the norm of the day because it is a tool to instantly, share information, received feedback from the shared information, exchange visual and auditory learning in the educational cycle, share job advertisements, arrange conferences, publish studies, etc. (Seguin and Seguin, 1995; Kim *et al.* 2013; Annku, 2014).

According to Nazim (2015), the value of applications for social media was highlighted by expanding access to the data storage and processing capabilities of organizations. He continued by pointing out that social media allows students to disseminate resources more easily and that it helps institutions function more effectively by providing academically relevant and high-quality material and other services. Meanwhile, the research conducted by Peyale (2011) found that social media gives students a fresh take on an old activity by giving them a direct channel through which to analyze and comment publicly on their real-time campus environment, organizational policies, and classes.

Furthermore, Boateng and Amankwaa (2016) argue in their research examining the effect of social media on student academic careers in higher education that because today's students communicate through technology and Facebook plays an important role in their lives, refusing to use social media is akin to severing a significant relationship with other students. This is because today's students communicate via technology, and Facebook has played an essential part in their lives. According to several studies, using social media successfully allows users to make intelligent decisions before and during data consumption (Aliquist et al., 2010; Mangold and Faulds, 2009). They claimed that using social media may increase brand recognition and influence customer behaviour, offer assistance in pre- and post-purchase contact, as well as analyse and grow an audience.

According to the studies of Masterson and Tribby (2009) and Mahmood (2012), traditional marketing mediums have a bigger associated expenditure than social media, while social media has a greater tendency of establishing global reach and exposure than the former. There are hundreds of social media networks dedicated to strengthening people's current social relationships. Their findings agreed with those of (Bria, 2014), who stated that users utilise social media applications to develop new communication patterns and provide material to new media aggregators such as Facebook and Twitter, including Flickr. These findings were also congruent with those of (Bria, 2014).

According to Bria (2014), Facebook has had more than 1.11 billion active users since February 2013, whereas LinkedIn had 225 million active users in May of the same year. Twitter had a total of 200 million users as of March 2013. He noted that social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter give a venue for technology to develop and extend user-to-user relationships, allowing them to become available to a broad audience and to disclose their social network. Other examples of such sites include Instagram and Snapchat. (Stephens, 2006; Chua and

Goh, 2010; Madmood and Richardson, 2011) found that libraries have adopted social media tools to promote two-way communication and create dynamic content outside of their physical library structure. These findings were found in the individual global library assessment studies that each researcher conducted. This gives librarians the ability to develop new material, answer inquiries about references, and share information with the rest of the university community.

While Redden (2010) suggests that social media can be used to engage students and other lecturers, it can also be used to enhance customer-driven services with little or no cost. This is accomplished by connecting and sharing information with their students more frequently and attracting new ones to access their content. Wardofo (2014) discovered that librarians and users could use social media to chat with clients on research needs issues such as subscriptions, online database access, and so on.

When it comes to publishing resource ads, seminars, course packages, database monitoring, new publications, service disturbances, staff promotions, appointments, and changes in library hours, school libraries and research libraries can benefit from using Web 2.0 resources, particularly Twitter and Facebook (Kim and Abbas, 2010; Graham, et al., 2009). This is because the two sites are ideal for the syndication and distribution of material. Because of this, Graham *et al.*, and other librarians have been able to cultivate and build professional ties both inside and outside of the library (2009).

1.1.4 The Disadvantage of Social Media Use

Complicated technical advancements in education are always accompanied by challenges and concerns (Anderson, 2019), and social media is no exception. And that, not all technological breakthroughs are good in the short or long run. There are a few examples of technology that was first employed and embraced only to be discovered to be inefficient. Much as variance in social networking technologies and their use makes it tough to analyse the overall efficacy and worth of social media, it was also challenging to identify and assess the challenges it brings with its usage (Regan, et al., 2018).

According to Pariser (2011), social media is not advantageous for learning since it has an overt propensity towards conviviality and homogeneity while lacking the necessary aspects of dissent and discussion. And that social media phenomenon filters out competing viewpoints (i.e., live in a filter bubble). (Emezie and Nwaohiri, 2016) discovered that many users access social media sites for social and entertainment purposes rather than academic objectives while writing about social networks as the

facilitator for library services: issues of Nigerian academic libraries. They also mentioned certain educational librarians' negative opinions about social media use. Since librarians are expected to be at the forefront of utilising the library's websites, the majority of them are unable to make use of the technology.

Charnigo and Bernet-Ellis (2007) discovered through a study that certain academic institutions are mostly indifferent to social media use. In 2009, Ramzan and Singh (2009) did a study on academic institutions in Pakistan and determined that certain institutions lack computers, poor internet access, irregular power supply, license application challenges, and software which impedes the usage of social media.

A survey conducted by (Hendrix, *et al.*, 2009) in academic health science facilities deduced that the staff there rejected Facebook use due to inadequate time and also lack social use of the software in an academic environment. They explained that staff said, there is no significant benefit from Facebook as a social media tool. Yet, (Mack *et al.*, 2007) contradicted this claim when they said that Facebook helps students to interact with instructors and receive knowledge to boost their academic performance.

According to Achugbue (2015), social media allows for the invasion of privacy since the social media platform does not always make it apparent if the user controls their data.

2 Resources and Methods Used

A survey design strategy was adopted, and data was collected via a questionnaire. The survey method was chosen because it uses questions to assess facts, attitudes, or behaviours. It is also a method of gathering data from a bigger number of respondents. Validity, reliability, and statistical significance can also be determined using these procedures. As the study addresses the usage of social networking sites among graduate students at UMaT, a purposive sampling technique was also adopted. This approach was used since the acquired samples were non-probabilistic and hence were selected according to the features of the research population and the objectives of the research. Again, the purposive sampling technique was used, as the researchers had to approach a targeted sample quickly. Furthermore, because there were a restricted number of primary data sources that might contribute to the study, sampling for proportionality was not the major issue (Palys, 2008). To gather information from postgraduate students, the convenience sampling approach was utilised. Because the majority of postgraduate students work and are not on campus

at the time of the study, only those who were available and willing to engage in the research were included.

Primary and secondary sources of information were used for this study. The primary sources consisted of the responses received from the questionnaire while the secondary sources consisted of published literature notes, both printed and electronic.

A structured questionnaire was developed and used. During the survey, the student records at UMaT academic affairs revealed that the total number of graduate students was 400. Of these, only 55 participated in the administration of the questionnaire series. Fifty-five out of the total representing 13.75% were retrieved for analysis using Microsoft Excel and the result was converted into charts, graphs and tables.

3 Results and Discussion

The results of the study, as obtained from the research are presented in this section.

3.1 Faculty/School of Respondents

From Fig. 1, it can be deduced that 43.6% of respondents are from the Master of Business and Technology programme, representing the largest number of respondents contributing to the data collection process, while 12.7% of respondents are from the Engineering Management programme and 10.9% are from the Mathematics Department.

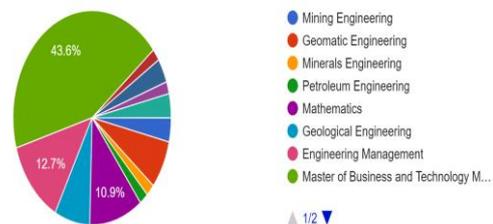


Fig. 1 shows the faculty or schools of respondents

3.2 Employment Status of Respondents

From Fig. 2, it can be observed that a greater number of the respondents (80%) are employed while undertaking further studies whiles 20% of the respondents are not employed.

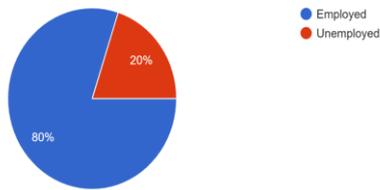


Fig. 2. Shows the employment status of respondents of the study

3.3 Usefulness of Social Media on Academic Activities among Respondents

This section presents the second objective of the study indicating the usefulness and benefits of using social media in academics. As shown in Fig. 3, It was determined that nearly all respondents agreed with the usefulness of social media platforms in their academic work, with 90.9% of respondents attesting to this, being the largest proportion of the sample, and 9.1% of respondents disagree. The finding agrees with Al-Ma'aitah (2020) conducted research employing a survey approach with a total of 1889 participants to investigate the influence of Web 2.0 technology on education in Jordanian institutions. According to the findings of the study, the use of such technology might be beneficial to students by delivering increased research and communication abilities.

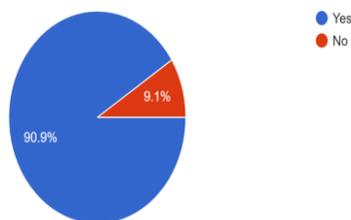


Fig. 3 indicates the effectiveness of the use of social media on academic activities among the respondents

3.4 Benefits of Social Media Usage (Purpose of Use)

Based on the multiple-choice questions given, it was concluded from Fig. 4 that the majority of respondents use social media primarily for academic and social goals, representing 89.1% and 85.5%, respectively. Employment, product promotion, and other accounts for 45.5%, 38.2%, and 27.3%, respectively, of the whole sample. This finding also agrees with a study conducted by Chukwuere (2021) examined how social media affects student social relationships. An online questionnaire was sent to 449 students, who responded 72%. His analysis revealed that how students use social media affects

their social connection and quality of time with colleagues. Friends' communication abilities improve, while physical distance increases. Chukwuere also suggested studying how social media affects students' academic performance, which the present study seeks to do.

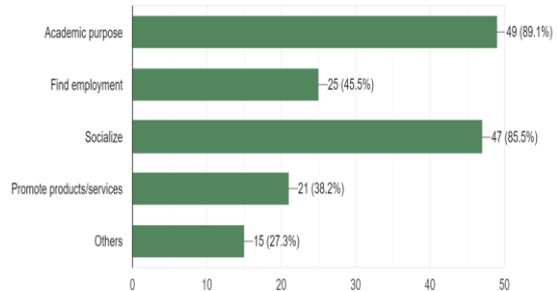


Fig. 4 indicates how respondents use their social media platforms

3.5 Benefits of Social Media Usage (Academics)

Fig. 5 demonstrates that the majority of participants (76.4%), used social media for research, indicating that the highest number of respondents used the technology for academic work, accessing electronic resources, and attending lectures (69.1% and 67.7%, respectively). The percentage of students actively using social media was demonstrated by the engagement of 65.5% of students, 63.6% of students who had access to course materials, and 7.5% of students who made use of other types of usage.

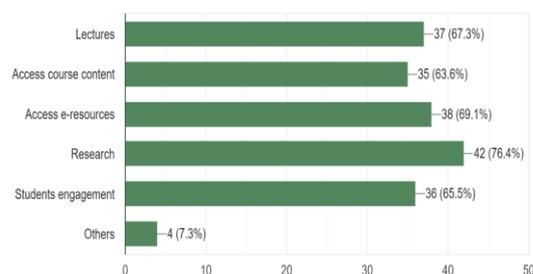


Fig. 5 shows the academic dimension of social media use among respondents

The data shown above are consistent with investigations undertaken by According to Tiene (2000), students are permitted to engage in conversations and offer their ideas via social media. Pupils are provided access to a platform that allows them to share and exchange information, particularly educational content. Moreover, Salvation and Adzharuddin (2014) noted that when utilising social media, students were able to participate in group discussions, exchange ideas, and connect with one another about academic work. Aside from that, social media aids in the

development of relationships between students and lecturers. Some professors utilise social media to communicate with their students about lecture notes and tutorial materials (Ahmed & Qazi, 2011).

3.6 Drawbacks of social media usage

This section presents the third objective of the study indicating the drawbacks of using social media. It was revealed from Fig. 6 that unstable internet connectivity and cost of internet connection are the main setbacks of using social media among respondents with 89.1% and 87.3% respectively. Data protection and privacy 45.5%, lack of conducive environment 25.5%, information explosion 25.5%, lack of mobile devices 12.7% and other issues 5.5% came in that order.

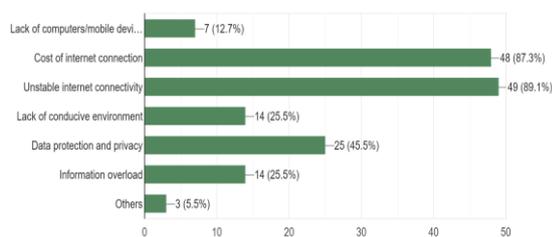


Fig. 6: indicates the challenges respondents faced in using social media platforms

When students are off campus, where Internet access is not provided for free, the high costs of airtime and data bundles necessitate the expenditure of a significant amount of money on their part. Anderson (2019) makes this point clear. This suggests that if students have a responsibility to fulfil when they are away from the institution, it will become a burden for them.

Data protection and privacy issues fall in agreement with a study conducted by Davies and Cranston (2008), some of the risks linked with social media include unlawful acts such as data theft and the emergence of connections that are not authentic, both of which are prevalent in contemporary society, as well as sexual abuse and inadequate advertising. On the same topic, O'Keeffe and Clake -Pearson (2011) pointed out that some of the obstacles that are associated with social networking included cyberbullying, online harassment, obscenity, Facebook depression, and privacy issues.

4 Conclusion and Recommendation

The following inferences were made based on the results that were obtained:

PhD students at the University of Mines and Technology spend a significant amount of time on different types of social networking sites. Moreover,

PgD students at UMaT should make good use of social media outlets to further their academic careers.

In addition, the respondents' exploitation of various social media platforms results in a multitude of advantageous outcomes.

It is unmistakable that postgraduate students have a comprehensive understanding of modern technology and online social networking sites. Even if there is a possibility of students plagiarizing their work, technologies like these have significant potential since they make it simple for students to get knowledge on practically any topic. These kinds of websites also provide beneficial avenues for instructors to establish contact with students, maybe to provide instructions or information, as well as allow lecturers to accept work from students and provide comments on that work. However, there are risks involved, and it is not advisable to provide any private information.

The most significant drawbacks associated with incorporating social media included the high costs involved in maintaining an internet connection as well as inconsistent connectivity to the internet.

Based on the above conclusions, the study made the following recommendations: To promote the usage of social media among graduate students, the University of Mines and Technology ought to form partnerships with telecommunications companies that are capable of delivering graduate students internet access that is both quick and dependable at a discounted rate. It is also imperative that this cutting-edge technology, which may enable professors and students to engage digitally, study online, form discussion groups, and other similar activities, be heavily utilised in the pedagogical training that takes place at universities.

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