THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA TO ENHANCE COLLABORATIVE LEARNING IN TANZANIA HIGHER LEARNING INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract

Social media has gained greater acceptability in the world societies and has probably become the most important communication tool among higher level education students. Studies have shown most of higher learning students spending more time active on social media. This study intended to assess the students' use of social media for collaborative learning in Tanzania higher learning institutions. Questionnaires were sent to collect data from five higher learning institutions in Tanzania to fulfill the purpose of this study. The study found that, Tanzania higher learning students use social media for collaborative learning. The nature of use included sharing learning materials during and off class hours among groups. The study also found students collaborating with peers purposely for acquiring new knowledge and skills. However, the study found respondents indifferent on whether social media can become a perfect substitute of face to face learning environment.

Key words: Learning, Collaborative, Social-Media, Students, Tanzania.

1.0   Introduction

Social media has gained greater acceptability in the world societies for its flexibility, and user-friendly applications. It has probably become the most important communication tool among higher level education students.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as a group of internet based applications built on the ideological and technological foundation of Web2.0, and that allows the creation and exchange of user-generated contents. Earlier on the discovery of internet people used it for commercial purpose, make new friends, reawaken old friends and recover the long lost relatives (Nwazor& Godwin-Maduike, 2015). But the emergence of social media made the whole process of communication easy. Also, easy accessibility of social media via smart phone has resulted to increase in number of users day after day. In July 2011 a total of 88.4 billion minutes were spent on social media. One year later that total went up to 121.1 billion minutes (Nielsen Company, 2012). According to Pew Research, 67% of Internet users engage in social media (Duggan & Brenner, 2013). Also, Vural (2015) adds that two of the three world population visit social networks. Apart from that, The Statistics Portal (2016) provides status on the most popular networks worldwide as of September, 2016 ranked by number of accounts. The reported market leader is Facebook currently with 1.71 billion monthly active users. The other social networks following Facebook are, WhatsApp 1.0 billion active users, Facebook Messenger 1.0 billion, QQ 899 million, WeChat 806 million, QZone 652 million, Tumbir2 555 million, Instagram 500 million, Twitter 313 million, Baidu Tieba 300 million, Skype 300 million, Sina Weibo 282 million, Viber 249 million, LINE 218 million, Snapchat 200 million, yy 122 million, LinkedIn 106 million, VKontakte 100 million, Pinterest 100 million, BBM 100 million and Telegram 100 active users.

Nevertheless, most of higher learning students are reported to spend more time active on social media; this has made people perceive it as a distractive technology to students' performance (McHaney, et al., 2015). Camilia, et al, (2013) clarify that, the passion of meeting new friends online, opening pages, viewing photos and profiles make students busy on social media during lecture sessions. Oluwatoyin (2011) made a study in Lagos State University and found that 90% of students could not make up to cumulative average grade point (above 3.50) because they spent most of their time on social media. It can be well said that, the improper use of social media, shortly termed as "Social Media Abuse" can negatively affect the students' performance. Vural (2015) addressed the impacts of social network to students during the use of social media. The mentioned impacts can bebroadly classified into two namely, wastage of time *i.e. individual sign in intending to spend five to ten minutes but unfortunately takes two or more hours;* and destruction of the user's mind *i.e. notifications or destructing messages are sent through social networks during the lecture or learning time*.

Contrarily, Van Rooyen (2015) argues that readily, available and affordable technologies have become crucial ingredient for student success as they are capable of increasing didactic conversations. Some of the positive use of social media include: announcements *i.e. easy to share information on changes in timetable or emergence meetings*; discussions *i.e. easy to make off class discussions comfortably online*; resource sharing i*.e. lecture videos, past exams and solution to questions can be easily shared among students* (Vural, 2015). Moreover, Roblyer (2006) adds that, social network can be used to help students communicate with each other and learn together about their societies, group projects and presentations. All of the above mentioned positive uses of social media can be collectively termed as "Collaborative learning".

According toPiaget (1975) &Roblyer(2006), in constructivism learning theory, it is believed that, learning and teaching is based on active processes and construction of knowledge colored by background, experience and aptitudes. Social activism is another form of constructivist learning discovered by John Dewey (1859 – 1952). Dewey (1897) believed that "learning is individual growth that comes through social experience". Social activism supports the idea that students learn well when their hands and mind are connected to real world issues and problems. Additionally, Al-Rahmi& Othman (2013) mention interaction or collaboration as the critical aspect in the learning process. In collaborative learning, the group member can give clarifications to assignment, discussion questions and concepts that were not well understood in the class (Johnson and Johnson, 1994).

Like other African countries, Social media has also gained greater acceptability in Tanzania, especially higher learning students. Previous studies haveshown that most of the students use social media during and off class hours (Jagero, 2013; & Titus and Mselle, 2015). There is a limited literature regarding the use of social media for collaborative learning. This study aimed at finding out if Tanzania higher learning students use of social media for collaborative learning. Data were collected from higher learning students from five higher learning institutions in Tanzania.

1.1   Research hypotheses

Various researchers concluded that knowledge is kept in individual's minds and interactions (Al-Rahimi et al, 2015). Interaction leads to active participation which is considered as a significant learning element (Al-Rahimi et al, 2015 &Hrastinski, 2009). Kabilan et al.(2010) adds that students are the one, through collaborative learning, with the power of creating and maintaining learning communities with adequate inventory of knowledge. Social media can effectively enable students' academic online interactions and make collaborative learning more beneficial. Through review of literatures, the following hypothesis

statements has been addressed as guiding statements to measure the use of social media for collaborative learning.

a) I felt that using social media for collaborative learning in my group was effective.
b) I was able to develop new skills through peer collaboration.
c) I was able to develop new skills and knowledge from other members in my group.
d) Collaborative learning experience in the social media environment is better than in a face-to-face learning environment.

1.2   *Theoretical Framework*

Figure 1:   The relationship between Constructivist Learning Theory and Collaborative Learning in Social Media
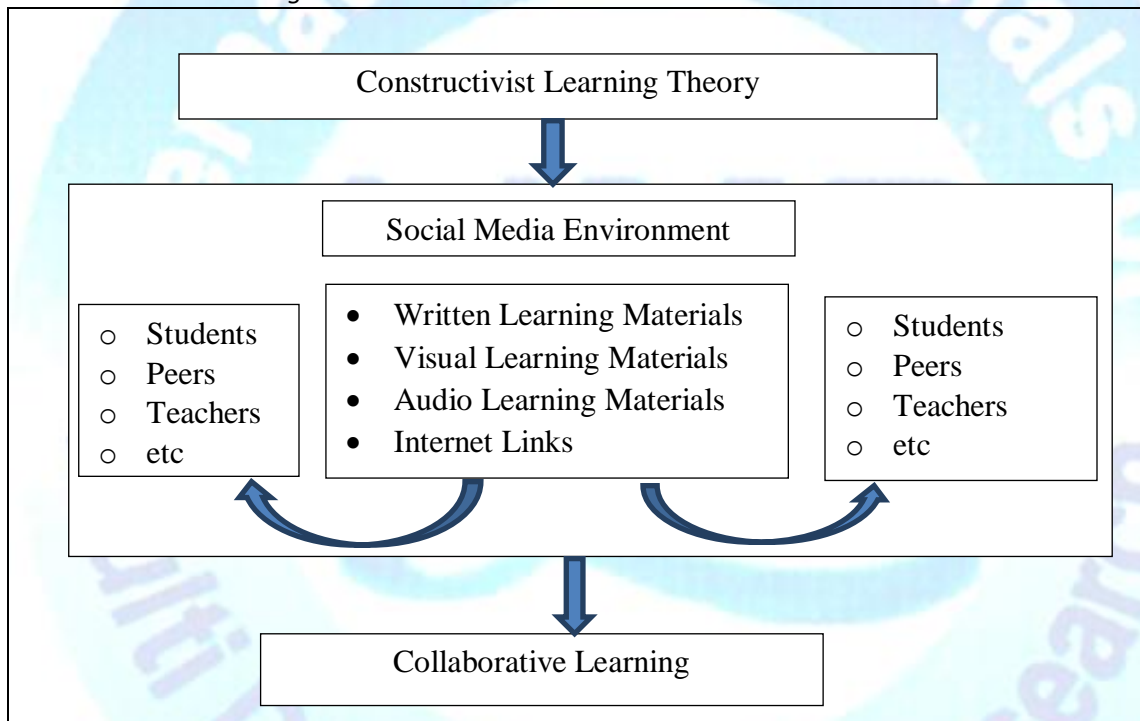
According to Piaget (1975) &Roblyer (2006), in constructivism learning theory, it is thought that, learning and teaching is based on active processes and construction of knowledge colored by background, experience and aptitudes. This theory attempts to respond on the question how people get to know what they know? (Gordon et al, 2008). According to Tomei (2009, p. 60) "Constructivist learning theory meaning is seen as a cognitive activity that produces mental models that represent perceptions of reality". Therefore, the theory intends to recognize how to instrument learning processes in the classroom, and how knowledge is constructed (Butler and Griffin, 2010). Brown and Adler (2008) refers to this new model as "a demand-pull rather than the traditional supply-push model of building up an inventory of knowledge in students' heads".

As the theoretical framework *(see figure 1 above)* shows, Constructivism learning theory and technology are working together in the current days to produce better understandings (Gilakjani et al,

2013). Constructivism learning theory recognize internet as a breakthrough in technology (Gilakjani et al, 2013). Jonassen (1999) define technology as the art and crafts of responding to our educational or learning needs. The author further state that, technology is a thinking tool that can be used to foster meaningful learning. Internet forums like social networks allow students to work on problems individually then frequently come together for online discussion with other students (Keengwe, Onchwari, &Agamba, 2013). Consequently, the concept of collaborative learning will be enhanced as Zarat¸ et al (2008) define collaborative learning as environment that facilitate participation, collaboration, and cooperation of people sharing the same interest. Al-Rahmi& Othman (2013) mention interaction or collaboration as the critical aspect in the learning process. In collaborative learning, the group member can give clarifications to assignment, discussion questions and concepts that were not well understood in the class (Johnson and Johnson, 1994). Moreover, computer-mediated communication through social media can help to develop communities of learners, as there is an atmosphere of individual responsibility coupled with mutual sharing of resources, (Barab and Duffy,2000). Therefore, with collaborative learning via social media, tutors can send links to new information via Twitter feeds or posts on social network sites, and students are able to access and share current and useful sources with peers via social bookmarking sites (Nwazor& Godwin-Maduike, 2015)

2.0   Methods

2.1   Sample selection

This study utilized random sampling design to choose elements in the population as the sample objects. The population of this study was made up of 45 fully fledged Tanzanian higher learning institutions registered by Tanzania Commission of Universities (TCU) and National Accreditation Council for Technical Education (NACTE). A total of 5 higher learning institution equivalent to 10% of all fully ledged Tanzanian higher learning institution were selected to serve the purpose of this study. According to Stockton and Clark (1975:166), 10% percent of the population served provides a minimum representative sample. The institutions selected were The University of Dodoma, University of Dar es Salaam, Ruaha Catholic University, University of Arusha and College of Business Education (Dodoma campus).

The respondents' selection involvedhigher learning students irrespective of the course or year of study. To achieve the objectives of the study, the number of respondents selected ranged 31 to 40 for each institution in the sample. The rationale for the sample size base on the arguments of Sekaran and Bougie (2010), Sekaran and Bougie (2010) argued that too large or too small a sample size is detrimental to a research project. It was further described that a sample size larger than 30 is appropriate for most research and if a research divides samples into sub-samples, the minimum number of each sub-sample was 30 (ibid). Thus, the number of samples design in this study exceeded 30 for each sub-sample. Therefore, the total sample size for this study was 200.

2.2   Questionnaires

The data collection method was questionnaire. A five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) was applied in preparing questionnaires. 200 questionnaires were distributed to the respondents, and only 196 questionnaires were returned.

3.0   *Findings,Data analysis and Discussion*

Data collected from respondents and descriptive analysis of computing frequencies and means was made. The scores computed from the value attached to each likert scale, were used to compute mean scores (or mean response) which represent the majority perception on the subject matter. The means responses which were closer to a discrete number (either 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5), the multivariate equality of means test was run to check if the calculated mean was statistically equivalent to next discrete number at 5% level of significance.

Table 1: Response to research questions

	Frequency					
	Strongly agree = 5	Agee = 4	Neutral = 3	Disagree = 2	Strongly disagree = 1	Mean
Q1	54	104	20	16	1	3.97449
Q2	43	115	25	12	1	3.954082
Q3	67	112	15	2	0	4.244898
Q4	25	58	44	62	7	3.163265

The first research hypothesis stated "I felt that using social media for collaborative learning in my group was effective". The findings (*see* table 1 above) show the mean score of 3.97 which is statistically equivalent to 4 (test results being F (1,195) = 0.03; p = 0.8699). The mean response implies that, the studentsuse of social media in their discussion groups and has made learning effective. On the same results, Ode&Iorliam (2014) referred collaborative learning through social media, as a helpful tool to facilitate spread of ideas and opinions among students, and team working. The second statement intended to know if students use social media to acquire new knowledge and skills through peer collaboration. The mean response of 3.954 which is statistically equal to 4 (test results being F (1,195) = 0.65; p = 0.4222), shows that, respondents also used social media to collaborate with peers. Peers are considered as a source of new knowledge and skills, so collaborating with them through social media makes easy flow of knowledge and materials to students,hence, making learning smooth and effective. The findings were consistent with Al-Rahmi et al. (2014) where social media were found to benefit group member from contributions published by their peers.The third hypothesis statement needed to check if the respondents were able to develop new skills from other members of the group through collaborative learning. The mean response of 4.245implies that, respondents were using social media to interact with other members of the group to get new materials that improve learning. The result is in line withAl-Rahmi et al. (2013)&Al-Rahmi et al. (2014) where collaborative learning was found to provide coalition and sharing of knowledge in classes and library by using social media at any point of time. The fourth statement needed to check if the smooth learning experience obtained through use of social media could make a perfect substitute of face to face learning environment. The mean response of 3.16 implies that, respondents are indifferent on whether social media can make a perfect substitute or not. Thus, despite the benefit that the social media provides to the collaborative learning environment, respondents still finds face to face learning necessary. This is because, even during face to face learning, social media can be used to share materials between groups.

4.0   Conclusion

As it was noted earlier in this study, the purpose of this paper was to investigate if Tanzania higher learning students use social media for collaborative learning. The study was motivated by the belief that social media has brought negative impact to higher learning students' academic performance. Literatures suggest that, student use of social media for collaborative learning can result into positive academic performance. Tanzania is among other African countries whose citizen use social media as a major means of communication including sharing information and events. This study aimed at finding out if Tanzania higher learning students use social media for collaborative learning. The study found that, Tanzania higher learning students use social media for collaborative learning. The nature of use included sharing materials during and off class hours among student groups. The study also found students collaborating with peers purposely for acquiring new knowledge and skills. However, the study found respondents indifferent on whether social media can become a perfect substitute of face to face learning environment. It is therefore suggested that, university managements should not delay to recognize social media as one of the effective means of transferring knowledge from lecturers to students.

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