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(RESEARCH ARTICLE)

Social media and pupils' academic performance: A case of selected secondary schools in Lusaka District, Zambia

Chanda Chansa Thelma [1, *], Brian Nakalonga Mubemba [1] and Lufeyo Chitondo [2]

[1] Rockview University, Lusaka, Zambia.
[2] Twin Palm Leadership University, Lusaka, Zambia.

Abstract

Social media is a collective term for websites and applications focusing on communication, community-based input, interaction, content-sharing, and collaboration. People use social media to stay in touch and interact with friends, family, and various communities. Today, social media has been commonly used by everyone, especially young people and schools are getting into this modern medium of communication rapidly. However, social media has dragged youngsters, especially pupils into it to the extent that it fritters away their valuable time meant for studies, energy, and money. From this background, the study was conducted to examine the effects of social media on pupils' academic performance in secondary schools in the Lusaka district, Zambia. The study employed both qualitative and quantitative methods and a descriptive survey design that sampled head teachers, teachers, pupils, and parents. Data was obtained from the respondents by means of interviews and questionnaires. Frequency tables, graphs, figures, and pie charts were used to analyze the qualitative and quantitative data. Data was also analyzed by the use of software; Statistical Package for Social Sciences (version 26) and Microsoft Excel (version 16). The study discovered that social media has facilitated an easy and economical way of communication between friends and families worldwide. Additionally, the study showed that social media is a valuable source of information, providing pupils with access to educational content, news, and resources that can enhance their learning. However, social media on the other hand was seen to be a significant distraction for pupils, diverting their attention away from studying, assignments, and other academic responsibilities. Also, late-night social media browsing can lead to sleep deprivation, which, in turn, can impair cognitive functioning and academic performance. The study therefore recommended that there is a need to encourage pupils to use social media for educational purposes only, such as group projects or discussions related to course content. Furthermore, there is a need to guide and support pupils in managing their time effectively and avoiding social media-related distractions.

Keywords: Academic Performance; Communication; Education; Pupil; School; Social Media.

1. Introduction

Education is the key to the doors of success for most people in Africa and the world at large (Chanda, 2023). The relationship that exists between social media and pupils' academic performance, therefore, it cannot be over-emphasized. Social media refers to online platforms and websites that enable users to create, share, and interact with content and other users (Alan, 2011). These platforms are designed for social networking and communication, allowing people to connect with friends, family, colleagues, and even strangers across the globe. Social media has become an integral part of modern life, influencing communication, information dissemination, and even business marketing. Social media has exploded as a category of online discourse where people create content, share it, bookmark it, and network at a prodigious rate. Because of its ease of use, speed, and reach, social media is fast changing the public discourse in society and setting trends and agendas in topics that range from the environment and politics to technology

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* Corresponding author: Chanda Chansa Thelma.

and the entertainment industry. In the last ten years, the online world has changed dramatically, thanks to the invention of social media, young men and women now exchange ideas, feelings, personal information, pictures, and videos at a truly astonishing rate. Seventy-three percent of Zambian pupils are now using social media websites. To them, social media is the use of Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Massager, and LinkedIn for the purpose of communication, and sharing photos as well as videos. However, for the purpose of this study, social media is captured within the use of the internet through Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Skype My Space as well and Yahoo Messenger for communication sharing of ideas, and sharing of photos and videos by users. Darleen (2007) says that the increased use of Social Networking Websites has become an international phenomenon in the past several years. What started out as a hobby for some computer-literate people has become a social norm and way of life for people from all over the world. Teenagers and young adults have especially embraced these sites as a way to connect with their peers, share information reinvent their personalities, and showcase their social lives (Whitney, 2008).

There are various types of social media platforms, including social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn), microblogging platforms (e.g., Twitter), photo-sharing apps (e.g., Instagram), video-sharing platforms (e.g., YouTube), and forums or discussion boards (Tajinder & Shabnoor, 2016). Social media platforms rely on user-generated content. Users can post text, images, videos, links, and other media for public or private consumption. Social media enables users to create and maintain personal profiles, connect with friends and acquaintances, and expand their network by sending or accepting connection requests. Social media platforms often allow for real-time communication, including instant messaging, comments, and live video streaming. Many people use social media to stay informed about current events, trends, and news. However, it's important to be critical of the sources and information shared on these platforms. Social media is widely used by businesses and brands for marketing, advertising, and customer engagement. It offers a way to reach a broad audience and interact directly with customers. The use of social media can raise privacy and security concerns. Users are encouraged to understand and manage their privacy settings and be cautious about sharing personal information.

Social media engages students and have to be examined as entrepreneurs of understanding. The interactive character of online conditions has extended with social networking which improved usage of Websites that have become a worldwide phenomenon. Teens and teenagers have especially recognized these internet sites to be able to contact their peers, share information, reinvent their personas, and showcase their social lives (Miller et al, 2012). According to Khurana (2015), social media users often time experience poor academic performance. Similarly, Stern (2012) posit that social media is negatively associated with the academic performance of the student and is a lot more momentous than its advantages. Internet addiction consequently gave rise in internet usage within the last couple of decades. Osharive (2015) recommended that addicted users prefer using the internet setting back their personal and professional responsibilities which ultimately leads to poor academic performance. In the same vein, Whitney (2008) pointed out that social media users devoted less time to their studies in comparison to nonusers and subsequently had lower GPAs. Ibid (2008) also mentioned that among various unique distractions of every single generation, Social media remains a major distraction of the current generation.

Academic performance, which is measured by the examination results, is one of the major goods of a school. According to MoE (2007), narrates that schools are established with the aim of imparting knowledge and skills to those who go through them, and behind all this is the idea of enhancing good academic performance. Ibid (2007) added that these days 'pupils are so engrossed in social media that they are almost 24 hours online. Even in classrooms and lecture theaters, it has been observed that some students are always busy pinging, 2going, or Facebooking, while lectures are on. Times that ought to be channeled towards learning, academic research, and innovating have been crushed by the passion for meeting new friends online and most times busy discussing trivial issues. Hence, most students suffer setbacks as a result of distractions from social media. According to Ahn (2011), social network websites grab the attention of students and then divert it towards non-educational and inappropriate actions including useless chatting. On the basis of the above statement, we can say that social networking sites may badly affect the academic life and learning experiences of the student. As students begin to spend more time using social media, they are not able to give time to their studies which is one of the factors for poor academic performance.

In the past years, social media websites have become common; giving young people a new way to interact with each other and communicate with the world. Social networking became popular between 2005 and 2007 after Facebook and Myspace were created. Facebook, for example, has over 600 million members and it is still growing and approximately 87% of undergraduate students are Facebook users. These numbers are expected to grow since Facebook users will continue to grow. And this is not only true for Facebook; numbers for YouTube users closely follow as well (University of Zambia, 2009). Social networking websites provide tools by which people can communicate, share information, and create new relationships. With the popularity of social networking websites on the rise, our social interaction is affected in multiple ways as we adapt to our increasingly technological world. Neelamalar & Chitra (2009) says that the way

web users interact and talk to each other has changed and continues to change. These users now socialize through the internet and it takes away from the person socialization that has been around forever. Social networking websites have affected our social interaction by changing the way we interact face-to-face, how we receive information, and the dynamics of our social groups and friendships. Communicating through the internet and social networking websites is quite different from communicating in person-to-person situations. When users communicate through these websites, they use things like instant messages (IM) and chatting as well as status or Twitter updates to talk to friends and express themselves (Khurana, 2015) further opines that social networking websites also affect the way we receive information and news. The sites open up different portals through which we get information and create more diverse news outlets. Most of the studies, by Stern (2010), conducted on pupils' use of social media sites and its impact on academic performance focused on students in the developed world.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

The rapid advancement of media technology has had a great effect on the way people communicate on a daily basis. Many parents and guardians are worried that pupils are spending too much time on Facebook and other social media sites and have not had enough time to study. Though parents are worried about their children's constant use of social media sites, many students continue to utilize these sites on a daily basis. The growing dimension of the use of social media among the youths of today cannot be over-emphasized. Osharive (2015) narrates that over the years, social networking among pupils has become more and more popular. It is a way to make connections, not only on campus but with friends outside of school. Social networking is a way that helps people feel they belong to a community. Due to the increased popularity of it, economists and professors are questioning whether the grades of students will not be affected by how much time is spent on these sites. Whitney, (2008), believes that the use of technology such as the Internet is one of the most important factors that can influence the educational performance of students positively or adversely.

1.2. The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of social media on pupils' academic performance in selected secondary schools in the Lusaka district, Zambia.

1.3. Research Objectives

The objectives of the study were to:

- Examine the effects of social media on pupils' academic performance in secondary schools of Lusaka district, Zambia.
- Establish the relationship between social media and pupil's academic performance in selected secondary schools of Lusaka district, Zambia.

1.4. Conceptual Framework

The knowledge that humans have acquired regarding behavior modification permits some measure of prediction and control over performance and learning. Theories of mental state by Locke, (1996) provide descriptive information about the limits of effective learning. These important factors and their interaction contribute to the students" learning process. They provide a basis for realizing the learning situations, instructional resources, students" characteristics, teaching strategies, and the kind of information a teacher requires when faced with a decision about which instructional strategies (amount and kind of experience to provide to the students) to use at a given time.

1.5. Significance of the Study

This study would provide necessary information to educators to analyze the advantages and disadvantages of social media on pupils' academic performance. The study was important in that the findings would help the Ministry of Education find ways and put up interventions concerning social media that would help improve the state of the performance of pupils in schools and thus improve academic performance. The information in this study would also help policymakers and other stakeholders in education to modify the conditions suitable for the quality delivery of education so that they help to enhance effective learners' academic performance.

2. Research methodology

2.1. Study Design

Due to the nature of this study, a mixed-methods approach which combined both the qualitative and quantitative research paradigms was adopted. The use of two methodologies was found to enhance research findings by providing a well-rounded understanding of the phenomenon being investigated. The mixed methods approach allowed the study to not only ensure the validity of the findings but also collect rich information from different perspectives. This mixed methods approach was used because it enabled the study to collect both quantified and personal verbatim which was of good help in furthering understanding of responses from the intended respondents.

2.2. Research Site

The research was conducted at some selected secondary schools in the Lusaka district, Zambia.

2.3. Population, Sample and Sampling Procedure

The population for the study comprised head teachers, teachers, pupils, and parents from the selected secondary schools of Lusaka district. The target population was 1200. The sample size involved a total of 120 respondents which included three (3) head teachers, one from each selected school. Twelve (12) teachers, four from each selected school. Fifteen (15) members of the community and Ninety (90) pupils, thirty (30) from each selected school. The study employed both purposive and simple random sampling on different participants from the selected secondary schools.

2.4. Data Analysis

Data was analyzed qualitatively as the semi-structured interview schedules were used as data collection instruments. A thematic approach was used, where data analysis started with the categorizing of themes from semi-structured interview schedules to structured ones. The data gathered was analyzed according to the themes of the study and the order of the research objectives. Data generated from the questionnaires were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (Version 26) and Microsoft Excel (Version 16). Frequency tables, charts, and graphs were also used to analyze data.

2.5. Ethical Issues

The study avoided pressuring respondents to take part in the research. Alternatively, permission, informed consent, and assent were obtained from respondents involved in the research, and the research topic was strategically selected to ensure that there was no harm whatsoever to the research respondents. Permission from the District Education Board for Lusaka District (DEBS) was sought to carry out this study. In this research, the study was fully conscious of the need to abide by the ethical rule of respecting the privacy of individuals taking part in the research. Interviews were not conducted on a one-to-one basis; instead, participants were grouped and identified using their titles. In the same way, all the respondents of the research were to remain unidentified to the public as all their valuable views, opinions and perceptions were only known by the researchers for use only in the research, and participant's identities will forever remain hidden.

3. Results and discussions

The following findings and discussions were presented according to set research objectives:

3.1. Effects of Social Media on Pupils' Academic Performance

Out of the total respondents, 40% of pupils agreed to the fact that social media helps them improve their academic performance and is useful for their academic life. They stated that social media can be used as an educational tool. Some educators and pupils use social media platforms for learning and collaboration, sharing educational resources, and discussing academic topics. Apart from that, it was also discovered that social media can also provide networking opportunities that can be beneficial for future career prospects. Pupils can connect with professionals, join academic groups, and access educational content. However, for 25% of the teachers' respondents, social media causes procrastination in the pupils. Pupils may postpone their assignments or study in favor of spending time on social media platforms, leading to rushed or incomplete work. They stated that most pupils referred to social media for doing their educational work whereas a few did not refer to social media. They further articulated that most of the pupils seek help.

of social media for doing their assignment, projects, or any other work related to academic activities and supplementing their bookish knowledge with the information given by social media. This is in line with Khurana (2015) who says that social media helps pupils in doing their academic work. On the other hand, 15% of the head teachers respondents pointed out that social media distracts pupils from concentrating on school studies and reduces time for studying. Excessive use of social media can lead to a decrease in the amount of time students dedicate to their studies. Instead of studying or doing homework, they may spend more time on social media, which can result in lower academic performance. They expressed that they do not feel that social media can improve pupils' academic performance because after they engaged in social media they lost interest in studies and they preferred to spend their time browsing the net or chatting with friends. It also distracted them during their study hour and they lost concentration while studying. Ahn (2011) points out that one of the most significant negative effects of social media on academic performance is distraction. Social media platforms are designed to be engaging and can easily divert students' attention from their studies. Constant notifications, scrolling through feeds, and chatting with friends online can disrupt their focus on schoolwork. They mostly use smartphones to stay online and things become easier for them to stay online anytime and anywhere. Furthermore, 20% of the parents responded that they have seen changes in their children's academic performance because in many cases social media lowered their grades instead of improving it. Late-night use of social media can interfere with students' sleep patterns. Lack of adequate sleep can negatively impact cognitive function, memory, and overall academic performance. This is because they stay online, they don't think about studying and there is no way for improvement in their studies if they are not studying. They further noted that social media can expose pupils to cyberbullying, which can have serious psychological and emotional consequences. If students are dealing with cyberbullying or other mental health issues related to their online interactions, it can affect their academic performance.
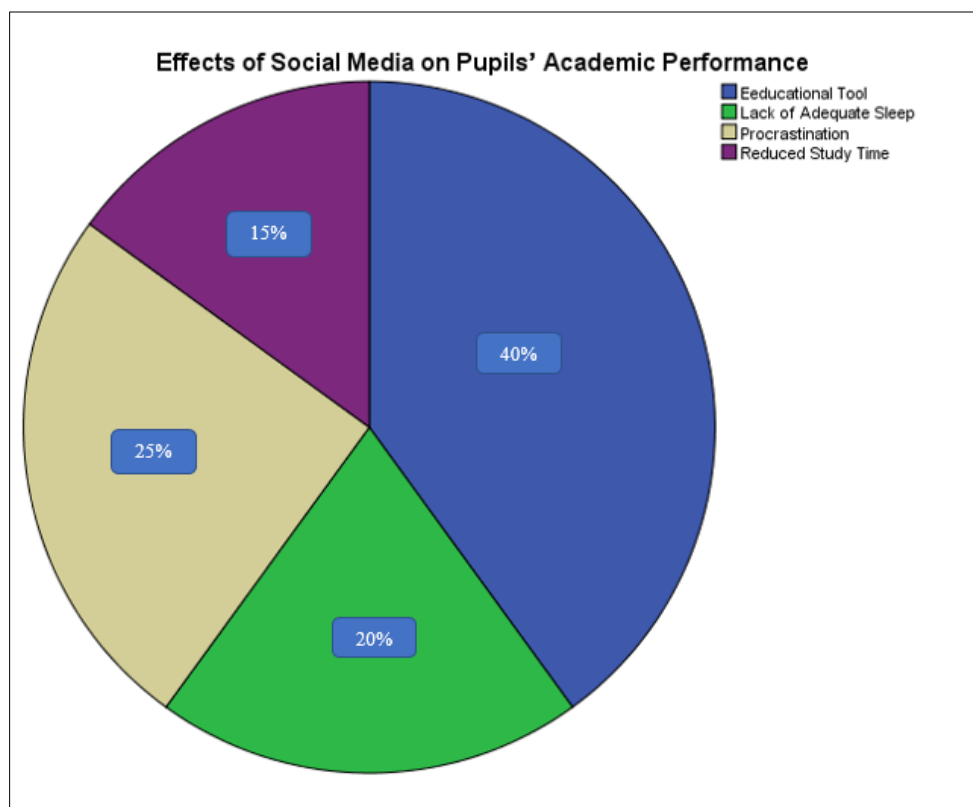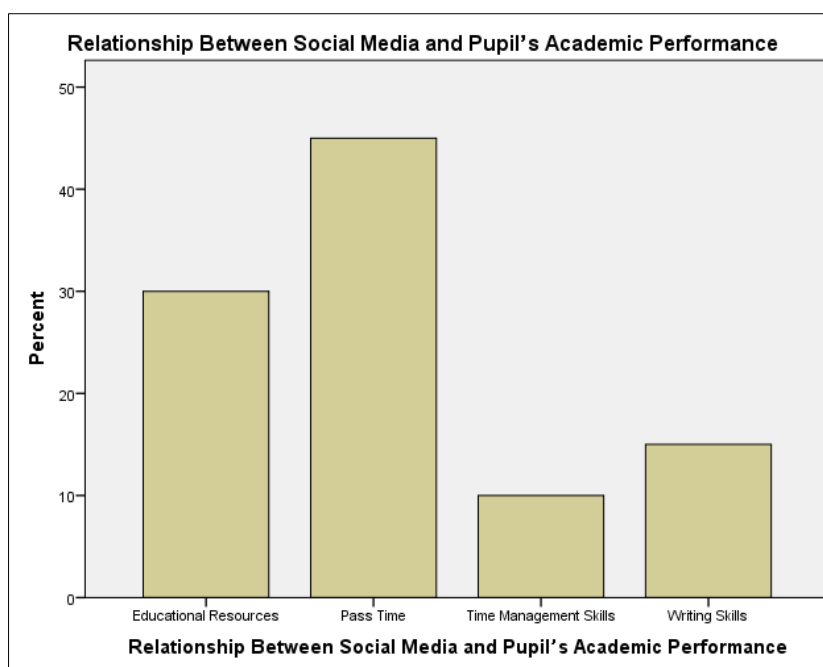

Figure 1 Effects of Social Media on Pupils' Academic Performance

3.2. Relationship Between Social Media and Pupil's Academic Performance

Research findings indicated that there is a link between social media and pupils' academic performance. 45% representing pupils narrated that they visit social media to kill their time. This shows that the respondents engaged on social media only to keep them away from being bored and for time to pass. The interviews with these pupils and their observation showed that their attitudes towards social media-assisted teaching were on the whole positive. Yet, the overall results of the interviews demonstrated their limited achievement despite the slight improvement they showed after taking the course. These results partly corroborate previous studies findings (Osharive, 2015). Teachers (30%) on the other hand said that pupils find satisfaction using social media due to the knowledge and academic information that they provide through different sites and thus, it helps the pupils get updated and also provides answers to their

doubts. It also helps them in solving their problems. They said that a few of them seek the help of social media for doing their assignment, project, or any other work related to academic activities and supplement their bookish knowledge with the information given by social media. Consequently, social media thus, helps them in doing their academic work. Social media platforms, especially those focused on education, can provide access to a wealth of educational resources. Whitney (2008) adds that many educational institutions, teachers, and experts share informative content, videos, articles, and study materials online. 10% of head teachers observed that the use of social media can significantly impact students' time management skills. Various apps and tools designed for time management and productivity are available on social media. These can help students organize their study schedules and track their progress. However, poor time management can lead to procrastination and, consequently, lower academic performance. Parents also noted that social media improves pupils' academic performance. Ultimately, understanding how social media use correlates with academic performance can provide insights into ways to enhance students' chances of academic success. They narrated that social media can be a platform for students to collaborate on projects, discuss academic topics, and connect with classmates. Online study groups and discussion forums can help in sharing knowledge and clarifying doubts. The respondents added that social media allows students to follow experts in their field, access the latest research, and stay updated on current events and trends. It can be a valuable tool for gathering information and staying informed. Last but not least, parents (15%) social media was used by their children to spread information among friend's circle. Parents have the opinion that social media for its fast and easy accessibility, it is useful for spreading information among friends regarding academic or social life. The respondents also said that pupils can use social media to research colleges, universities, and career opportunities. They can connect with alumni and professionals to gain insights into potential career paths. Platforms like blogging and microblogging sites encourage pupils to express their thoughts in writing. This can help improve their writing skills and develop their ability to articulate ideas effectively (Tajinder & Shabnoor, 2016).

Figure 2 Relationship Between Social Media and Pupil's Academic Performance

4. Conclusion

The new trends in social media have captured the attention of people all around the world especially the youth and the pupils. The study found that though a number of students make use of social media in a useful manner as a medium of communication and source of knowledge, a good number of them use it for fun, and entertainment which does not contribute much to them. While the former spent their time meaningfully without affecting their studies, the latter used a lot in wasting their time and it also affected their studies at times. This research study has explored and exposed a few guidelines on how to make social media an effective tool for learning and enriching experiences and also how to make use of different apps as teaching-learning tools, since it is the interest of young pupils and has the capacity to be an interesting tool of education. The results of the study show that student's involvement in social media has both positive and negative outcomes based on how they use it. The study sought to clarify that technology does not lessen the

student's abilities to learn but rather it helps them to learn different abilities which they have never known before. Today, as we can see development happens due to technology and social media. So, making use of social media for good and positive purposes will enable the road to progress. However, it's crucial for pupils to use social media responsibly and avoid its potential distractions. Excessive use of social media for non-educational purposes can lead to procrastination and decreased academic performance. To harness the benefits of social media while minimizing its drawbacks, pupils should establish healthy boundaries, set specific goals for its use, and maintain a balance between online and offline activities. Parents and educators can also play a role in guiding pupils to use social media in a productive and safe manner.

4.1. Recommendations

The following are actions that should be taken on the basis of the findings of this study:

- Educators should ensure that social media is used wisely for academic purposes; and for sharing classroom activities and information among the teachers and pupils.
- Parents must ensure that the use of social media by students should focus on the academic relevance of those sites instead of using them for negative purposes.
- The pupils should create a balance between chit-chatting and academic activities.
- There is a need to educate pupils on the effects of social media on their academic performance.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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Author's short biography

	Chanda Chansa Thelma specializes in Civic Education and Political Science. She has taught Civic Education, Political Science and Research Methods at the university level for seven years now. She holds a Doctor of Philosophy in Civic Education, a Master of Arts in Civic Education, a Bachelor of Arts Degree; in Civic Education & Religious Studies, a Diploma in Education, and several Educational Certificates. Currently, she is a Coordinator for Open Distance Learning at Rockview University.
	Brian Nakalonga Mubemba specializes in Economics and Business Studies. He has taught at the Secondary school level for 33 years and at the University level for 7 years now. He holds a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Economics, a Master of Business Administration degree, a Bachelor of Social Sciences (BA, Economics/ History), Business Studies (Diploma with Education), and Education Management (Certificate). He holds the position of Dean of Post-Graduate Studies at Rockview University.
	Lufeyo Chitondo specializes in Applied Linguistics and has lectured and is still in the field of Linguistics and research on different academic subjects of great significance.