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## **Social Media Usage and Coping Strategies among University of Ghana Undergraduate Students.**

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### **Abstract**

The emergence of the internet has propelled the influence of social media among tertiary students all over the world. This study investigates the effects of social media on the academic lives of University of Ghana undergraduate students as well as their coping strategies in dealing with the social media pressures. By relying on a mixed method approach and drawing a sample of 420 students from the University of Ghana, the study shows that WhatsApp is the most used social media platform among University of Ghana students for academic purposes. Also, the study showed that social media platforms are often used by students to communicate with their families and friends rather than for academic purposes. While the use of social media positively impacts academic performance through research, the study shows that it impacts negatively on students' academic lives as well, given its addictive nature. Thus, to contain this effect, the study revealed a number of coping strategies that students employ to shove off the social media pressure. Critical among them are putting off their internet data or WIFI, limiting the number of social media applications on their phones, and deleting all social media accounts such as Facebook and WhatsApp during examination periods. It is recommended that the University of Ghana, through the Careers and Counselling Centre embarks on sensitisation programmes for students on how to balance and manage their study times vis a vis social media usage for optimal results..

### **Keywords**

Coping strategies, Facebook, Social Media, University of Ghana, WhatsApp

## Introduction

The emergence of the internet and social media in recent years has been regarded as one of the significant transformations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2011; Jenkins, 2006). Global statistical data show that the growth in the number of active social media users since January 2015 is 10% representing 219 million (Perrin, 2015). This indicates a high penetration rate of social media usage across the length and breadth of the world. For instance in Asia the total percentage of internet users is 50.3%, Europe 15.9%, Latin America/Carribbean 10.1%, Africa 11.5%, North America 7.6%, Middle East 3.9% and Oceania/Australia 0.6% (Internet World Stats, 2020). Thus the role of and controversies surrounding social media at all levels of human endeavour and development is gaining much attention of both scholars and practitioners in diverse fields (Ahn, 2011; Boyd & Ellison, 2008).

Indeed, social media is considered as an important feature of this digital era and a key component of the internet culture (Rashmi & Neetu, 2014). The overall impact of the evolution of internet and social media is the transformation in the communication environment of man. In fact what makes social media as a recent phenomenon different from the conventional mode of communication is its global interactive nature which allows users from any part of the globe to participate in it (Sudha and Kavitha, 2016; Ezeah, Asogwa & Obiorah, 2013). The educational sector, especially the universities (higher institutions of learning) remains one of the most important areas of human development where social media is increasingly playing a significant role. Management and authorities of higher institutions of learning are therefore investing in and exploring innovative pedagogical ways of promoting effective method of knowledge transfer, collaboration and information sharing through social media (Junco *et al.*, 2011) to connect to the wider learning or academic community. Globally, higher institutions of learning are increasingly relying on social media to promote their research, innovations and e-learning. Both educators and students in higher education continue to use social media as an effective avenue for teaching and learning respectively (Burbules, 2016). Generally, social media network platforms used for students' learning and engagements include *inter alia* Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, YouTube, Google+, MySpace, LinkedIn, Skype, and Blogger. Of all these social media platforms, Facebook remains the most popular one for students' engagements and as such has attracted the attention of social media research (Junco, 2011; Quan-Haase & Young, 2010).

The accessibility feature of social media makes it more convenient to use as they are not limited to desktops but on smart phones and internet connected gadgets such as tablets which are within the reach of students. This has made social media gained much popularity among college students (Kalpidou *et al.*, 2011). Social media is therefore considered to be a ubiquitous phenomenon in students' academic lives and an important technological tool of their new culture of learning and engagements (Thomas & Brown, 2011; Kabilan *et al.*, 2010). Student engagement, as noted by Knight-McCord *et al.* (2016, p. 22), 'represents the time and effort students invest in their education'. It is therefore not surprising that educators are being encouraged to embrace social media platforms since students learn new ways through social media networking platforms or sites (Ito *et al.*, 2009; Lenhart *et al.*, 2010).

Just like in other parts of the world, there is a high prevalence of social media usage among students in the University of Ghana for their learning and general academic engagements. The University of Ghana as part of meeting its vision of becoming a world class university has created an enabling environment through the provision of Information Communication & Technology (ICT) facilities and internet connectivity to enhance teaching, research and learning. With such an internet support environment, there is an increasing use of social media among its students. It is important to note that inasmuch as social media can affect the academic lives of students positively, it can equally have negative effects on their learning outcomes. Thus, there is a relationship between the use of social media and the academic performance of students as evidenced by empirical findings on social media and mass communication studies (Oueder & Abousaber, 2018; Raut & Patil, 2016; Burbules, 2016; Mensah & Nizam, 2016; Knight-McCord *et al.*, 2016; ; Ahn, 2011; Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2011; Junco *et al.*, 2011; Jacobsen & Forste, 2011; Chen & Peng, 2008). However, what remains unclear in the literature is how social media users cope with and sustain the social media pressures in their academic engagements.

It can be argued that for social media to be a positive or negative tool, it will depend on the users (in this case students) albeit the contention that social media is a double-edged sword (Baran, 2018). Thus, although there are considerable literature on the effects of social media on students' academic performance, no attention has been given to the coping strategies of students in dealing with the social media pressures.

It is against this backdrop that this paper seeks to investigate the effects of social media on the academic engagement of University of Ghana undergraduate students as well as their coping strategies of dealing with social media pressure in their academic work. Thus, it seeks to address how well the undergraduate students make use of social media in their learning and engagements in an internet support environment. The study therefore seeks to achieve the following objectives: (1) To examine the attitude of University of Ghana undergraduate students toward social media usage; (2) To examine the effects of social media on the academic lives of University of Ghana undergraduate students; and (3) To underscore the coping strategies of University of Ghana undergraduate students in dealing with the social media pressure on their academic engagements.

## **Materials and Method**

### ***Study settings and Design***

The University of Ghana, by birth and size, is the oldest and largest public university in Ghana. It was founded by ordinance on August 11, 1948 as the University College of the Gold Coast, with the overarching aim of providing and promoting university education, learning and research. It currently has about 38,000 student population. The study conducted a cross-sectional survey-based study from September 2019 to November 2019. In terms of research strategy, the study adopted the mixed method research strategy which included both qualitative and quantitative methods.

### ***Sources of data***

The study relied on both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary sources included focus group discussions and the administration of structured questionnaires. The secondary sources included journal articles, news items from the internet and other published and unpublished works.

### ***Sample size determination and sampling procedure***

The study population were undergraduate students of the University of Ghana from level 100 to level 400. Using a cluster sampling method, a total of 420 study participants were randomly sampled from the 38,000 student population of the University of Ghana. The survey included both resident and non-resident students of the University of Ghana, unlike the study by Kolan and Dzandza (2018) on the effect of social media on academic performance of students in the University of Ghana where non-resident students were not part of the survey. All non-resident students were treated as a one cluster and added to the list of 16 halls of residence on campus. Out of the 17 clusters, 10 were randomly selected after adopting the lottery method, where all the names of the clusters were written on a piece of paper, folded, placed in a bowl and shuffled. Out of the 10 clusters randomly selected, Forty-two (42) study participants were sampled from each cluster using the simple random technique. For the qualitative facet of the study, participants were purposively selected for in-depth discussions on some themes that emerged out of the survey. In all, four separate focus group discussions were conducted among the four levels of study and the composition of the groups were as follows: Level 100 (8 students), 200 (7 students), 300 (7 students), and 400 (8 students).

### **Instrumentation and Framework of Data Analyses**

The main research instruments were structured questionnaires and an interview guide. The questionnaire consisted of questions examining socio-demographics, attitude towards social media, effects of social media on academics, and coping strategies in dealing with pressures associated with social media. The interview guide for the focus group discussion focused on specific issues relating to attitude towards social media, how social media positively and negatively affects their academic performance, and how they are able to cope with these effects. Given that a sequential explanatory mixed method approach was adopted in collecting data for the study, the survey was initially done within a three months period, and the focus group discussions were held after the survey. The quantitative data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 and thematic content analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data. The results of the survey were presented in the form of tables and figures. The consents of every respondent and participant were sought before allowing them to be part of the research process. Confidentiality was thus, respected and maintained throughout the study.

## **Results**

The results in table 1 show that 55% (N=420) of respondents were males and majority (82%) were less than thirty-one years. Also, 17% of respondents were within the ages of 31-40 years and those with the ages of 41-50 years (1%) were the least represented age group. With regards to the residential status, majority of the respondents (91%) were resident on campus and 9% were non-resident. In terms of the level of study, a relatively higher percentage were in level 300 (37%), 25% were in level 100, 20% were in level 400 and 18% were in level 200.

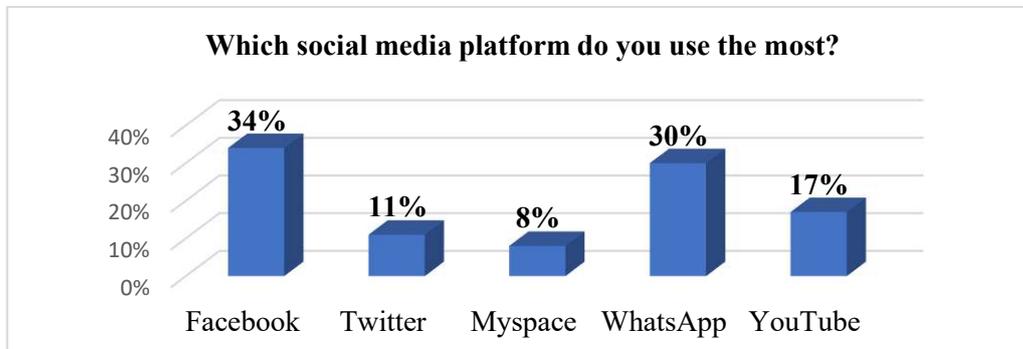
**Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents**

<b>Sex</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
Male	232	55
Female	188	45
Total	420	100
<b>Age</b>		
<31	345	82
31-40	73	17
41-50	2	1
Total	420	100
<b>Residential status</b>		
Resident	382	91
Nonresident	38	9
Total	420	100
<b>Level</b>		
100	105	25
200	76	18
300	156	37
400	83	20
Total	420	100

Source: Field work, 2019

Respondents identified various social media network sites they often use. Facebook (34%) was identified as the popular social media platform often used, followed by WhatsApp (30%), YouTube (17%) Twitter (11%), and, lastly, Myspace (8%) (see figure 1).

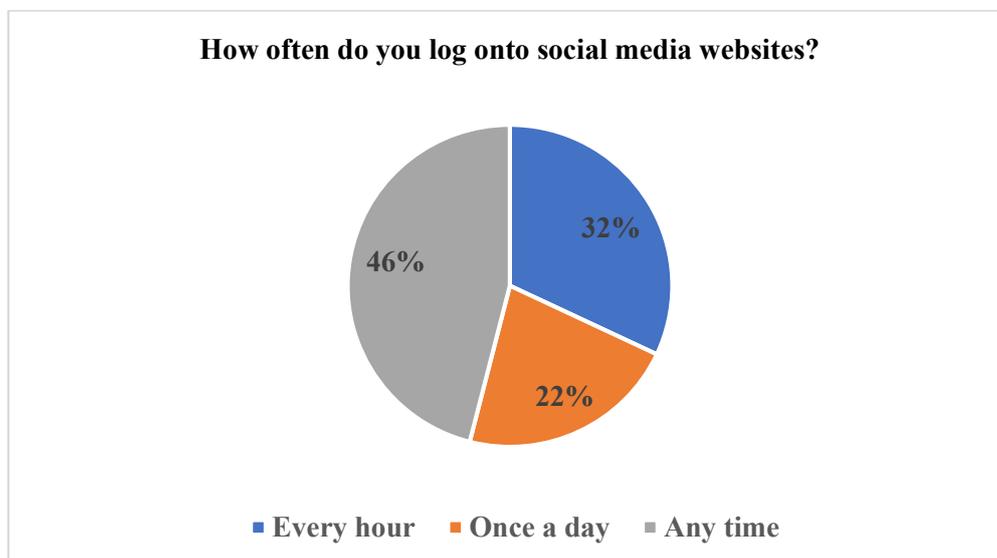
**Figure 1: Distribution of respondents by the social media used the most**



Source: Field work, 2019

Respondents were asked the number of times they log onto social media websites. It was revealed that a higher percentage (46%) visit social media websites anytime and 32% visit their respective social media websites every hour. Only 22% visit social media sites once a day. Thus, majority of students in the University of Ghana visit various social media sites any time (see figure 2).

**Figure 2: Distribution of respondents by how often they log onto social media sites**



Source: Field work, 2019

The results in table 3 show the frequency on number of times spent online by students. A higher percentage of respondents (44%) spend 6hrs and above online each day, 36% spend 3-5hrs online, and 14% spend 1-2hrs online each day. Further, only 6% spend less than 1hr online each day (see table 2).

**Table 2: Distribution of respondents by the number of time spent online each day**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid Less than an hour	24	5.7	5.7
1-2hrs	57	13.6	13.6
3-5hrs	153	36.4	36.4
6hrs and above	186	44.3	44.3
Total	420	100.0	100.0

Source: Field work, 2019

Additionally, respondents were asked what they mostly use social media for, considering that social media is used for various purposes. The results show that 29% use social media platforms to communicate with their family and friends, 28% of respondents use social media platforms for academic purposes and 24% refer to social media for news updates. Also, 18% use social media platforms for fun and entertainment. Thus, a higher percentage of undergraduate students in the University of Ghana use social media platforms to stay connected with their friends and loved ones (see table 3).

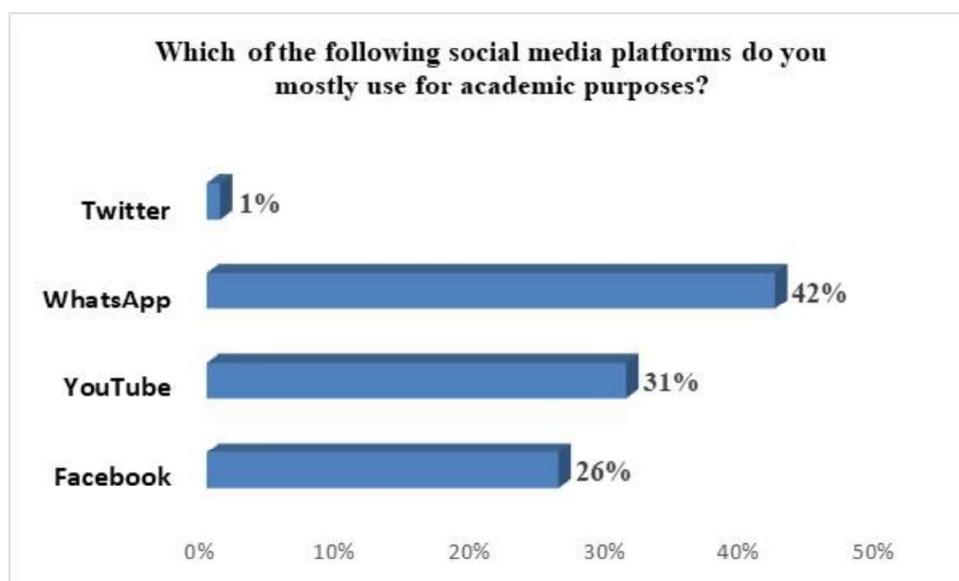
**Table 3: Uses of social media platforms**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid Communicating with family and friends	122	29.0	29.0
Just for fun and entertainment	77	18.3	18.3
News update	102	24.3	24.3
Academic activities	119	28.3	28.3
Total	420	100.0	100.0

Source: Field work, 2019

The results in figure 3 show a number of social media platforms that respondents use for academic purposes. WhatsApp (42%) was used often, followed by YouTube (31%), and Facebook (26%). Twitter (1%) was the least reported social media platform used for academic purposes.

**Figure 3: The mostly used social media platform for academic purposes**



Source: Field work, 2019

The results in table 4 show respondents' level of agreement on the use of social media for academic purposes. In all, the results show that 66% of respondents agreed (27%) or strongly agree (39%) that social media platforms are used by students to discuss general issues that are not related to academics while 27% disagree that social media platforms are mostly used by students to discuss general issues that are nonacademic. Further, majority of respondents representing 39% strongly disagree that social media platforms are mostly used by students to share academic information. This is followed 36% who also agree to this statement. Also, 10% remained neutral (N). Fifteen percent (15%), however, agree that social media platforms are used by students to share academic information. Thus, majority of University of Ghana undergraduate students disagree that social medial platforms are used by students to share academic information. Respondents were also asked to show their level of agreement on the statement that students mostly use YouTube for academic related activities. Majority of the respondents representing 50% strongly disagree. Another 18% disagree to the statement that YouTube is mostly used by students for academic related activities. However, 25% were positive that students use YouTube for academic related activities.

**Table 4: Distribution of respondents by level of agreement on the use of social media**

STATEMENT	SD	D	N	A	SA	Total
Social media platforms are mostly used by students to discuss general issues that are non-academic	8%	19%	7%	27%	39%	100%
Social media platforms are mostly used by students to share academic information	39%	36%	10%	9%	6%	100%
Students mostly use YouTube for academic related activities	50%	18%	7%	14%	11%	100%

Source: Field work, 2019

On the positive effects of social media, the respondents identified various ways in which they benefit from social media. A higher percentage of respondents (34%) stated that social media usage enhances further research for their studies. Also, 28% noted that discussions on social media groups enhance further understanding of what has been taught in class. Sixteen percent (16%) of respondents also indicated that social media helps them to get feedback from their lecturers and teaching assistants (TAs) on time. Fourteen percent (14%) of the respondents also indicated that social media impacts on them positively through the promotion of collaborative learning. Lastly, 9% of the respondents indicated that the use of social media helps them to have wider knowledge (see table 5).

**Table 5: Benefits of Social media in students' academic life**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid It promotes collaborative learning	59	14.0	14.0
It enhances further research for my studies	141	33.6	33.6
Valid Discussions on social media groups enhances further understanding of what has been taught in class	117	27.9	27.9
It helps us to get feedback from our lecturers and TAs on time	65	15.5	15.5
Valid It helps us get wider knowledge	38	9.0	9.0
Total	420	100.0	100.0

Source: Field work, 2019

On the negative impacts of social media on the academic life of students, respondents were asked to show their level of agreement or disagreement on the negative effect of social media (see table 6). Social media addiction is regarded as one of the fundamental negative impacts of social media generally on users. An overwhelming majority of the respondents (92%) strongly agree that social media is addictive. The results further show 95% of respondents noting that social media takes a lot of their study time. Social media has also been identified as having some contents that distract users. Majority of the respondents representing 78% strongly agree that some of the contents displayed on social media platforms are distractive which affects their studies and academic performance. Also, 14% agree to this statement. However, 7% disagree with this statement about the negative effect of social media on the academic life of students and 1% remained neutral. Also on the negative impact of social media, 54% of the respondents strongly agree with the statement that social media brings about wrong exposure. This is followed by 33% who agree to this statement. However, 11% and 1% disagree and disagree respectively. Lastly, majority of the respondents (67%) strongly agree that social media has affected their spellings and grammar usages. This is followed by 19% who agree to this statement. However, 11% and 3% disagree and strongly disagree respectively. Thus, majority of respondents representing 86% agree that their spelling abilities and grammar have been affected negatively as a result of social media.

**Table 6: Negative Impact of Social Media usage on Academic performance**

STATEMENT	SD	D	N	A	SA	Total
Social media is addictive	1%	1%	0%	6%	92%	100%
The use of social media takes a lot of my study time	1%	4%	0%	23%	72%	100%
Some of the content displayed are distractive for learning	0%	7%	1%	14%	78%	100%
It brings about wrong exposure	1%	11%	1%	33%	54%	100%
It has affected my spellings and grammar usage	3%	11%	0%	19%	67%	100%

Source: Field work, 2019

The results in table 7 show the various coping strategies of respondents against the negative effects of social media. A higher percent of respondents (31%) revealed that they put off their mobile data or WiFi when studying. Another coping strategy identified by respondents is limiting the number of social media groups they join. This was identified by 28% of the respondents. Also about 23% of the respondents indicated that they limit the number of social media applications on their phones as a strategy of dealing or coping with the negative effects of social media on their academic lives. Furthermore, 17% of the respondents indicated that during exams they delete all their social media accounts. The last strategy in coping with the negative effects of social media identified by respondents was that they make sure they do not belong to any group on social media. This strategy was indicated by 2%. This is the least coping strategy adopted by respondents.

**Table 7: Coping strategies of students against the negative effects of social media**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
I put off the mobile data or WiFi whiles studying	130	31.0	31.0
I limit myself on the number of social media groups I join	116	27.6	27.6
I have limited the number of social media Apps on my phone	95	22.6	22.6
During exam time I delete all my social media accounts	71	16.9	16.9
I make sure I do not belong to any social media group	8	1.9	1.9
Total	420	100.0	100.0

Source: Field work, 2019

## Discussion

### *Demographic Characteristics of Respondents*

In terms of the demographic characteristics, it was revealed that majority were males. This confirms the existing statistics that males dominate the educational sector in Ghana than the females. For this reason there has been the implementation of affirmative action by the government concerning the admissions in tertiary education. For instance, the University of Ghana has an affirmative action policy for females to close the gap on the dominance of males in the educational sector. In terms of the age it was not surprising that the majority of the students interviewed were less than thirty-one years and not more than forty years. This result, therefore, confirms existing statistics that indicate that the youth, largely between the ages of 18-40 years, form the largest number of undergraduate students in Ghana. Majority of students interviewed were those in level 300. The respondents reflected students from level 100 to 400. This was to give the study varied background and responses of the students sampled.

### *Attitude towards Social Media Usage*

In terms of the attitude of students toward social media usage, it is noted that all respondents use one social media or the other. In a focus group discussion, respondents were of the view that they are social beings and that they cannot imagine human beings not using any social media in their daily lives at this age of modernity. Studies on social media have largely shown that of all the social media platforms, Facebook is the most visited network site (Junco, 2011; Quan-Haase & Young, 2010). The use of social media has been sustained due to internet connectivity. There is no social media that is not dependent on internet connectivity. Every higher institution, globally, has invested in internet so as to facilitate teaching and learning by teachers and students respectively. In the University of Ghana every hall and lecture room has internet connectivity (WiFi) to enable students' access to the World Wide Web for academic purposes. In a focus group discussion, most of the participants expressed the view that one of the reasons they chose to study in the University of Ghana was the good and reliable infrastructure like the internet services, hence they feel happy using the University WiFi.

Majority of University of Ghana undergraduate students spend much time online each day. In a focus group discussion some of the respondents were of the view that social media is part of their life now so they need to be online. This proves how important social media network sites are becoming an important component in the academic life of every student. As an academic environment, it is expected that students would use the University internet facility for academic purposes. However, it was revealed in the results that majority of University of Ghana undergraduate students use their social media platforms connected with the University WiFi more to communicate with their families and friends rather than using them for academic related activities. The implication of this is that the students are not taking good advantage of the uses of the internet provided for academic work.

### *Social Media and Academic Engagements*

As already noted, the University of Ghana has invested in internet support infrastructure to enhance teaching and learning. It has been confirmed in the social media literature that students use social media for academic purposes which is very relevant for their academic development (Oueder & Abousaber, 2018; Burbules, 2016; Mensah & Nizam, 2016; Ahn, 2011; Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2011). It was confirmed in the results that of all the social media platforms, WhatsApp is the mostly used for academic purposes. In a focus group discussion, participants largely expressed the view that although they used Facebook mostly, when it comes to learning and other academic engagements, WhatsApp is the most preferred. For instance a respondent remarked that:

*For me WhatsApp is the best social media platform that I can use for my academic purposes. We easily create groups for our courses and follow discussions so easily. So to me, even if the internet is not stable you can easily connect to WhatsApp for updates and notifications.*

It was also shown in the results that majority of students preferred to use social media throughout the semester. In a focus group discussion it was noted that majority of students preferred to use social media platforms for studies throughout the semester so that they do not miss any valuable information regarding their studies. Others stated that there is nothing much to learn or study in the beginning of the semester so they rather use social media platforms for other non-academic activities such as news updates, current affairs, and for entertainment. There was a general consensus among the students that social media platforms are used to discuss general issues that are not related to academic activities. Again, it was realised from the results that majority of students do not use their various social media platforms for academic purposes. It was also revealed from the results that majority of students interviewed disagree that YouTube is used by students for academic activities. In a focus group discussion, female participants were of the view that the males use YouTube to watch sports, especially soccer and movies rather than using it for academic related activities. The males also revealed what their female counterparts do with YouTube. For instance a male respondent argued that the females use the YouTube site to learn about the latest makeups in town and also spend much time on YouTube learning how to prepare foreign and local dishes.

### ***Positive impacts of Social Media on Students academic Performance***

Study participants affirmed that social media has both positive and negative impacts on their academic lives. This position is not different from what has already been noted in literature. It was revealed in the results that social media is very relevant to student to enhance further research. In a focus group discussion, participants were of the view that after every class they use social media sites such as YouTube to download videos on topics related to their studies. Others also noted that they normally get further readings from their WhatsApp groups. The significance therefore, of social media to students' academic work in terms of aiding further reading and further research cannot be overstated. Students also noted that social media platforms are used for further discussions on what has been taught in class. Some students are very shy by nature to ask questions in class and feel very comfortable to ask their colleagues for clarifications. Thus, to such respondents, social media platforms give them the opportunity to get engaged and seek clarifications on lecture lessons. In a focus group discussion, one participant noted that:

*In fact, I must confess that I am a very shy person so I find it very difficult to ask questions (orally) in class. So I take the advantage of my WhatsApp group to ask my colleagues questions and seek for clarifications. And this has helped me so much to improve upon my learning and discussion activities.*

Students also revealed that they use social media platforms to get prompt feedbacks from their lecturers and teaching assistants (TAs). In a focus group discussion participants noted that through WhatsApp they create course groups and add their instructors. Sometimes they create separate groups for both lecturers and TAs and see the WhatsApp platform as second lecture hall to continue with class interactions. A participant remarked that:

*I cannot actually speak for all of us but in my view the WhatsApp platforms help me to interact with the TAs and lecturers very well on academic related issues. Some of the lecturers are very modern and they always help us with further clarifications that we might not cover for the lecture period. The lecture period is only two hours but through WhatsApp we can engage with our lecturers at any time and they give us prompt feedbacks.*

This excerpt gives credence to the view that social media platforms help students to easily connect with their lecturers for further clarity on what has been discussed in class. Collaborative learning, to a larger extent, is regarded as one of the best learning methodologies that students can embrace to enhance their learning and studies. Social media users in the University of Ghana identified that the use of social media platforms promote collaborative learning. They expressed that WhatsApp and other social media platforms have made it easier in forming study groups without meeting physically. In a focus group discussion, participants noted that they use social media platforms to discuss past questions and prepare for exams and it is helping them very well. A level 400 participant noted that:

*Sometimes if I am reading and I come across a concept that I do not understand very well I just share it on the WhatsApp group and sometimes post it on our group wall on Facebook. This has been helping me since level 100 and I will continue until I graduate and even with this experience, I will continue when I start with my Masters.*

Respondents also stated that social media helps them to get wider knowledge. In a focus group discussion, respondents were of the view that they see social media platforms as an extension of the classroom and that it is a virtual classroom which they like very much. Participants were of the view that some of their colleagues normally share with them interesting materials that are relevant for a specific course of subject. Thus, it is interesting to note that social media platforms help students to connect with the wider academic environment to add knowledge to what has been taught in class.

### **Negative Impacts of Social Media on Academic Performance**

Respondents also largely agreed with some of the negative effects of social media on their academic lives. Majority of the students agreed from the results that social media usage is addictive which negatively affects their academic lives. Though situated in the same study context, this result is at variance with the study by Kolan and Dzandza (2018) where majority of respondents from the University of Ghana noted that students were not addicted to social media. A participant in a focus group discussion observed:

*I can say most students are addicted to social media and not only students but majority of people who use social media for specific reasons. I think social media has come to stay and has been part of students. It is only few people who are able to overcome this kind of addiction. In fact the whole day if I do not visit any of my social media sites I do not feel well.*

It was also revealed in the results that social media takes a lot of the study times of students. Majority of the respondents largely agree that this has negative impacts on their academics. In a focus group discussion, participants stated that this affects their studies and put pressure on them during revision weeks. Thus, without any personal discipline, social media network sites take the biggest attention of students away from their books and general academic activities.

Majority of the respondents agree that some contents on the social media platforms are distractive. It was revealed in a focus group discussion that sometimes some students post unnecessary things on the WhatsApp platforms which distract them and take off their attention and concentration. Some further stated that because they are on more than one social media platforms, this negative effect is exacerbated and becomes the main source of distraction. Thus, majority of the respondents agree that social media brings about wrong exposure. In a focus group discussion, a participant made this revelation about the wrong exposure of social media:

*Some posts on social media platforms are unhealthy and highly unethical. For instance some group members abuse the group and send nude pictures. Sometimes too, on group Facebook wall, some post unnecessary news that are not good. Some are even fabrications and complete falsehoods.*

One of the growing negative effects of social media on the academic life of students, especially in higher education is the spelling abilities of students which is becoming a silent killer. Majority of the students identified this as a negative impact of social media on their academic lives. In a focus group discussion, participants largely confessed that their spelling abilities have been severely affected and this manifests during examinations, assignments, and even in taking simple notes. For instance a level 400 student noted:

*This is very true most at times because the phone does the spellings we find it very difficult to spell certain cheap words. Some of our lecturers warn us to desist from writing short hands in exams and we do it involuntarily. I think it is a bad habit and we need to be very careful especially the level 100s.*

It can therefore be concluded that social media has both negative and positive effects on the academic lives of university of Ghana undergraduate students.

### ***Coping strategies against negative effects of social media***

As indicated in the literature gap, although there are considerable literature on the impact of social media on academic performance (Oueder & Abousaber, 2018; Raut & Patil, 2016; Burbules, 2016; Mensah & Nizam, 2016), no attempt has been made to investigate how students navigate and cope with the social media pressure on their academic lives. For instance the recent work on the impact of social media on academic performance among University of Ghana students by Kolan and Dzandza (2018) failed to fill this gap. This study has unraveled five main strategies that students employ to cope with the negative impacts of social media on their academic lives. The first coping strategy identified by social media users was that they put off their mobile data or WiFi during study hours to avoid or minimise any form of distractions. To such respondents, this is the most important and fundamental strategy they can use in dealing with the distraction from social media. Study participants noted that since the use of any social media platform depends on internet connectivity the best option is to cut off the source of the internet. Another coping strategy adopted by students is that they limit the number of social media groups that they join. During the focus group discussion, majority of respondents were of the view that apart from the academic social media platforms, they are very reluctant to join other open and general groups on social media platforms. For instance, a participant noted:

*I believe social media cannot control us; we have to control it. For me I am not a fan of groups on social media especially WhatsApp. I have realised that some of the groups are created just to waste one's time. Even those that I am on, I put the notification off to avoid any distraction during studies.*

Furthermore, in dealing with the social media pressure, students in the University of Ghana limit the number of social media applications on their phones. This in their view is to limit themselves to few social media sites as a way of avoiding potential negative effects associated with having many social media apps on the phone. Also, as a coping strategy, some respondents resort to deleting all their social media accounts such as Facebook and WhatsApp during exam periods since they are the mostly used social media networks. In the focus discussion, participants expressed the view that exams periods are considered the most crucial periods of the semester, so they try as much as possible to avoid any form of distractions from social media platforms. The last coping strategy used by University of Ghana undergraduate students to deal with the social media pressures is that they make sure they do not join any social media groups apart from those solely meant for course related and other academic discourses. To those who identified this strategy, the logic is to use the social media productively to avoid any of the dangers associated with the social media addiction. For instance in a focus group discussion, a participant noted:

*To me, I make sure Facebook and other social media platforms do not distract me in my studies. I am fully aware of the dangers such as addiction and wrong exposure. To avoid any form of unnecessary negative impacts of social media I decide to personalise the use of social media platforms. I do not join any social media group so that I will have control over them and concentrate fully on my books.*

It can therefore be deduced that the University of Ghana undergraduate students have one coping strategy or the other for dealing with the negative influences of social media on their academic lives.

## Conclusion

This study has shown that although the primary purpose for installing a free WiFi in the University of Ghana is to aid students to easily get access to the internet for information and research, most of the undergraduate students rather use the internet more for Facebook, WhatsApp and other social media activities. It is pretty much obvious that in this modern age and time, social media also forms an important aspect of people's daily lives, and as such, it would be difficult and, perhaps, near impossible to live without it. Its utility on many fronts cannot be over emphasised. However, considering the fact that undergraduate students use the University's WiFi to gain access to the internet mainly for social media activities unrelated to academics and use it less for real academic research activities, can be a call for concern. This is particularly so as this study has revealed that social media is having some negative effects on the academic lives of students. A personal observation made by the researchers also proved that almost every undergraduate student in the University of Ghana is at least familiar with three social media platforms and also know the functions of these social media platforms. Meanwhile, if these same students are asked to mention any three academic databases that are relevant to their area of study, just a handful of students would be able to do that. This implies that students are familiar with social media platforms and their purpose but have little knowledge or perhaps have no idea about academic databases where they could find relevant information that will help them in their areas of study. The question therefore is, how do we encourage these undergraduate students to use the internet more for research and other academic activities and less for "social media", since social media also has its positive aspects as far as today's modern world is concerned.

It is this regard that the research recommends that lecturers should assist students to use the internet and other social media platforms for learning and other academic activities since students spend much time on such social media platform every day. One way by which lecturers could do this is by creating or forming groups for their various courses or classes and posting information relevant to those particular courses on those platforms. They can then direct every student in the group to read and post their individual comments in the group. Based on this, the lecturer/instructor can monitor students who are actually reading the information posted on the course groups and making relevant use of it. Such regular participation by students could be scored and counted as part of their final assessments. This will motivate students to spend more of their online hours on academic activities. It is also recommended that students must cultivate the habit of discipline to limit the number of social media groups they join that are not related to their academic activities (at least when they are in school). Students must also develop the habit of putting off their internet data when studying to avoid distractions when studying. Finally, on its part as an institution, the University of Ghana through the Careers and Counselling Centre must embark on sensitisation programmes to educate students on how to balance their studies with social media usage so that they can use the internet productively. This can be part of the orientation policy of the university for newly admitted undergraduate students.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Additionally, the authors highlighted that they declare that there is no conflict of interest with the execution of the study. It was purely for academic purposes and nothing dubious or malicious.