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Adapting Social Networking Sites for Scholarly Communication among Postgraduate Students in Kenyan Universities

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Abstract

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Keywords

Academics, Faculty Members, Kenya, Postgraduate Student, Scholar, Scholarly Communication, Social Networking Site

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Adapting Social Networking Sites for Scholarly Communication among Postgraduate Students in Kenyan Universities

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Abstract

The study examines how postgraduate students use Social Networking Sites (SNS) in communicating scholarly information in Kenyan universities with reference to use of WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and Academia.edu. The objectives of this studies are: to determine how social networking sites are used for scholarly communication and to find out the reasons for using social networking sites by postgraduate students. Descriptive research design was used to guide the study. From four universities with a sample size of 242 postgraduate students who filled the questionnaire. The findings of the study showed that postgraduate students use SNS to share research ideas, class experiences, to know where to meet for lessons, when lectures are starting and updates on deadlines for submitting class assignments; the reasons for using SNS are for academic purposes and group discussion. In conclusion, the findings of the study show that postgraduate students use SNS to share daily experiences within campus rather than sharing information on how and where they can get scholarly information that will enable them to add new body of knowledge.

Keywords: Academics, Faculty Members, Kenya, Postgraduate Student, Scholar, Scholarly Communication, Social Networking Site

1. Introduction

Scholarly communication has been experiencing tremendous change due to rapid technological changes leading to the creation of varied ways of sharing information among scholars despite the ever-rising cost of information access and sharing (Sawant, 2012). For example, the advent of the Internet and the World Wide Web has led to improved ways for research dissemination and scholarly publication (Al-Aufi & Genoni, 2010; Sawant, 2012). Therefore, postgraduate students look for

a medium where the process of scholarly communication will be made simple and effective to them and their target audiences, therefore, the choice of using SNS for scholarly communication.

Scholarly Communication (SC) is a process in which research and scholarly works are created, assessed and distributed to other scholars or scholarly communities and kept for future use. SC has two components; formal and informal SC (Procter *et al.*, 2010). The formal process involves writing and publishing research and it is done through both peer-reviewed and other journals which

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is the primary channel of communicating to a wider audience (Gu & Widen-wulff, 2010; Ponte & Simon, 2011; Procter *et al.*, 2010). Informal Process involves the process of sharing and disseminating research ideas through electronic mailing lists, personal contacts, attending lectures, conferences, and seminars (Al-Aufi & Fulton, 2015).

Social Networking Sites (SNS) have become part of our life from societal level, family level and now in the academic level as the most picking mode of communication. According to (Boyd & Ellison, 2008) SNS are web-based platforms that enable individuals to create public or semi-public profiles; communicative list of other users in a connection; and finally interact and take the helm of their list of connections and those created by others within the network?

SNSs are communication networks that depend on user-generated content and therefore researchers, professionals, lecturers and students can use them for various purposes. These SNSs allow online interactions and sharing of content-based information through the display of personal information, interests, and photographs (Boyd, 2007). SNSs have been used for various purposes, for example, individuals use SNSs to 'hang out', to waste time, and learn about each other or simply as a directory (Stutzman, 2006).

According to the results of a survey conducted by (Rowlands *et al.*, 2011) on use of social media in research flow in the University College London, SNS has found thoughtful use at all stages of the research life cycle, from identifying research problem to the final dissemination of findings (Rowlands *et al.*, 2011) also found that collaborative authoring, conferencing, scheduling and meeting tools are the suitable characteristics effective scholarly communication. Social Networking Sites (SNS) have these characteristics and therefore, postgraduate students are likely to practice scholarly communication because they need to collaborate and share research ideas through SNS.

2. Statement of the Problem

Postgraduate studies have been receiving considerable attention in Kenya with a large student enrolment in various fields of study. However, to make the research activities more visible, postgraduate students need to adopt the new communication media to share information. The

literature reviewed shows that information providers and academic staff in different disciplines use social networks for research collaboration and publishing scholarly communication. Lecturers also use social platforms for teaching and their day-to-day learning activities. However, little is known about use of social media by post-graduate students for scholarly communication. This research seeks to fill this gap by assessing how postgraduate students use social networking sites for scholarly communication in selected Kenyan universities.

3. Literature Review

The literature reviewed covers the following:

- To determine how postgraduate students use SNS for scholarly communication, and
- To find out the reasons why postgraduate students use SNS.

3.1 Use of Social Networking Sites for Scholarly Communication

Since scholars gain knowledge through interaction with peers and partners, SNSs allow them to enhance their links with peer networks (Chen & Bryer, 2012) thus boosting learning and the way they organize and share their research ideas. SNSs are developed to connect individuals with similar interests and are becoming more widespread (Lester & Perini, 2010). A study of fourth-year students in Applied Research Centre of Community College in the UK found that these students are often not on campus, meaning there is very little faculty-student interaction, and active and collaborative learning in a face-to-face environment. Therefore, they use SNSs as the best communication tool that will promote wider sharing of knowledge in various locations.

Nkatha (Muneja & Abungu, 2012) carried out a study on how tutors use SNS to teach students at the main campus of Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT). The study showed that tutors in institutions of higher learning use SNS (Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Google+ and YouTube) in their teaching practices. A study on the ways in which tutors can utilize YouTube with their students in economics and business studies has been reported by Hilner (2012). The study shows that YouTube videos help students understand better the subject matter and remember the information

they have learned longer. SNSs facilitate tutorial groups where students raise doubts or problems concerning their lessons and their fellow students answer them through the network. This strengthens and makes flexible the teaching-learning process (Ventura & Quero, 2013).

In the social network environment, voluntariness is the key factor where the teacher-student relationship takes place horizontally due to the nature of the communication medium. This enhances interaction and participation leading to increased trust in their discussions and prolonged relationship between teachers and students (Arnold & Paulus, 2010). A research on teaching of English as a foreign language in higher education in Greece indicated improvements due to the use of web-based tools and social media (Dogoriti *et al.*, 2014). These tools changed the way students' perceive the use of Internet technology in the development of their English language learning.

Further research has found that SNSs are commonly used among academics, faculty members and information providers. Academics use SNSs for sharing research work and communicating with one another across disciplines. In addition to this, faculty members use SNS to communicate with one another on academic research, communicating with the administration, and also information providers' use SNSs to deliver their information services and marketing the same to their users (Al-Aufi & Fulton, 2014; Gichora & Kwanya, 2015; Madhusudhan, 2012; Muneja & Abungu, 2012).

A study reports how social networks have impacted learning a foreign language among undergraduate students in London, to improve their speaking skills undergraduates follow professional foreign language teachers and various facilities for speaking (Bicen *et al.*, 2015). A study on the scholarly use of social media by doctoral students in the University of Calicut, Kerala (India) found that students are aware and use it for locating scholarly content, content awareness and searching scholarly materials in their fields of study (Ashraf & Mohamed, 2016).

Another research conducted in Italian University found out that scholars use academic SNSs like Academia.edu and Research Gate to connect with other scholars, share research results and develop new connections with colleagues (Manca & Ranieri, 2017). The study focused on faculty assistant professors, associate professors, and full professors. Another study found that academic social networking sites (Research Gate and Academia.

edu) are used by scholars for connecting to other research scholars, sharing and following research (Asmi & Margam, 2018). A study of faculty members, teachers and teaching assistants in Kuwait University found use of Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram and YouTube for scholarly communication (Al-Daihani *et al.*, 2018).

According to (Al-Muomen *et al.*, 2020) on a study in Kuwait University on the use of Academic Networking Sites (ANSs), it was observed faculty members are aware of importance of ANSs and has enabled them to make connections with their fellow scholars and share similar research interests and even publications which have been made available by the academic social networks. Therefore, there is great use of SNS for SC in various universities in different countries and there is minimal literature on use of these networks in Kenyan universities especially among postgraduate students.

3.2 The Reasons for using Social Networking Sites

There are various reasons for using. The major reasons of SNSs usage have been mainly built in the uses and gratifications theory (Hilner, 2012; Karimi *et al.*, 2014; Whiting & Williams, 2013) and show that SNSs are used for social interaction, passing time, information seeking, entertainment, relaxation, community utility and convenience utility.

The reasons for using SNS are to connect with other researchers' activities, interact with peers, keeping them up-to-date and searching for information and a few doctoral students use them for discussion (Ashraf & Mohamed, 2016). This was supported studies that found out that SNSs are used because they facilitate faculty members to keep in touch with people they know, to find friends, get research updates, gain professional visibility, get conference announcements, exchange research documents, etc. (Al-Daihani *et al.*, 2018; Manco, 2019; Matto, 2015).

4. Methodology

This study used a descriptive survey research design and mixed methods and covered Masters' students in universities in Nakuru County, Kenya. The universities include Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT), Egerton University, Mount Kenya

University (MKU) and St, Paul’s University. Purposive sampling technique was used to select universities and 242 postgraduate students were selected using simple random sampling technique (Karimi *et al.*, 2014). The data collection tools were Questionnaires and interview. The tool for quantitative analysis was the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (Version 20). Qualitative data were analysed using content analysis.

5. Findings

5.1 Awareness on usage of SNS

97.06% (Figure 1) of the postgraduate student population has been using social networking sites. The study also

indicated that 2.94% of the postgraduate students do not use the social networking sites. 97% use Facebook, 95% of postgraduate students use Twitter while 92% use WhatsApp. Others indicated that they use LinkedIn, Instagram, Academia.edu and Research gate. Concerning this, the class representatives reported that they have social networking groups on WhatsApp platform, Telegram, and LinkedIn. This is in line with earlier research findings (Ashraf & Mohamed, 2016).

5.2 Devices used for Accessing SNS

Most postgraduate students use their smartphones. This is in conformity with the findings of an earlier research (Dogoriti *et al.*, 2014) (Figure 2).

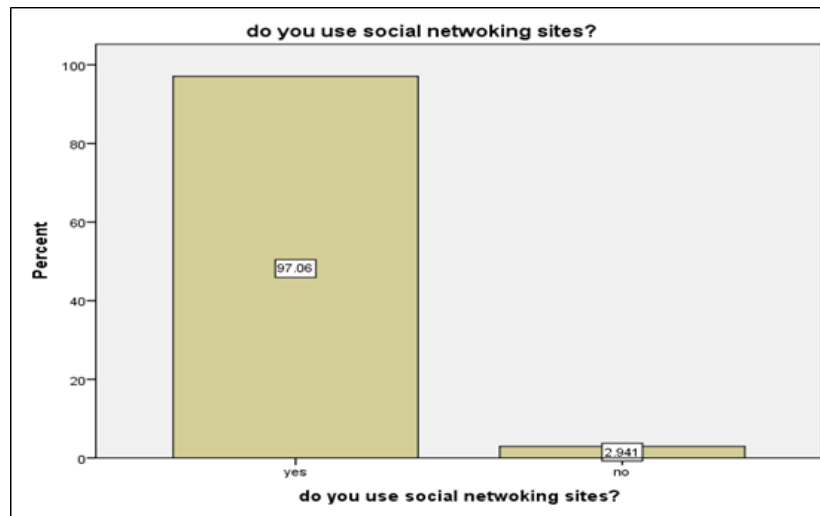


Figure 1. Use of social networking sites.

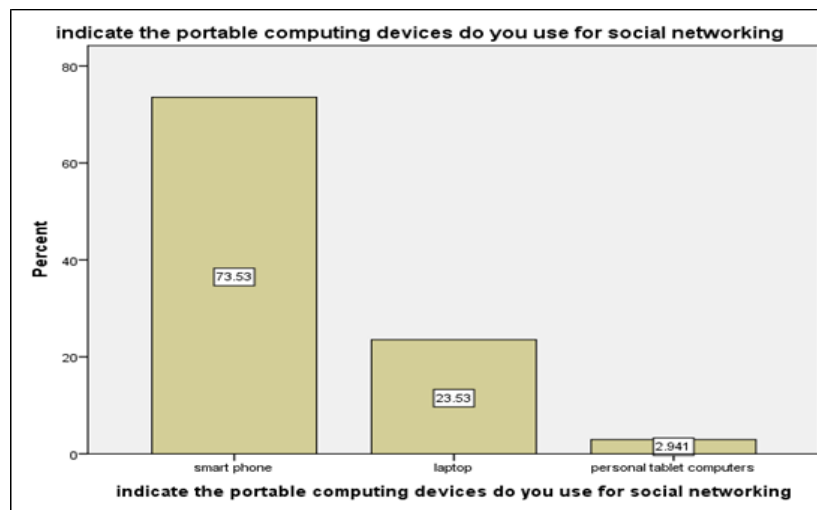


Figure 2. Types of computing devices used in accessing SNS.

5.3 Use of SNSs for Scholarly Communication

The use of social networking sites for academic purposes has been on the rise among university students. Most postgraduate students use SNSs for sharing research ideas which were represented by a chi-square of 30.118 with a p-value of 0.000, which is a less than 0.05 significance level. This is echoed in earlier research in that the purpose of using SNSs by students was to connect with other researchers' activities and to interact with peers (Al-Daihani *et al.*, 2018; Ashraf & Mohamed, 2016; Asmi & Margam, 2018). However, this contradicts the findings of a study that indicated that sharing of research work was not the main purpose of use of SNSs by students (Madhusudhan, 2012). This is supported by the TAM 2 model in that the job relevance of the SNS is what makes it to be chosen for use (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000).

Chi-square test also suggested that the use of social networking sites for sharing class experiences was high among postgraduate students (chi-square values were 11.765 with a p-value of 0.000). One class representative mentioned, "We share information about new research ideas, about individual's research study and information about seminars". This showed that the postgraduate students share information about their studies within the campus. This is in line with an earlier study (Lester & Perini, 2010). TAM 2 models alludes that the output

quality of a communication media is paramount in its choice of use.

The study also established that different social networking sites are used for different purposes; for example, some students indicated that they used WhatsApp, Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram and Telegram to know where they meet for lessons, when lectures are starting and updates on deadlines for submitting class assignments. While this confirms the findings of another study (Dogoriti *et al.*, 2014) where it is shown that most students make consistent use of Facebook for discussion related to courses in the same way as they use SNSs for social purposes, it is different from what was found in another study (Ventura & Quero, 2013).

5.4 Reasons for using SNS by Postgraduate Students

5.4.1 Level of use of SNS for SC

It was also found that SNSs are used by the postgraduate students for communication within the Campus environment (Figure 3).

The study also found that students find it *Very easy / Easy to use* (Figure 4). In fact this has been established even in earlier studies (Al-Aufi & Fulton, 2015). The instant feedback that users can get is another major factor that prompts students to use social media.

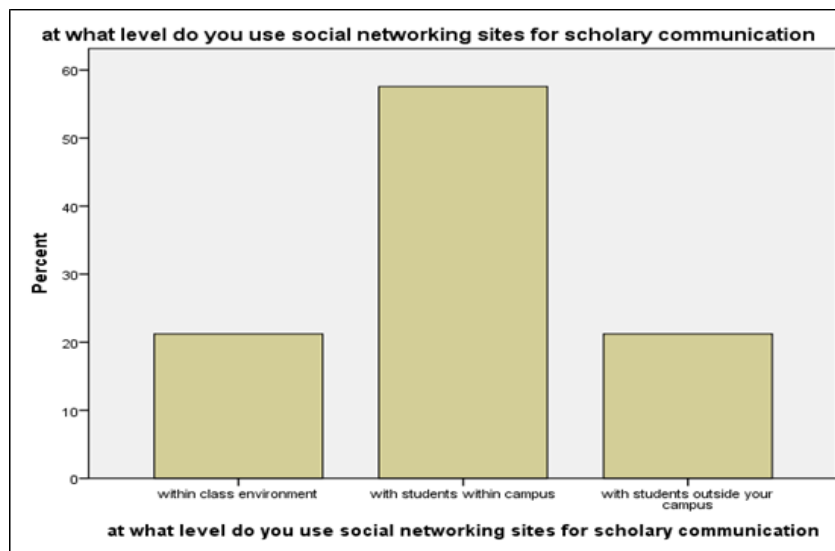


Figure 3. Level of use of SNS for SC.

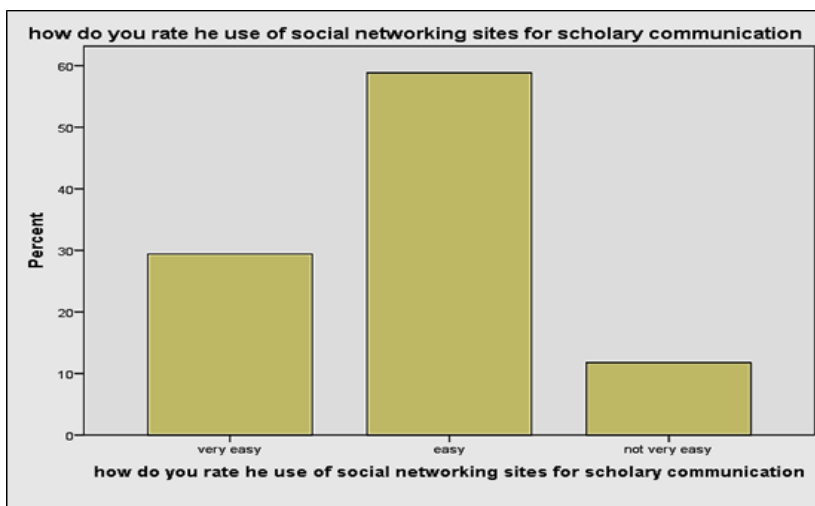


Figure 4. Rating the use of SNS for SC.

The results of this study show that postgraduate students use SNS for two major reasons; these are for academic reasons and for discussion.

5.4.2 Academic Purpose

About 85% of postgraduate students use social networking sites for academic purposes. The study also indicated that only 15% of the postgraduate students do not use social networking for academic purpose rather than social purpose. This was echoed by the response of

a class representative who said “I get access to scholarly information easily from Academia.edu and LinkedIn which are academic SNSs”. This is in line with another study (Greenhow, 2011) (Figure 5).

5.4.3 Group Discussions

Social networking sites for group discussion were not used much. About 75% of students did not use SNSs for group discussion (Figure 6).

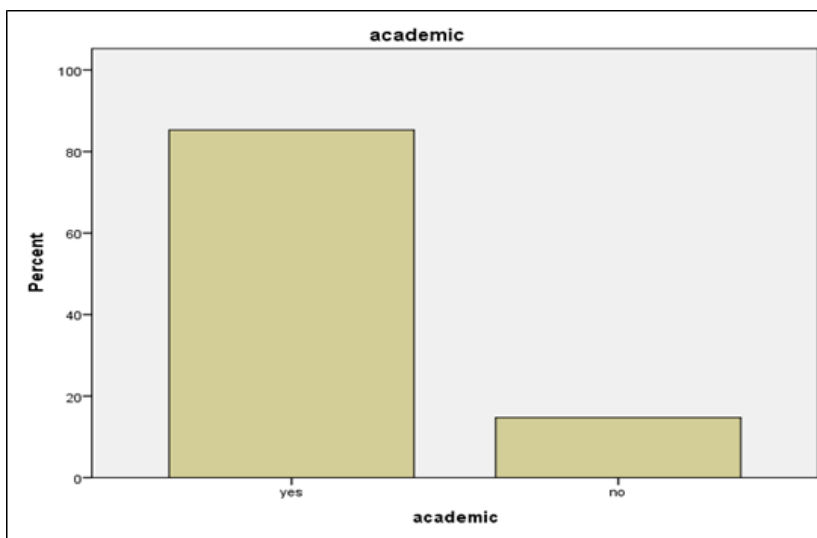


Figure 5. For academic purpose.

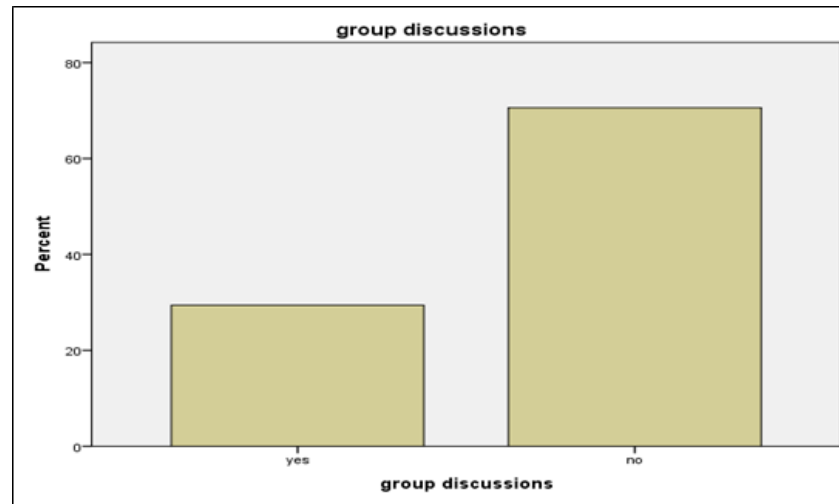


Figure 6. For group discussion.

One respondent said: “group discussions on a particular subject sometimes lead to delays in my studies”.

6. Conclusion

The study found that postgraduate students use social networking sites to enhance their research; for instance, the use of SNSs allows students to follow current researches and to come up with new research ideas. It was also observed that some postgraduate students do not use SNS for scholarly communication because some do not have relevant skills to access scholarly networks and others are not aware of the existence of academic social networks. Therefore, institutions need to conduct orientation programmes on how to access academic social networks. Another observation made was that the most commonly used SNS are Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter while academia.edu was the least used. Other SNSs that the study found to be used were LinkedIn, Instagram and Telegram. This shows that there are more SNS platforms that postgraduate students use for SC.

The study has given an overview on the use of SNS by postgraduate students for scholarly communication by postgraduate students in Kenya. More research needs to be done on the use of academic social networking sites for scholarly communication.

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