Social Media Networks and Their Impact on University Students' Academic Performance: A Case of Kibabii University, Kenya

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Abstract: **Improvements in communication technology especially in social media has greatly broadened the scope of communication helping people to be better informed and keeping abreast with world development. The social networking sites among others include: WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook and Skype which use gadgets like smart phones and tablets. The popularity of use of social media has been felt in learning institutions. Certainly, this creates a direct link between the use of social media and academic achievement in learning institutions. These sites remain in use continuously by students on a daily basis. Therefore, as to whether many social networking sites displayed on the internet cause students to be tempted to abandon their academic work and reading times in preference for chatting online with friends or they enhance academic performance is a question that this paper has attempted to answer. Consequently, this paper aims at discussing the impact of social media networks in terms of promoting or negating academic performance among university students. At the end of the paper, the author has recommended on how learning institutions can maximumly benefit there students from the exposure to social media to enhance academic performance.**

Key words: **Social media networks; Academic achievement**

I. INTRODUCTION

The study of social media networks has received significant interest from researchers in various domains such as psychology and education. Hansen (2017) defined social media as a set of online applications and tools that provide ways of social interaction and communication between digital media users by facilitating and creating knowledge, sharing and ultimately transforming a monologue into a dialog. On the other hand, Baltaci (2019) defines social media as online environments accessed via internet that individuals use when they want to share their instantaneous thoughts and feelings and even their behaviors with others by means of photos and videos.

Notably, many of the students in higher education institutions are widely using social media networks in transforming their way of learning, social conduct, communication and networking. In relation to this, Selwyne (2012) opines that social media technology usage increases due to a combination of factors that entails affordability of the mobile devices and increased internet bandwidth amongst the consumers who are majorly students. Apparently, the most dominant social media platforms are Facebook and Whatsapp. Davis, Deil-Amen,

Rios-Aguilar and Gonzalez-Canchem (2012) emphasize this fact by noting that a number of interfaces used for social media have increased with Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, MySpace and Flicker being among the top. Currently, social media is so pronounced because it has changed how people, including university students communicate, interact and socialize over the course of their learning processes at educational institutions. According to Penny (2017), social media provides platforms that enable university students and the rest of the population to trade their ideas, thoughts, information, and conclusions; talk with one another about the substance of data and make contacts by means of interpersonal interaction. The main reason as to why youths are so indulged in social media networks might be they are tending to avoid or pull themselves from socially worrying environments and trying to exist in social networks (Morahan-Martin & Schumacher, 2000).

A report by Al Sayigh (2013) as cited in Badri, Al Nuaimi, Guang and Al Rashedi (2017) noted that the new communication revolution has effected a major change in the culture and way of life of individuals, especially of the youth. A significant number of the predominant issues affecting the youth, for example, introspection, social disengagement, web fixation, poor performance at schools, and the obtaining of negative behavior patterns and qualities, for example, brutality and criminal conduct are an immediate result of the enormous change that has struck our social culture.

Many studies have been done refuting the fact social media networks hinder academic performance while others support the claim. For instance, a study by Jacobsen and Forste (2011) concluded that there was evidence that social media networks hinder academic performance. On that note, Junco and Cotton (2012) elaborates that the proposed mechanisms for the link between social media use and lower academic performance include less total time studying as well as inefficient studying due to multitasking and could also reflect the sleep disturbance. Social media use in learning institutions is much pronounced in the colleges and universities as most of the students have more access to it than in secondary and primary institutions. In a study by Kirschner and Karpinski (2010), college students who used Facebook had lower GPAs and spent less time studying than those who did not use Facebook despite any differences regarding total time spent online.

Another study showed that two-thirds of the students reported using electronic media during class, while studying, or while doing homework, with amount of electronic media use negatively associated with self-reported GPA (Jacobsen and Forste, 2011) as cited in Spies Shapiro and Margolin (2014).

Some evidence shows computer use is detrimental to the academic performance of some, but not all youths (Hofferth & Moon, 2011). Also, Malaney (2005) argued that some students in multiple studies in 2000 and 2003 reported that their grades had suffered as a result of too much time spent on social media. The reason behind this might be students' their engagement with these sites reduces their focus, which causes them to dedicate less time to their studies and results in a decline in their academic performance as depicted by Hoffmann and Bublitz (2017). On the flipside, other studies like one done in Pakistan by Ahmed and Qazi (2011) noted that there was no significant relation between time spent on social media networks and students' academic performance despite. The increase in the popularity of social media and becoming dependent on the virtual structure of these social networks leads to an increase in the number of individuals with adversely affected lives by being secluded from reality and people with harmed relationships (Eliphinston & Noller, 2011). Seemingly, the issue as to whether social media affects academic performance seems to attract mixed reactions especially in the developing countries. Zanamwe, Rupere and Kufandirimbwa (2013) concede that social networking innovations were received with blended responses by scholars in developing nations in spite of the fact that the pattern is by all accounts in support of adoption. Basing on this argument, Kenya being one of the developing countries, the study endeared at establishing the impact of social media networks on university students' academic performance and in this case Kibabii University in Kenya.

II. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Shields and Rangarjan (2013) note that descriptive research design addresses the "what" question hence it usually tries to describe some group of people or other entities. Descriptive survey research design is used in preliminary and exploratory studies to permit researchers to collect information, summarize, present and interpret for the aim of clarification (Orodho, 2012). Therefore, the researcher was able to assess and give descriptions on the impact of social media networks on academic perfomance of university students. This design was relevant for the study because the researcher observed, described and recorded information that is present in the population, but did not manipulate the variables enabling a naturalistic interpretive research approach to be adopted.

The study was conducted in Bungoma County where Kibabii University is located. The target population of this study was 9,000 students of Kibabii University. Among this, 5,800 are male while 4,200 are female students (Office of Academic Registrar, 2020). The age coincides with late adolescence and

early adulthood that are exposed to social media networks. The sample size of the students was determined using the formula developed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970). The study employed a questionnaire in data collection with descriptive statistics being used in data analysis. Stratified sampling design was used. This method gave all the students equal opportunity of being picked for the study. Out of a student population of 9,000 the study took 2.5% for a sample since the target population is higher than 1,000 and this translated to a sample size of 225 students.

Social media networks used by University Students

From the study, it is evident that students use more than one social network at any given time. The findings showed that 26.7% of the students have up to two social network accounts, 28.4% have up to three accounts while 28% were found to have more than three accounts. The study also established that only 16.9% of the students had only one social network accounts. This shows how popular social media networks have become among university students as exemplified in table 1.

Table 1: Social media networks used by students

No of social network	Frequency	Percentage
One social network	38	16.9
Two social networks	60	26.7
Three social networks	64	28.4
More than three social networks	63	28
Total	225	100

WhatsApp was found to be the most popular among university students followed by Facebook, twitter and Instagram in that order and recorded more than 30% among the students. LinkedIn was found to be the least used social network at 12.1% usage while the study also recorded moderate usage of Telegram, skype, YouTube and snapchat. Some social networks were found to be more prevalence among female students compared to male students. These findings have been illustrated herein in table 2.

Table 2: Use of social media networks based on gender

Social media network	Male		Female	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
WhatsApp	27	24.5	31	27.0
Facebook	16	14.5	19	16.5
Instagram	13	11.9	17	14.8
Skype	8	7.3	5	4.3
Twitter	13	11.8	8	7.0
LinkedIn	7	6.4	4	3.5
Telegram	11	10	18	15.6

YouTube	10	9.1	6	5.2
Snapchat	5	4.5	7	6.1
Total	110	100	115	100

The number of female students using WhatsApp is more than male students. Facebook, Instagram, Telegram and YouTube are more common among female university students compared to the male students. The study also shows that more male students use LinkedIn and skype at 6.4% and 7.3% respectively compared to female students. Among all the social media platforms, WhatsApp seems to be the most pronounced. This finding tallies with that of Schrittwieser , Fïuhwirt, Kieseberg, Manuel, Mulazzani, Huber and Weippl (2012) who report that WhatsApp has become the most popular tested application as it is distributed among various smart-phone platforms and is being widely used by the students because of reasons that include affordability of smartphones, decreasing data costs and improved internet bandwidth.

Social Media and Academic Performance

The study noted that a significant number of university students indicated a relationship between use of social media networks and academic perfomance. In determining this, students were asked to record the frequency with which they use social networks and when they access these networks. The findings of the study show that 23.1% of the students accessed social networks all day while 19.2% stated that they access social networks during the day only. The study also established that 14.3% of the students accessed social networks at night while 12.4% of them accessed social networks in the morning, 17.2% over lunch hours and in-between breaks while 13.8% accessed the social networks over the weekends as shown in table 3.

Table 3: Access to social media networks

Time of access to social networks	Total % of access	Time of access to social media networks					
		High		Moderate		Low	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
All day	23.1	56	24.9	83	36.9	86	38.2
During the day only	19.2	66	29.3	77	34.2	82	36.5
At night only	14.3	107	47.5	65	28.8	53	23.6
Morning	12.4	100	44.4	59	26.2	66	29.4
Lunch hours	17.2	117	52	51	23	57	25
Weekends	13.8	137	60.9	39	17.3	49	21.8

The students were then asked if their time of access to social media networks affects their academic performance. It was established that 38.0% of the students who accessed social networks all day reported low academic performance while 37.0% of them recorded moderate academic performance and only 25.0% of them recorded high academic performance. 36.5% of the students who accessed social media during the day were found to record low academic performance while 34.2% of them recorded moderate performance as the remaining 29.3% recoded high performance. The study also noted academic performance to be higher among students who accessed social networks at specific times especially among those who did so in the evening, at night and over the weekends. Therefore, it might mean that the low academic performance is a reflection of too much time spent on the social media networks. These findings therefore collaborate with those of Malaney (2005) who argued that some students in multiple studies in 2000 and 2003 reported that their grades had suffered as a result of too much time spent on social media.

III. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The major social networks used by university students include WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Skype, LinkedIn, Telegram, YouTube, and Snapchat. Some of these networks are used by more female students compared to male students and majority of the students use more than one social network. The study findings show that there exists a link between use of social media networks and academic performance of students where by those who use social media throughout the day were found to record lower academic achievement compared to those that use social networks at specific times such as night, weekend and during breaks. Based on the findings, the study recommends that there is need to create awareness to university students on the influence of Social media networks on their academic performance. Further, there is need to educate the students through workshops or seminars on how to better manage their study time and prevent themselves form social media distractions.

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