

Social Media as a Tool for Research among Postgraduate Students in a South African University

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ABSTRACT This paper looks at social media usage as a tool for research among postgraduate students at a South African university. The study adopts quantitative research design and data was collected using structured questionnaires administered to 310 postgraduate students that are representative of the student population. 264 questionnaires were returned and analysed using SPSS Statistical software and Chi-square test. Findings revealed that social media has, to a large extent, improved students' research activities, as they frequently seek practical knowledge for demonstration and tutorship from social media platforms. The findings also showed that postgraduate students regard social media as a good platform for finding published research work, identify new research topics and also for gaining access to scholarly papers, journals and books as well as other research works in audio and video formats. The study concludes that social media is indeed a valuable tool for research.

INTRODUCTION

Social media has become a global phenomenon and prominent technology over the past few years with its availability in 70 languages with over 800 million users worldwide. According to Digital Global Overview (2019) there are 3.48 billion social media users in 2019, with the worldwide total growing by 288 million (9%) since 2018 and social media, being a global phenomenon, is still expanding its economic and social impact (Sapountzi and Psannis 2018). While many higher academic institutions still rely on traditional learning systems, which really do not make full use of social media to engage researchers in collaborative learning, research has shown that there has been a big shift towards adopting social media use for research (Chukwuere and Chukwuere 2017). Due to the increase in social media usage, especially among researchers and lecturers of academic institutions, a great deal of research has continuously explored the advantages of social media to improve students' performance and research through collaborative learning (Al-rahmi et al. 2015:265; Sapountzi and Psannis 2018).

It is also important to note that social media is now a vital medium for human communication and seeking knowledge (Manjunatha 2014; Eddings 2015; Mustapha et al. 2016) and evidently,

individuals, researchers including students have over the years displayed a type of addiction in terms of social media usage particularly to Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, blogs, BBM and WhatsApp. Interestingly, additional newer platforms such as Instagram, Tumblr, Pinterest, Hi5, Flickr and blogs have since emerged (Reddy 2013; Hou et al. 2019). Considering its usefulness, social media is now being used for various activities like communication, research, politics, health, business and so on, both in private and public sectors. As a result, social media have enhanced communication, business, interactions, information and even academic research thereby offering users the option of active participation (Sapountzi and Psannis 2018). Based on this premise, this paper seeks to explore the effectiveness of social media as a tool for research among postgraduate students in a South African university.

Problem Statement

Undoubtedly, social media has diversified the channels of communication, thereby dividing the audience and transforming it from a mass society into a segmented society (Manjunatha 2014; Nielsen 2017). This has now changed the context of communication by bringing convenience and facilitating a globalised reach of the

audience (Al-rahmi et al. 2015). Interestingly, the Internet and mobile phones have facilitated convergence, making possible multiple ways in which the university community can access the same content on research (Reddy 2013). These patterns of media use change significantly with its penetration into the daily lives of consumers, thereby affecting their social relations (Stahl and McDonald 2019). While there have been various views on the use of social media for various purposes, is it a useful tool for research purpose? Can one say that members of the university community use or depend on social media for conducting their research activities? Is it also possible to say that in the absence of social media, the research progress of the institution is affected or disturbed? In line with these views, this paper focuses on postgraduate students' value of using the social media within the academic environment for research and to know if social media is indeed a tool of research.

Research Questions

This paper seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the forms of social media used by postgraduate students?
2. What are postgraduate students' perceptions of the impact of the social media on their academic research?
3. To what extent has social media enhanced the performance of postgraduate students' research activities?

Literature Review

Overview of Social Media and Its Impact

The social media is a global phenomenon (Al-rahmi et al. 2015: 265) and it is noteworthy that students make use of various social media such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Blogs, BBM, WhatsApp, ResearchGate and academia.com for different purposes and that as individuals, they tailor their usage to fit their specific needs each day. Some social media platforms are basically for communication rather than research. This paper seeks to ascertain whether social media have an impact on research by identifying which of the social media platforms are utilised by stu-

dents, to gratify their social integrative needs (uses and gratification theory) thereby combining learning, education and research as the fundamental elements. This paper therefore seeks to either support the argument for or against other researchers, who alleged that youths, especially students are addicted users of social media platforms and search engines either to gather research knowledge or purely for entertainment or communication. Without any doubt, one can say users see social media as a platform to access electronic-web-based knowledge, information and opinion to improve their research as supported by many scholars and writers (Burgess-Wilkerson et al. 2019).

It is also important to note that within the context of higher academic institutions, social media presents opportunity for academic scholarship and outreach for students and readers to have evidence-based information. It is believed that there are benefits of social media as a tool for research and scholarship in that social media can help to fulfil the demand for cheap, instant communication between researchers fuelled by the growth of collaborative and interdisciplinary research as noted by some scholars too. Social media, including blogs, YouTube videos, Facebook, and Twitter provide a venue for scholarly discussion, thereby making popular the research (Al-Sharqi et al. 2015).

Learning-related advantages of the use of social media in education context include decreasing geographical distances as well as prompt feedback, the establishment of social dealings between academicians and students, students' effort in overcoming difficulties, and enhancing independent learning abilities and cooperation (Chukwuere and Chukwuere 2017). The most significant contributions of social networks to the academics is that of knowledge sharing among students and the capability to use such knowledge along with the social networks to overcome their difficulties (Al-rahmi et al. 2015). It must however be pointed out that there is known dissatisfaction about the trust, such as dependability and validity of the content created by students within a social network. However, according to Osterrieder (2013) and Al-rahmi et al. (2015), students professed that while using social media, they experienced an improvement in critical thinking and written com-

munication skills, as they become more aware of their fields of study, and consequently an improvement in their academic performance.

Social Media Use by Postgraduate Students for Research Purposes

A notable area of investigation for social scientists and university students is utilisation of social media by postgraduate level students (Kolan and Dzandza 2018). Unquestionably, there are benefits to institutions whose students employ social media to connect with current and prospective students (Chukwuere and Chukwuere 2017). In place of students being nothing more than information consumers or web users, they have also emerged as joint-creators of social information in connection with the sudden and great increase in social media usage. Its extensive use is seen in providing learning activities for social communications among the younger generation (Lahiry et al. 2019). The advent of web 2.0 is a result of numerous efforts undertaken to integrate social media into the students' learning or education enabling learners to possess power to produce their own learning activities (Abbas et al. 2019).

Al-rahmi et al. (2015: 265) found out in a study that many higher education institutions still rely on the traditional learning management systems, which really make full use of social media to improve global participation of students in learning through collaborative learning within social environment (Boateng and Amakwaa 2016). Based on a study conducted by Al-rahmi et al. the advent of web 2.0 is the origin by which collaborating technologies become a mode of learning for young people, as not many of them take advantages of social media in their academic performance. In addition, Al-rahmi et al. (2015: 265) stated that majority of learners do not really understand the connection between social media and their learning capabilities, a necessary gap to explore between social media and academic performance through collaborative learning. Through social media use, students understand how to communicate, collaborate, socialise as well as share information and knowledge (Powell et al. 2012), as there are diverse rewards in social media usage in tertiary institutions. In advancing students' learning experiences, it re-

quires the effort by students who employ social media for education-based activities in tertiary institutions as noted by Al-rahmi et al. (2015). In addition, previous studies had projected social media as an educationally useful tool for students (Al-rahmi et al. 2015).

It must be noted that the use of social media is widely popular in the USA, just like many parts of the world like South Africa. Interestingly, university students also use social media. A 2010 ESCAR study (EDUCAUSE Centre for Applied Research) of undergraduates and information technology revealed that students' use of social media has steadily increased from 2007 to 2010 (Al-rahmi et al. 2015: 266). The study showed the noticeable use of social media within students' academic coursework. In place of students being nothing more than information consumers or web users they have also become emerged joint-creators of social information in connection with the sudden and great increase in social media. Its extensive use is seen in providing learning activities for social communications among the younger generation (Terzi et al. 2019).

Increase in Social Media Usage, Social Media Platforms and Research Visibility

The advent of web 2.0 is a result of numerous efforts undertaken to integrate social media into the students' learning or education enabling learners to possess power to produce their own learning activities (Al-rahmi et al. 2015). Al-rahmi et al. (2015: 265) found out that many academic institutions still rely on the traditional learning systems rather than the modern, which make use of social media to improve global participation of students through collaborative learning (Al-rahmi et al. 2015: 265). Based on a study conducted by Al-rahmi et al. the advent of web 2.0 is the origin by which collaborating technologies become a mode of learning for young people, as not many of them take advantages of social media in their academic performance. In addition, Al-rahmi et al. (2015: 265) stated that majority of learners do not really understand the connection between social media and their learning capabilities, a necessary gap to explore the social media for academic performance through collaborative learning.

Consequently, Kolan and Dzandza (2018) had also projected the rate of social media usage to grow from forty-one percent in 2008 to over sixty-five percent in 2014 and this pointed to the increased use of social media among the youths, especially students and hence this necessitated this study. Al-rahmi et al. (2015: 265) also confirmed the projection. Moreno et al. (2013) and Nicholas and Rowland (2011) agreed that social media may not yet have fully invaded the research space, but there are indicators that social media is likely to make a very significant impact over the next few years. In this age of communication, however, information is considered as wealth and one of the keys to such a source lies in the application of information retrieval techniques, which have enhanced the emergence of social media as the new communication technology (Yu Lin and Peng Lu 2011; Dabbagh and Kitsantas 2012; Manjunatha 2014; Al-rahmi et al. 2015: 265). Conventional routes of information dissemination used to involve textbooks, conference presentations and journal publications (Al-rahmi et al. 2015). However, the use of technologies today in particular, the social media platforms through computers in schools and personal smart phones now provide students with access to in-depth knowledge of research topics from some research papers in online libraries, on the internet, interviews, books, magazines and newspapers published online for research purposes. There is now computer mediated communication on different social media websites through the use of audio, video, text or animated multimedia and ICT provides full access to experts in remote places, enables learning environment and increases the efficiency of the education system (Konijn et al. 2013; Reddy 2013; Al-rahmi et al. 2015). This therefore means that the use of technology provides a different approach to teaching and learning not covered by traditional textbook-based methods and students can therefore make use of computers as tutors to make progress in their academics (Duggan 2013; Al-rahmi et al. 2015).

As at now, social media platforms such as Facebook and blogs place academic research in the public sphere for rapid sharing of research methods, results, and conclusions with appropriate references. This in turn allows rapid dissemination of unfiltered but reliable information

as well as promotes knowledge sharing, idea generation, which in turn complements other traditional goals of higher education institutions as tools for research, learning and teaching (Powell et al. 2012; Al-rahmi et al. 2015). Osterrieder (2013) in her submission attests that social media make available a highly personalised and relevant table of contents for researchers or students to keep up to date with current research, popular science and broader issues such as policy, funding, publishing, or personal career development. Although she compared all that to purely academic sites like ResearchGate or Academia.edu, the value of entirely open networks like Twitter or Google+, which cannot be understated (Osterrieder 2013). She states that some known social media platforms are helpful tools for professional networking within specific subject fields or across different disciplines and professions and that such open platforms facilitate dialogue between scientists. She further notes that these social media platforms also proffer opportunities for others to join the conversation particularly those of science communicators and journalists, teachers, students, researchers and professionals from other disciplines, as well as other interested non-experts (Osterrieder 2013).

Social Media Interactivity and Collaborative Learning

Some studies have emphasised how academics or academicians clearly target the benefits of blogs and wikis using web technologies and social media. Their ability is to encourage interaction and cooperation between students and readers across academic and non-academicians and across borders and this is a well-known reward of social media (Osterrieder 2013; Manjunatha 2014). Another benefit of social media is its use to alert or update users about current research. Social interactions bear current relationships and this helps to form relationships with academicians of the similar research area (Al-rahmi et al. 2015). The capability of disseminating knowledge and information is another well-recognised benefit of social media usage, as contents related to those academic fields are broadened by blogging devices used by many academicians (Osterrieder 2013; Al-rahmi et al. 2015). Other bene-

fits enjoyed by academic bloggers include possessing the ability to deliberate on public issues, getting answers to difficult or unanswered questions, and the ability to write for the web (Osterrieder 2013; Al-rahmi et al. 2015).

Scholarly Twitter users acknowledge during academia-based meetings that information dissemination is one of the foremost rewards of social media usage (Osterrieder 2013; Al-rahmi et al. 2015). Based on earlier discussion, one can conclude that social media has a positive influence on collaborative learning as such learning includes sharing of information whereby students and tutor obtain knowledge from one another and motivate them to reason analytically and present their views (Al-rahmi et al. 2015). Moreover, based on the fact that additional newer packages or platforms also enhanced communication, business, interactions, information and academic research thereby offering users the option of active participation, social media is a phenomenon of great importance and has transformed the public sphere today. One would watch with keen interest how students and lecturers make use of social media every day on their smartphones, laptops or computers to scout for research, information and even connect with friends and families on blogs and other Internet forums.

Empirical Studies

Predictions have it that the Internet will ultimately transform every aspect of human lives privately, publicly, socially, politically, educationally, economically and culturally (Nielsen 2017). Though the use of Internet or Computer Mediated Communication is not assumed as the replacement of old technology, but it presents additional choices to the people or consumers. The Internet is a communication medium, which has challenged the traditional distinctions between media production and media consumption (Rutledge 2013). According to recent studies, public schools in South Africa and even universities, in the past usually made use of conventional methods of teaching, which include discussion worksheets, stories, posters, written notes as well as chalkboards to promote learning. But today, students have access to rich information due to the Internet and social media

technology in education (Konijn et al. 2013; Osterrieder 2013; Manjunatha 2014; Al-rahmi et al. 2015).

According to Reddy (2013) and Al-rahmi et al. (2015), the society expects a lot from its educational system as schools are expected to train the future leaders. It is therefore important to note that the use of technology allows learners to constructively obtain knowledge from various sources. Reuben (2008) and Manjunatha (2014) also express that social media consists of networking and socialising online through words, videos and pictures. Many types of these new technologies have the capability to help learners with various academic problems that they are faced with (Osterrieder 2013; Manjunatha 2014; Al-rahmi et al. 2015).

Stempel and Stellar (2009) as quoted by Reddy (2013) and Al-rahmi et al. (2015) admitted that technology linked to social media has been helpful in the classroom, as it expands communication to a larger sample of participants, giving such people the option to voice their opinions and thoughts. People can transfer and receive large quantity of information faster and easier to and from other individuals and workgroups from far regions. The medium usually used include web-conferencing applications and social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, Pinterest, Wiki, blogs and LinkedIn, which can be used to promote study (Dabagh and Kitsantas 2012; Osterrieder 2013; Manjunatha 2014; Al-rahmi et al. 2015).

Theoretical Underpinning

For the period of critical development in students' lives and careers, they make use of social media for new information on how to satisfy their professional goals. Julia et al. (2015) point out that the influence of social media might radically differ because of different courses of study that students pursue. Several scholars have explored and examined social media, with many theories and research models in the literature developed to explain social media and students' behaviour, and some well-known theories supporting such studies of social media include communication theory, the theory of personal behaviour and the theory of social behaviour (Gibbons et al. 2017).

This paper however builds on the influential “*uses and gratification theory*”. The *uses and gratification theory* focuses on individual needs and gratification assuming that media consumption is not the same for everyone. The premise of this theory is on more knowledge about audiences and the importance of individual differences in the audience experience. The social media platforms are part of the media even though it is social. According to Gentile and Walsh (2002), the uses and gratification theory was seen as an appropriate theoretical foundation to examine the social media platforms since this approach had been previously used to understand the audiences’ use of other media (Ferguson et al. 2007). The uses and gratification theory supports the connection between the users’ need or motivation as well as the real use of technology with ritualistic and instrumental use as types of motivation for use of technology (Bryant and Heath 2000).

It must however be noted that few past studies showed that within the uses and gratification theory, some factors affect or influence a consumer’s selection of a particular communication technology. So it is the aim of this paper to determine the use and gratification that people actually experience with the media. Boateng and Amankwaa (2016) applied network externalities and motivation theory to understand the usage of social networking sites among college students while Di Gennaro and Dutton (2007) note that the popularity of social media sites, of which Facebook, YouTube and Twitter belong to, serve as meeting points for users’ personal and social needs. Bargh and McKenna (2004) agreed that people or users are not passively affected by the technology (internet), but those users mainly and actively shape technology use and influence into a powerful tool to meet their various needs (Di Gennaro and Dutton 2007; Manjunatha 2014). This current study therefore applied the uses and gratification theory since it was a vital way to explore the needs of the students in relation to these social media sites. The paper attempted to provide answers to what forms of social media are being used by postgraduate students and to what extent the social media enhanced their research activities.

METHODOLOGY

A quantitative methodology framework was seen as suitable for this study and a questionnaire was therefore used to collect data from the selected participants. The population was categorised into sub-units and a representative member of a population was selected as units of analysis (Babbie 2005). The total number of postgraduates in the university was 3,070, Out of this number, only ten percent, which was 307 postgraduate students of the university across all fields and levels, faculties and departments (Honours, Masters and PhDs) were participants. Cluster sampling under probability sampling was used to select 307 postgraduate students of the university across all fields and levels, faculties and departments (Honours, Masters and PhDs). The nearest figure for the sample size was 310 in order to have five percent sample error. The confidence level of the population of the sample of 307 postgraduate students was therefore set at 0.05 or ninety-five percent.

RESULTS

The study distributed 310 questionnaires but only 264 were returned and usable for data analysis. Data analysis therefore focused on the responses of 264 postgraduate students and their use of social media as a research tool. Information about the respondents such as age, gender, race, nationality, country of origin, level of study and year, faculty, departments, residence and ICT literacy were captured using tables. The questionnaire investigated the social media platforms as a research tool and the uses and gratification of social media in the form of substitution of face-to-face interaction.

Ages of Respondents

Out of the 264 respondents (across gender, nationality, all levels of study, departments and Faculty), 105 respondents (representing 40.1%) are between the ages of 20 to 25 years and 98 respondents (representing 37.4%) are 25 to 30 years. 32 respondents (representing 12.2%) are 35 to 40 years old and 10 respondents (representing 3.8%) fall between 30 to 35 years. 11 respondents (representing 4.2%) are aged 45 to

Table 1: Age and percentages of the respondents

Age group	20 - 25	25 -30	30 - 35	35 - 40	40 - 45	45 - 50	50+
Percentage	40.1	37.4	3.8	12.2	1.5	4.2	0.8

50 years old. 4 respondents (representing 1.5%) are 40 to 45 years. The respondents who are 50 and above represent 0.8 percent of the sample. The analysis is presented in Table 1.

Gender of Respondents

Table 2 indicates the graph for the gender of the 264 respondents across nationality, levels of study, departments and faculty, of which, 128 respondents (representing 48%) are females while 136 respondents (representing 52%) are male. The university student record also shows that there are more male students pursuing post-graduate studies.

Table 2: Gender of respondents

Gender of respondents	Male	Female
Percentage	52	48

Education Level of Respondents

The survey revealed that the Masters and Honours students are the majority, due to the time and use of social media at their disposal unlike the PhDs and post-docs who have bulk tasks before them. Out of the 264 respondents across departments and faculty, 117 respondents (representing 44.3%) are Masters students followed by 75 respondents (representing 28.4%) who are Honours students. 55 respondents (representing 20.8%) are PhD students while 13 respondents (representing 4.9%) are post-docs. There is however a missing value for 4 respondents (representing 1.6%). Table 3 indicates the data for the educational levels of the respondents.

Respondents' Views on Frequency of Access to the Social Media

Out of the 264 respondents, 154 respondents (representing 58.3%) say they frequently access the social media, while 95 respondents (representing 36.0%) said 'sometimes'. 3 respondents (representing 1.1%) say they hardly make use of the social media by choosing 'rarely', while 1

Table 3: Education level of the respondents

Level of study	Post-Docs	PhD students	Masters students	Honours students	Missing value
Number of students	117	13	75	55	4
Percentage	44.3	4.9	28.4	20.81	1.6

respondent (representing 0.4%) chose 'never'. In total 253 respondents represent 95.8 percent while 11 missing questionnaires representing 4.2 percent equal to one hundred percent as seen in Table 4. Cross tabulation shows that all the (100%) respondents across all levels of study are familiar with Facebook and Twitter even if they do not access it for academics or research. Respondents of all age ranges are familiar with blogs and frequently use them. This means almost everyone uses blogs either to gather research topics or purely for communication. It can be argued that blogs seem to be more used by respondents, especially from ages between 20 to 30 and 35 to 40. Without any doubt, one can say that the respondents see social media as a platform to access electronic-web-based knowledge, information and opinion to improve their research and these views are supported by some scholars too (Mohamed 2008; Rhoades et al. 2008; Sasfko and Brake 2009; Dabbagh and Kitsantas 2012; Reddy 2013).

Table 4: Respondents' views on mode of accessing social media

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
<i>Valid</i>				
Frequently	154	58.3	60.9	60.9
Sometimes	95	36.0	37.5	98.4
Rarely	3	1.1	1.2	99.6
Never	1	.4	.4	100.0
Total	253	95.8	100.0	
<i>Missing</i>				
Total	264	100.0		

Accessibility to Social Media

Respondents' View on Frequency of Usage of Social Media as a Research Tool

Out of the 264 respondents, 171 respondents (representing 64.8%) frequently use social media, 81 respondents (representing 30.7%) chose 'sometimes', 6 respondents (representing 2.3%) said 'rarely' while 1 respondent (representing 4%) chose 'never'. However, there are 5 unresponsive answers (missing value, which represents 1.9%). The whole equals 100.1 percent. The respondents, who ticked 'frequently', are a typical social media user. Detailed analysis is presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Frequency of social media usage by respondents

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Valid percent</i>	<i>Cumulative percent</i>
<i>Valid</i>				
Frequently	171	64.8	66.0	66.0
Sometimes	81	30.7	31.3	97.3
Rarely	6	2.3	2.3	99.6
Never	1	.4	.4	100.0
Total	259	98.1	100.0	
<i>Missing</i>				
Total	264	100.1		

Interestingly, the respondents are from various academic departments. This section attests to the points made by researchers such as Nicholas and Rowland (2011), who had earlier pointed out that people in the academics, business, health, the biosciences and the arts and humanities are more likely to use social media professionally and for research purposes.

Respondents' Views on Whether Social Media Have Improved Their Research in Any Way

Table 6 reveals that out of the 264 respondents, 119 respondents (representing 45.1%) said 'Yes', as they are of the opinion that social media have improved their research. 78 respondents (representing 29.5%) ticked 'partially' while 57 respondents (representing 21.6%) ticked 'No'. There are 10 missing values (representing 3.8%). In conclusion, all the respondents for 'Yes' and 'Partially' are more than the respondents for 'No'

Table 6: Respondents' views as to whether social media has improved their research

<i>Rate</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Partially</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Missing value</i>
No. of students	119	78	57	10
Percentage	45.1	29.5	21.6	3.8

as seen in Table 6. Social media has thus helped to improve respondents' research activities. This supports the views of scholars like Nicholas and Rowland (2011) who assert that age is a demographic factor when considering the use of social media in research. Nicholas and Rowland (2011) believed that researchers under 35 are generally more likely to use at least one social media application than the over 35 years old. Other writers have also said that in terms of new technology, young people are more familiar and comfortable with technologies and social media, which are by no means a digital native phenomenon (Mohamed 2008; Nicholas and Rowland 2011; Reddy 2013; Mhlomi and Osunkunle 2017).

Respondents' Consideration of Social Media as a Platform for Research

Table 7 seeks to analyse whether social media should be considered an excellent, good, or poor platform for research. Out of 264 respondents, 105 respondents (representing 39.7%) say it is an excellent platform, 131 respondents (representing 49.6%) regard social media as a good platform for research, while 21 respondents (representing 8.0%) ticked that social media is a poor platform for research. There are 7 missing answers (missing value representing 2.7%). Respondents consider social media to be a good platform for research as supported by Stahl and McDonald (2019). These writers had pointed out that individuals' behaviour of using information technology is a result of gaining value and plea-

Table 7: Respondents' view on social media as a platform for research

<i>Rate</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Partially</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Missing value</i>
No. of Students	105	131	21	7
Percentage	39.7	49.6	8.0	2.7

sure or enjoyment within the uses and gratification theory. These writers used the motivation theory to explain individuals' acceptance and use of information technology based on conceived beliefs that using a product or service elevates one's class work or job performance or that a user gets pleasure from using computer technology to undertake in a work related behaviour, which also enhances behaviour intention.

Major factors, which hinder researchers from using social media in their research is lack of time and the fact that some people are still unclear about the benefits of social media. They also have serious concerns about the authenticity of crowd-sourced information as noted by Nicholas and Rowland (2011).

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

The core findings from the analyses of data in the study showed that most of the respondents access online materials and use all forms of social media to search for related research topics in audio and video format, scholarly papers, books and journals. This paper has to a large extent proved that social media have an impact on research based on the views of the respondents, who acknowledged that the use of social media has helped to enhance their several research activities and to a large extent.

Tools for Accessing Social Media

This paper revealed that among the respondents, mobile phones were the most popular tool to access social media, followed by laptops. Scholars like Wickramanayake and Jika (2018) have noted that major tools that students use to access social media were laptops followed by desktops and mobile phones. Interestingly, all the respondents in this study have access to one or more of these tools, which makes it possible for them to access social media once they have the data to connect. This paper has revealed that some of these respondents make use of their cell phones very often to access these social media platforms, as it is mobile, much easier to hold and gives them access just anywhere they find themselves. Most of the respondents noted that laptops are also used but they would need a bit of space to use.

Postgraduate Students' Use of Social Media for Research

This paper has revealed that majority of the respondents are frequent social media users. In relation to different forms of social media, Facebook was the highest preference. This result correlates well with findings of some studies by Fasae and Adegbihero-Iwari (2016), Stainbank and Gurr (2016) and Singh and Gill (2015) who all noted that Facebook was the priority choice among students. Majority of respondents believed that social media use had no effect or decreased their study times and that they used social media for different purposes like downloading research materials, reading, and communicating. Lahiry et al. (2019) and Wickramanayake and Jika (2018) in their separate studies found that social media is an effective tool for students' learning, communication with fellows, homework, and research work. Majority of respondents agreed that using social media for research has improved their critical thinking and problem solving skills.

Different Social Media Sites Used for Research

This paper has found that many respondents use YouTube and blogs to obtain, learn or communicate their research via the social media websites. Other sites consulted by these respondents include ResearchGate and academia.com. There is also a belief that through social media, research results can be disseminated to a larger audience rather than mere scientific community and more effectively than traditional communication channels. Some respondents also consider YouTube, blogs and LinkedIn as effective ways to communicate research results to people of like minds in the research area in general, giving students an added advantage of limitless access to information. The powerful adoption of social media among the younger generation, according to Mowafy (2018), confirms their fast grasp of up to date knowledge of as well as their comfort and accessibility. As found out by many scholars, social media obsession by many university students and institutions remain entangled to the rapidly changing technologies (Dumpit and Fernandez 2017; Mowafy 2018). This brings, to the point that the impact of social media on learning and possibly teaching is increasingly debatable among higher education

students and scholars, as it has changed the game in the area of learning and instruction as noted by Mowafy (2018).

CONCLUSION

This paper has to a large extent proved that social media has an impact on research based on the views of the respondents. This paper has revealed that respondents used social media particularly Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, blogs, BBM, WhatsApp, ResearchGate and Academia.com for research. Respondents say that the use of social media uplifts their education, learning as well as research activities, as noted by some scholars in the literature reviewed. It must also be noted that the potential impact of social media in the world economy seems to be huge and now in education, particularly learning and research. Social media seems to have infiltrated more or less every part of the world's culture, serving as shaping layers through which people sort out their lives. Having collected and analysed data and also reviewed related literature, this study has come to the conclusion that most postgraduate students use the social media sites to collect and share research ideas and topics from online papers either for further research or debates. This paper also found that social media sites like Facebook are being used as a tool for science communication, allowing easy access to experts' blogs, new findings as well as research updates or methods. The social networking sites thus allow for free flow of research findings to increase peoples' knowledge thereby creating an impact on research. This paper also concludes that social media platforms are valuable research tools for researchers and tutors to reach out and conduct studies within the populations, which are not likely to be reachable in traditional research.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has been quite enlightening and has provided positive feedback regarding the perceptions of social media as a tool for research among postgraduate students in this selected university. It has also assisted to indicate that people, particularly postgraduate students, are always exploring the social media or perhaps any new technology. Social media had created

an environment even for education, information, communication, entertainment (edutainment) as well as learning. In light of this, this paper recommends that since students are seen to spend a chunk of their time on social media platforms and search engines for various reasons, academic research inclusive, it therefore becomes imperative to create more links for students to explore books, scholarly journals and papers necessary for research and academic purposes within the social media.

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