

Social Networking and Academic Performance of University Students in Kenya: A Case Study of Kenyatta University, Kericho Campus

Jedidah Chebet Langat¹

Bett K. Alfred²

¹*Correspondent Author, School of Business, Kenyatta University, Kenya*

²*School of Business, Kenyatta University, Kenya*

Abstract

Academic performance is an important element to the lives of students in schools and their progression to the career world. Several factors indicate a student's academic success. While some may not graduate top of their class, they may hold leadership positions in several student groups or score high on extracurricular activities. The title of this paper is "Social Networking and Academic Performance of University Students in Kenya: A Case Study of Kenyatta University, Kericho Campus." General objective of the study was to assess the impact of social network on academic performance of University students in Kenya: A case study of Kenyatta University, Kericho Campus. The specific objectives of the study were as follows: to determine the effect of peer interaction on academic performance; to investigate the effect of student-lecturer interaction on academic performance; and to analyse the effect of engaging in social network on academic performance. The total population was 582; while after computing using Taro Yamen's formula, the sample size was 250. Cross-sectional survey research design employed the use of the closed survey questionnaire. The survey questionnaire was administered to students in Kenyatta University, Kericho Campus, Kenya. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The piloted data was analysed to calculate its reliability, and special attention was given to relevance of survey questionnaire and clarity of instructions for this research. Results of the study showed that students of Kenyatta University, Kericho Campus, have access to social media and that their exposure to social media is to a very great extent. Findings also show that exposure to social media has effect on the students and that the effect is positive. Based on the findings, the paper concludes that exposure to social media by the undergraduate students of Kenyatta University has Positive effect on their academic performance. To this end, the paper recommends that the students should pay critical attention to social networking usage, focusing more on using social networking in their academic-related activities. The significance of this study was to the university students to know how best to use social media networks as tool for improving their academic performance, to scholars in furthering the relationship between social networking and academic performance, to the government and other stakeholders in improving the implementation of IT in universities.

Keywords: *Social Networks, Students, Academic Performance*

1. BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM

Social network has grown to become one of the largest and most influential components of the web, but despite how prevalent it is in the Western World (especially among the younger crowd), not everyone uses it or understands it. A social network represents relationships and flows between people, groups, organizations, animals, computers or other information/knowledge processing entities. Social network is based on a certain structure that allows people to both express their individuality and meet people with similar interests. Some of the common components of social network include: comments; blogs; profile; friends and followers; home feeds; likes; groups; and tags.

Kamaku & Mberia (2014) define Social networking is the activity of creating personal and business relationships with other people especially by sharing information, personal messages, etc., on the Internet. Social networking sites (SNS) such as MySpace, Facebook, Bebo, and Twitter are popular with teens. Using social networks can be a lot of fun and help us feel connected with the people we care most about. Adults also use social networks to share resources and look for jobs, while seniors and shut-ins benefit from being able to stay in touch with relatives and friends. The increasing popularity of social sites like Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn, social networks has gained attention as the most viable communication choice for the bloggers, article writers and content creators (Purvis & Savarimuthu, 2010). Social networks have removed all the communication and interaction barriers, and now one can communicate his/her perception and thoughts over a variety of topics. Students and experts are able to share and communicate with like-minded people and can ask for the input and opinion on a particular topic. Another positive impact of social networking sites is to unite people on a huge platform for the achievement of some specific objective. This is very important to bring the positive change in society.

However, social network does not go without its flaws. One of the negative effect of social media or network is it leads to addiction. Spending countless hours on the social sites can divert the focus and attention from a particular task. It lowers the motivational level of the people, especially of the teenagers and students. They mainly rely on technology and the internet instead of learning the practical knowledge and expertise of the everyday life. Sometimes people share photos on social media that contains violence and sex, which can damage the behaviour of kids and teenagers. It put the negative impact on overall society as these kids and teenagers involve themselves in crime related activities. Academic performance (or academic achievement) is the outcome of education; the extent to which a student, teacher or institution has achieved their educational goals (Al-Deen & Hendricks, 2012). Academic performance is commonly measured by examinations or continuous assessment but there is no general agreement on how it is best tested or which aspects are most important: procedural knowledge such as skills or declarative knowledge such as facts.

With today's youth spending a majority of their afterschool time in organized activities, it is important to understand the influence that these activities can have on academic performance. Schools or Universities often offer a variety of extracurricular activities for today's students. In order to encompass all students, these activities can often range from Internet access, theatre rehearsal to soccer practice (Purvis & Savarimuthu, 2010). These extracurricular activities have a positive relationship with academic performance. While research suggests that there is a positive link between academic performance and participation in out-of-class activities, such as engaging

in group discussions, information sharing through social platforms, etc., but the practice behind this relationship is not always clear. Moreover, there are many unrelated factors that influence the relationship between academic achievement and participation in these activities. These variables include: civic engagement, identity development, positive social relationships and behaviours, and mental health. In other research on students, it was reported that positive social support and development, which can be acquired through organized after school activities is beneficial for achieving academic success. Social networks have been found to influence academic performance: students tend to perform better with high-performers among their friends, as some people are capable of inspiring others to try harder, according to Kamaku & Mberia (2014). However, recent empirical studies indicate that the role of the social environment may be underestimated, as classmates can greatly influence one another's behaviour and academic success (Dimofte, *et al.*, 2015; Mark, 2016).

1. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Most people relate “academic performance” with the student’s GPA. However, several factors indicate a student’s academic success. While some may not graduate top of their class, they may hold leadership positions in several student groups or score high on standardized tests such as the SAT or ACT. People often consider grades first when evaluating academic achievement. This includes schools, which rank students by their GPA, awarding special designations such as valedictorian and salutatorian for those who graduate first and second in their class. Some of the brightest students don’t earn straight As but are extremely well-rounded, succeeding at everything from music to athletics. The ability to master a diverse set of skills illustrates intelligence, curiosity and persistence, qualities attractive to universities and employers. Some colleges will admit and even award scholarships to students who earned average grades but display a pattern of achievement by consistently learning new skills.

Leadership initiative can also indicate academic performance. Some students demonstrate their competence by serving as student body president or holding officer positions in student groups such as the honour society or the science club. Or, they might regularly organize student events such as fundraisers, pep rallies or dances (Al-Deen & Hendricks, 2012). Others participate in volunteer organizations and coordinate food drives or other community outreach efforts. Universities and employers look favourably on consistent leadership activities, feeling these students will bring that same drive to their classrooms or board rooms. The study on factors contributing to the students’ academic performance at Islamia University was designed to improve the academic performance of graduate students. It made use of the academic performance (student’s grades or marks) as dependent variable while gender, age, faculty of study, schooling, parents or guardian, social economic status, residential area, medium of schooling, tuition trend, daily study hours and accommodation trend as independent variables. Findings revealed that age, parents/guardians, social economic status and daily study hours significantly contributed to the academic performance of graduate students. On the other hand, a disparity on the academic performance of the students was discerned when grouped according to the medium of schooling, tuition trend, and daily study hours (Shoukat, *et al.*, 2013).

Academic performance, which is stemmed from Student learning, is best explained in Bandura’s Social Learning Theory. It presents the interrelationship of observation and modeling of behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others in the learning process of an individual learner. The theory posited that human behavior is learned observationally through modeling:

from observing others, one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action (Bandura, 1986). Social Development Theory posited that the social interactions made by a student-learner precede development, consciousness and cognition. Hypothesizing that cognition and development is the end product of socialization and social behaviours, the theory posits the following tenets: (1) Social interaction plays a fundamental role in the process of cognitive development. Vygotsky felt social learning precedes development (Vygotsky, 1978).

Situated Learning Theory argued that learning is a function of various activities, contexts and culture of inquiry under social interactions in a process of “legitimate peripheral participation.” Social interaction is a critical component of situated learning. Student-learners are invited to come across learning in a “community of practice” which embodies certain beliefs and behaviors to be observed and practiced. As student-learners involve themselves in the process of cognitive inquiry, they become more active and engaged within each interaction. Hence, the student-learners assume roles in the learning environment which is usually unintentional rather than deliberate (Lave, 2008). A number of studies in relation to academic performance have been conducted. These, however have centred on various variables, such as grades and social network use in other sectors, mainly in corporate sector (Baruah, 2012). For example, a study by Abu-Shanab and Al-Tarawneh (2013) explored the advantages and disadvantages of Facebook utilizing university students. A sample of 206 students responded to a survey containing 10 advantages and 10 disadvantages of Facebook, and yielded interesting results. The study did not focus on students’ academic performance, but took the issue as a general view of social media influence. Since these studies have been conducted in other such as corporate sectors, this present study finds it necessary to conduct this study on the role social network participation plays in the performance of students in Universities in Kenya. This study believes this will add a new dimension and also fill the research gap in terms of the effect of social media on students’ academic performance in Kenya; a case study of Kericho County.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The general objective of the study was to assess the impact of social network on academic performance of University students in Kenya: A case study of Kenyatta University, Kericho Campus.

The specific objectives of the study were as follows:

- i. To determine the effect of peer interaction on academic performance;
- ii. To investigate the effect of student-lecturer interaction on academic performance; and
- iii. To analyse the effect of engaging in social network on academic performance.

3. THEORETICAL REVIEW

The theories considered most appropriate for this study were: social information processing theory and media equation theory.

4.1 Social information processing theory

Social information processing theory explains online information. The theory was developed in 1992 by Joseph Waither (Asemah 2011:219). Social information processing theory is an interpersonal communication theory which suggests that online interpersonal relationship development might require more time to develop than face-to-face relationships, but when

developed, it has the same influence as face-to-face communication. This means, the more students use social media, the more they influence their disposition to studies, given the fact that friends from social media will begin to exert influence on each other.

4.2 Media equation theory

Media equation theory, as noted by Griffin (2000), cited in Asemah and Edegoh (2012) was propounded by Byron Reeves and Clifford Nass. The theory proposes that media are equal to real life and that electronic media in particular are being given human attributes. In most cases, people talk to computer as if they were talking to human beings. More so, in most cases, you talk to your television as if you are discussing with human beings, hence you talk to television sets as if you are discussing with people. That is, people have personalised the media of mass communication to the extent that they now see them, just the way they see human beings. Thus, Griffin (2000, p. 273), cited in Asemah and Edegoh (2012), notes that media are equal to real life. He further noted that what Reeves and Nass's equation suggests is that we respond to communication media as if they were alive. This theory says that people now treat computers, television and the new media like real people and places. Going by the media equation theory, we tend to give human attributes to inanimate objects in our homes. According to Griffin (2000, p. 373): "The practical implication of the media equation is that once we turn on a television or boot up on computer, we follow all the rules of interpersonal interaction that we have précised throughout life. Thus, the word interface is particularly apt when describing human media relations. This natural social response goes way beyond occasional words yelled at the television set or our frantic play for the computer to retrieve lost data. Reeves and Nass maintain that the media equation is so basic that it applies to everyone; it applies often and it is highly consequential." The above assertion aptly captures how the audience members now tend to engage the media in a discussion as they do to human beings. The relevance of the theory to the paper cannot be overemphasised. People treat the media like human beings, so whatever people see in the media, they tend to believe because they respond to the new media, the way they will respond to human beings.

4.3 The System's Theory (Input – Output Model)

The theory adapted for this study is derived from the System's Theory Input – Output model developed by Ludwig Van Bertalanffy and Weihrich, (1988) which postulates that an organized enterprise does not exist in isolation; it's dependent on its environment in which it's established. They add that the inputs from the environment are received by the organization which then transforms them into output after processing such inputs. As adapted by this study, the student (input) are admitted into the school with different intelligent quotient, family and educational background; when they get into the school system, the school through its resources (both human and capital) process such students through the learning process which is aided or made easier through the resources/variables attributed to such school. The effectiveness of such variables is measured through the output of the student which is measured in term of their academic performance. Saleem (1997) states that all systems must work in harmony in order to achieve the overall goal of such system. According to the input – output model, its assumed that the school with high level of variables will enable the students produce a high level of output which can be measured in term of their academic performance. Therefore, student will perform well in an academic environment with the best facilities/variables in term of school size, ownership, type, structure and location.

4. CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

According to Miles & Huberman (1994) and Robson (2011), the conceptual framework of a study (the system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that supports and informs your research) is a key part of the research design. Miles and Huberman (1994) defined a conceptual framework as a visual or written product, one that “explains, either graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied—the key factors, concepts, or variables—and the presumed relationships among them” (p. 18).

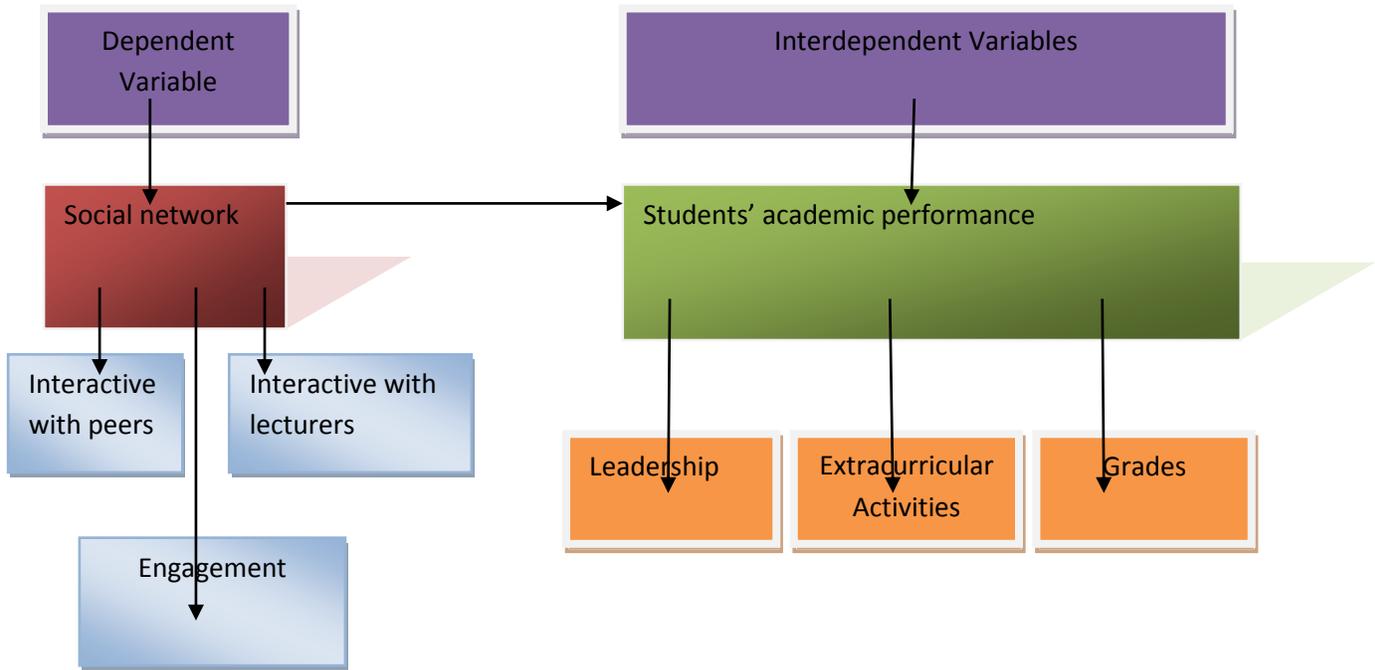


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This cross-sectional survey research design employed the use of a 25-item closed survey questionnaire developed to assess demographics, social network use, and the impact of social network on academic performance of students in Kenyatta University, Kericho Campus. Kenyatta University, Kericho Campus, was selected for the study, with a total population of 582 students. The total population for the study is that total number of students in this campus of Kenyatta University. The study used questionnaire as a research instrument. A questionnaire is a list of questions to be answered by a respondent to get their views about a subject. It is preceded by a covering letter, introducing the researcher, explaining the purpose of the research and soliciting assistance in providing the required information. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The data was also presented in tables, frequencies, and percentages. Two types of statistical techniques were used to answer the questions. First was a comparison of academic performance between Facebook users and non-Facebook users. Through the comparison among students, we discovered whether social network users are earning better grade or non-users of social network. Second sub-

question was to find out the correlation between the variables (Time spent on social network, use of social network, etc.).

6.1 To investigate the effect of student-lecturer interaction on academic performance

This subsection focused on the student and lecturer relationship mainly in relation to the social networking sites for academic purposes. This was critical question since it determines whether lecturers are also productive in encouraging students to positively and academically use social networking sites. Therefore, 60.8% (n=135) of the sampled students at Kenyatta University, Kericho Campus, reported that their specific lecturers are on social network group, while of these 60.8% of students, most reported to be using social network sites to get updated on class schedules.

Additionally, significantly below half (45.9%) of the sampled students claimed that either the University or Campus promotes the use of social network sites for academic purposes. However, significantly higher number of students (70.3%) reported that lecturers use network sites weekly to communicate with students, while significantly less number of students (22.5%, n=50) reported the use of social network group to pose academic questions to the lecturers. This may be because most students (83.3%) posited that lecturers are not responsive to student’s questions on social network group (s). However, in line with the findings from Al-Rahmi and Othman (2013), 69% of the sampled students in this current study reported a positive correlation between the use of social network sites and academic performance.

6.2 To analyse the effect of engaging in social network on academic performance

In addition, this current study further revealed that majority of the respondents (97.3%) agreed on sharing class activities on social network sites or to facilitate class discussions. Majority of respondents (75%) also added that their social network sites may distract students from engaging in academic activities, hence hindering their academic performance. This was supported by Malaney (2005) who found that 8.9% of students in 2000, and 4.4% in 2003, reported that their grades had suffered as a result of too much time spent on the Internet as well as on social media networks. This was supported by the study of Kirschner and Karpinski (2010), who found a “significant negative relationship between Facebook use and academic performance. Further, a high number of respondents (97.7%) also confirmed that social networking has helped ease access to their lecturers, while 97.4% confirmed the increased interaction among students.

Table 1: Exposure to social media has an Influence on the academic performance of the Students

	ITEMS	SD	D	N	A	SA
i	I use social network to share change of class schedules with my course mates	0	4	2	153	63
ii	I use social network site to pass message to my course instructor	0	3	2	146	71
iii	I use social networking to facilitate a class discussion	0	4	3	151	64
iv	I use social networking to deliver homework or assignment	1	2	2	143	74
v	I use social networking to inform colleagues of links and resources related to our course	0	0	1	129	92

	ITEMS	SD	D	N	A	SA
vi	I use social networking to enrol to academic groups related to my course	0	0	1	132	89
vii	I participate in group work activities via social network	0	2	0	127	93
viii	I exchange ideas on class projects via social network	0	1	0	123	98
ix	I exchange multimedia resources on social network with colleagues		3	2	125	92
x	I exchange visual materials related to my course on social network	77	53	5	84	3
xi	I exchange academic videos on social network	77	52	4	85	4
xii	I exchange academic documents on social network		3	2	126	91
xiii	Social networking has enabled me to become a better user of the computer	51	130	5	31	5

From Table 2, it is apparent that most students sampled in this study showed that they share various materials within themselves and send and receive course related materials or notes from their lecturers. Moreover, most students (69.9%) “Agree” with respect to sharing change of class schedules with my course mates, while 65.8% (Agree) communicates with their lecturers using social networking platforms. However, from the same Table 4.4, it can be seen that most students do not share course-related videos and visual materials with the course mates. Finally, it can be seen that most students (58.6%, Disagree) disagree that social networking has enabled them to become better users of computers.

Table 2 shows that age range of the respondent was 18-49 old with mean age was 25.45. The mean time of students spend on Facebook was 4.31(SD=0.43) hours per day. Furthermore, the mean of computer experience in years was 4.7 (SD=0.51).

Table 2: Descriptive statistics age, academic performance and Facebook activities (N=222)

Variables	Means	Standard Deviation
Age	25.45	0.65
Cumulative GPA	3.48	0.61
Time spend on Facebook per day	4.31	0.43
Computer experience in years	4.7	0.51

Table 2 shows correlation of students’ academic performance (GPA) with time spent on using social networking sites per day and computer experience in years. Based on the result there is no significant relation between of time spent on social network sites ($r=0.25, P>0.05$) and computer experience in years ($r=0.31, p>0.05$) with students GPA. The result also indicated that there is no significant relationship between accessing social networking sites at home, school, or work ($r=0.52, p>0.050$) using any device type (excluding cell phones), but there is a negative, moderate and noteworthy correlation between using cell phones to access social networking sites and students GPA ($r= -0.48, p<0.05$).

Table 3: Correlation of Time spent per day, device used computer experience in years on students GPA (N=222)

Independent Variables	Student's Cumulative GPA
Time spend on social networks	0.25
Computer experience	0.31
Cell phone	-0.48****
Any other device type	0.41

**P<0.05

6. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

College students in Kenya and other parts of the world have taken up technology and made it as part of their daily activities. Social networking software is a powerful tool used by up to 70% of the youth aged between 18-25 years (Facebook.com) and all most all of the University students in Kenyatta University, Kericho Campus. In Kenya alone unofficial reports put Facebook's daily hits at two million (Mwaniki, 2010). The purpose of this study is to investigate the alleged effects of social media and social network sites on academic performance of University students in Kenya, with the case study of Kericho County. A review of literature showed that there is no consensus on the effects of technology usage on academic outcomes to date. This is partially due to the number of limited studies examining the educational impacts of technology usage. In addition, very few studies have examined the impacts of technology on education in Africa and specifically, if there is, Kenyatta University, Kericho Campus, despite the tremendous use of these technologies.

The number of male students in Kenyatta University, Kericho Campus, is more than female and belongs in the age bracket of 20-25. The average time spent during any browsing session was 4.7 hours per week and many of the students had used computers for a period of 1-5 years. There was a significant relationship between experience in using computers and average time spent on the internet per week. The current study had three research questions. The first question aimed to find out the effect of peer interaction on academic performance. The findings show most students had only used computers for a period of 1-5 years (47.7%), while majority spending less than 3 hours on the Internet. All sampled students also claimed that their friends are on social network sites. Moreover, 85.6% of students reported using this group(s) for class projects, while 90.1% reported to be using social networking sites to share class notes.

The second research question sought to find the effect of student-lecturer interaction on academic performance. The research findings showed that 60.8% of the students reported that their specific lecturers are on social network group, while most reported to be using social network sites to get updated on class schedules. Moreover, only 45.9% of the students stated that the university promotes the use of social network sites for academic purposes. However, 70.3% reported that lecturers use network sites weekly to communicate with students, while only 22.5%

reported the use of social network group to pose academic questions to the lecturers. The latter may be because 83.3% asserted that lecturers are not responsive to student's questions on social network group(s). The third research question focused on the effect of engaging in social network on academic performance. The findings reported that 97.3% of the students agreed on sharing class activities on social network sites or to facilitate class discussions, while 97.7% also confirmed that social networking has helped ease access to their lecturers. In addition, 97.4% of the sampled students confirmed the increased interaction among students.

7. CONCLUSION

Most, if not all, of university students in Kenyatta University, Kericho Campus, actively engage in social networking sites. This is because it is cheap, accessible and user friendly. Social networking was found to have positive effects on learning outcomes for those students who used it for learning. However use of social networking for entertainment, pass time and socialization had some negative effects on learning outcomes. Similarly social networking while attending lectures, group work and private reading is counterproductive. From the collected and analysed, it can be concluded that the exposure to social media by students of Kenyatta University is high and this has positive effect on their performance.

The study has revealed that despite the benefits that come with the participation of students on social media networks, it could impact negatively on their academic performance if not used properly. A lot of benefits abound in the use of social media networks such as sharing information and ideas, improving reading skills etc. Despite the benefits that comes with the participation of students on social media networks, its misuse could affect the academic life of the student and thereby their performance. Normally, social networking sites chosen by people would compete with other sources of information. Therefore, social media networks compete with academic work for students' attention. It is therefore the responsibility of the student to make the right decision in relation to the use of social network sites. Moreover, as the learning outcomes of students are influenced by the students decision on his choice of situation (social media networks and participation) and peers (friendship networks), they could make the right decision in the usage of these media to bring about the positive outcome (academic performance) that is desired.

8. RECOMMENDATION

Following the above conclusions the following are the recommendations: Majority of university students have social networking accounts and by extension are computer literate and therefore it will be worthwhile to engage university students in computer related academic assignments, projects and researches. Use of social network among students and faculty is very limited although more students are ready and willing to engage their lecturers via these social networking sites. Lecturers can use social networking sites to announce change of class schedules, facilitate discussions, and exchange academic videos, documents and assignments.

Social networking is a powerful tool that can support excellent academic performance to university students. Students should, therefore, be allowed to have a free choice of social network site they are willing to use especially if they use it for learning. Student related information can be delivered to students freely via university Facebook or other social network pages since majority of them have registered on these social networking sites.

University students spend a lot of time socializing on social networking sites. This can be detrimental to academic excellence. There is need to balance time used on social networking sites to avoid addiction and concentrate on social networking use for academic purposes since these sites have a rich source of educational content if well utilized. Students need to be informed through student counseling units that engaging in social networking while in a lecture or during private study competes with cognitive resources and focus on information which results to poor educational benefit. Software developers in charge of developing e-learning software need to adopt some of the features that attract students to social network site(s). These features include; easy accessibility both on phone and computer, cheapness, interactivity, learner centeredness, ability to upload and download content.

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