



An Investigation of The Extent of Use of Social Media By Undergraduate Students At St.augustine University of TANZANIA, Mwanza Campus

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ABSTRACT

The study applied mixed methods research using survey methodology. Through multi-stage and non-probability sampling, 539 respondents were used for quantitative and qualitative phases respectively. The study revealed that WhatsApp was the most popular site closely followed by Facebook. Also, respondents used social media mainly for information-seeking purposes that were not necessarily academic in nature followed by the need for online social interaction with colleagues.

KEYWORDS : Social Media, WhatsApp, Use

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, social media has become popular all over the world with more people using it to communicate to their online colleagues (Berkman, 2013). Social media continues to play an increasingly important part of many peoples' lives and has become of age and continued to evolve with new applications and uses (Smith-Duff, 2012).

The first type of social media is the *social network* (IBM, 2013; Grahl, 2014; White, 2014). This is most likely what many people think of when they hear the words "social media" and are sites that allow one to connect with other people via Internet, in addition, they also allow one to meet and connect with other people with similar interests as the user (IBM, 2013; Grahl, 2014; White, 2014). These include *Face book*, *Linked In* and *My Space* which used to be popular, but is being reinvented. However, *WhatsApp* is the most popular social media since it allows better accessibility and ease of communication offering fast messaging, empowerment, sense of belongingness and sociability, enjoyment, quick information-sharing and cost benefits (Yeboah & Ewur, 2014; Soliman & Salem, 2014; Devi & Tevera, 2014).

The second type of social media is the *social news* that allows users to post outside articles and news links to a website that the community votes as relevant or interest (IBM, 2013; Grahl, 2014; White, 2014). This is a very powerful tool because it is the market deciding what is worthy and what is not with the most popular social news sites as *Digg* and *Reddit* (IBM, 2013; Grahl, 2014; White, 2014).

The third type of social media is the *book marking sites* that essentially organize and manage users' web links (IBM, 2013; Grahl, 2014; White, 2014). Here, users can share their information with anybody they select with the most popular web sites are *Delicious* and *Stumble Upon* (IBM, 2013; Grahl, 2014; White, 2014). The fourth type of social media is *Media Sharing* with sites like *You Tube* and *Flickr* where users can upload and share pictures and videos with people all around world. In addition, they also have features like profiles and commenting so that one is able to interact with other users. The fifth type includes *micro blogging sites* like *Twitter* which are basically short updates that people who "follow" you receive. It is a rapid way to spread any information or content one may want with his or her audience (IBM, 2013; Grahl, 2014; White, 2014).

BENEFITS OF USING SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is used in complementing education in various

learning institutions where users share various ideas and assist each other identify the latest publications and extend learning beyond formal academic settings and also through e-learning that can be of benefit in their academic endeavors (Notley & Tachi, 2005).

Social media allow creativity (Collin, *et.al*, 2010) where users develop creative content that is widely shared thereby developing their technological knowledge and ability that is crucial in this digital age (Burgess *et.al.*, 2006; Bruns, 2008) such that media users have become producers.

Social media are increasingly important for the expression of identity (Boyd & Ellison, 2007) where users can express their gender, personality and cultural among other forms of identities to other users whom they may have not physically met thereby feeling a sense of relief since social media is used as an avenue.

Social media is used for strengthening interpersonal relationships, especially when online and offline worlds converge (Collin *et.al.*, 2010) which is necessary for wholistic individual development.

USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN TANZANIA

Although Tanzania has grown in terms of quantity and quality of key indicators of freedom of expression namely in terms of media, associations, political parties, forums, demonstrations, and strikes among others (Ndumbaro, 2016), social media sites that focus on politics have been under threat, closure and intimidation from the government (Joseph, 2012; Nalwoga, n.d).

Social media use is rapidly growing among Tanzanian undergraduates, however, those in Kenyan universities lead in East Africa (Ng'ang'a, 2012). Facebook and WhatsApp are the most common sites among Tanzanian students who connect with their online colleagues to discuss various topics of interest and concern (Ridley, 2014).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The researcher used mixed methods research (Creswell, 2009) in the survey method using self-administered questionnaires and interview guides. After conducting multi-stage sampling method at the quantitative phase (acquiring 503) and non-probability sampling method at qualitative phase (acquiring 36) respectively, a total of 539 out of 704 respondents were used. This represents 76.5% and minimizes non-response bias (Fincham, 2008).

Table -1
Days spent in a week on social media

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Days you use Face book in a week	436	1.00	7.00	4.2500	2.32317
Days you use WhatsApp in a week	451	1.00	7.00	6.3814	1.48653
Days you use Twitter in a week	185	1.00	7.00	3.1892	2.21209
Days you use MySpace in a week	22	1.00	7.00	2.9091	2.20193
Days you use LinkedIn in a week	49	1.000	7.000	3.85714	2.549510
Days you use Instagram in a week	270	1.00	7.00	5.7296	1.86063
Days you use Flickr in a week	18	1.00	7.00	3.7222	2.34660
Days you use Google+ in a week	299	1.00	7.00	5.4482	1.98649
Days you use Blogs in a week	123	1.00	7.00	4.8211	2.14641
Days you use Skype in a week	70	1.00	7.00	3.4429	2.31339
Days you use Hangouts in a week	72	1.00	7.00	5.1944	2.41264
Days you use Viber in a week	105	1.00	7.00	4.4190	2.42099
Days you use Immo in a week	2	4	7	5.50	2.121
Valid N (listwise)	0				

Source: Researcher's findings

Table 1 reveals that WhatsApp had a higher use with an average of 6.3814 days followed by Facebook with 4.25 days in a week. Findings also reveal that although Facebook was the second highest in terms of user population, there were fewer users on a daily basis compared to Instagram that had fewer users (270) who spent more days (5.7296) on it.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) revealed that users spent more days in a week (almost daily) on WhatsApp followed by Facebook that though popular, was not used on some days.

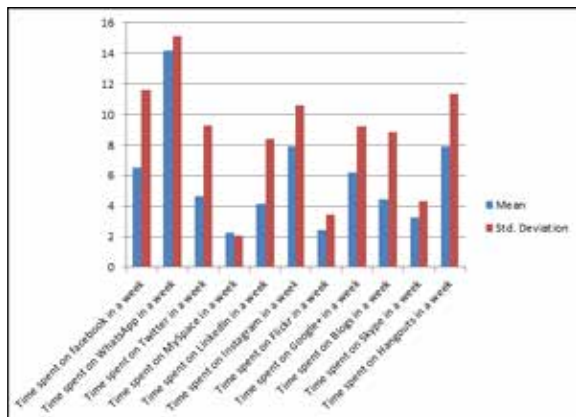


Figure 1: Extent of use of social media in terms of time (hours) spent in a week

Source: Researcher's findings

Figure 1 reveals that more time was spent by undergraduate students in WhatsApp (14 hours) than in any other social media site in a week followed by Instagram and Hangouts where users spent an average of 8 hours per week. WhatsApp had a higher standard deviation (15.11325 hours) than all other sites, this implies that there are users who use it at extremes namely for very long hours to very few minutes.

The Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) revealed WhatsApp as the most popular site followed closely by Facebook among users.

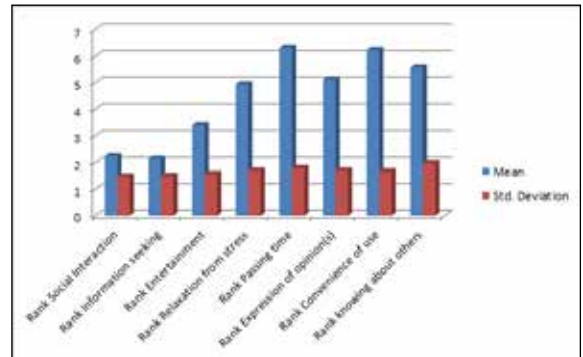


Figure 2: Reasons for using social media
Source: Researcher's findings

Figure 2 reveals that students ranked use social media sites for information seeking purposes (mean of 2.15) as the foremost reason for using social media. This was closely followed by the need for social interaction which was ranked second (2.25). The use of social media for entertainment purposes was third in terms of ranking (3.42).

The quantitative study findings slightly differ with those of the FGDs which revealed that most students preferred using social media for online interaction purposes followed by information seeking.

CONCLUSIONS

Although social media is popular in Tanzania and has key benefits, there are restrictions on its use especially those that seem to question the political status quo. A lot needs to be done by Tanzanian Government, through the Ministries of Higher Education and Ministry of Information to enhance use of social media and information technology aspects in higher learning institutions so as to match her East African counterparts of Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda.

The study findings revealed that WhatsApp is the most popular site by undergraduate students at St. Augustine University of Tanzania (SAUT) closely followed by Face book. However, Instagram is increasingly growing in popularity among users. A majority of SAUT undergraduates mainly use social media for information seeking on various topics of interest closely followed by the need for social interaction.

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