

# CHALLENGES OF USING SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLS FOR LEARNING AMONG STUDENTS: A CASE OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA.

By

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## ABSTRACT

The research investigated the challenges of using social media applications for learning among undergraduate students at the University of Zambia. It specifically sought to investigate what social media tools were being used by the undergraduates; and establish challenges undergraduates face in the use of social media tools.

A sample of 175 Library and Information Science students at the University of Zambia was randomly selected for the study. The data was collected via self-administered questionnaires.

The study established that students were using all the four social media tools under investigation. The findings further indicate that the major challenge students faced in the use of social media applications is inadequate knowledge and skill.

The study concludes that although Library and Information Science students at the University of Zambia use social media applications they still lack knowledge and skill in the educational use of such tools. And lastly, the study recommends that lecturers should provide their students with opportunities to exercise the use of social media in their coursework; and that further research is needed that studies lecturers' acceptance and utilization of social media applications for teaching and learning.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The World Wide Web (WWW) has undergone a huge transformation from a resource for scientist to a worldwide source of information for billions of users. It has transitioned into a more social participatory stage called Social Media under which an information user becomes the provider of information by creating, organizing and sharing content (Anderson, 2007). As demonstrated by Selwyn (2007), not so many internet users would fail to notice the recent development of Social Media especially much-advertised tools like Facebook, Wikipedia and YouTube. Even casual internet users are now aware of the concept of social networking sites. Since being announced as the Time Magazine's 'Person of the Year' at the end of 2006, Social Media is seemingly dominating the practices in which digital technologies are being used all over the world. To this end, Varinder and Kanwar (2012) feel that, Social Media has become an inescapable part of most people's daily lives and whether we like it or not, it has come to stay.

There are several Social Media tools, as confirmed by Ware (2009). For the purpose of this study, the main concentration was on Social Networking Sites (SNS), Web Logs (Blogs), Wikis, and Video Sharing Sites

### 1.2 Social Media and Education

Social Media applications have continuously raised the awareness of a number of researchers on the prospects of using these tools for educational purposes. According to Armstrong and Franklin (2008: 12): *There are two important reasons why Social Media matters to universities. Students will increasingly be using Social Media technologies in their social lives, at work and in previous study, and will begin to expect that their courses will make use of them too...and perhaps more importantly, because Social Media provide a new set of powerful educational affordances.*

However, the fact that students are using a technology is not really a reason per se to use it in their education, but as alluded to earlier, Social Media is made up of several technologies which provide different

capabilities. It is anticipated that some of these technologies will have a significant impact on how students engage with their education.

There is still divided opinion over the advantages of using Social Media in education. Bryant (2006) in McLoughlin and Lee (2007) explains that Social Media tools have potential to handle the diverse needs of today's students, by providing them with opportunities to collaborate and network in an online environment. Safran, Helic and Gutl (2007), adds that Social Media enables students to achieve their potential via improved access to information resources and experts which go beyond their school or country boundaries. This idea is shared with Klamma and Spaniol (2008) who suggest that Social Media applications have astounding potential of linking learners in collaborative environments with decreases in boundaries. This simply means that with the possibility to interact in a non-physical environment, learners are able to collaborate without having to worry about physical boundaries of time and space.

Researches have shown that Social Media has ground breaking opportunities for higher education, for instance, in a research where Swain (2008) did a survey among the students at Kansas State University, he concluded that Social Media has relevance for higher education. Furthermore, in an experimental study by Ullrich et al (2008), it was concluded that Social Media applications offer significant advantages in learning. These studies show that Social Media can indeed encourage students to actively participate in learning.

Research shows that the majority of university students are using Social Media tools for different purposes (Holliday and Li, 2004; Greenhow, C., Robelia, E. & Hughes, J., 2009). However, there is not much evidence on the extent to which Social Media tools are being used for educational purposes among UNZA undergraduates.

### **1.3 Problem statement**

Despite these purported benefits of Social Media applications in the education circles, a review of literature found that efforts made in understanding the educational use of these tools at universities have mainly concentrated on developed countries especially Europe and North America. Little has been done in developing countries like Zambia. Due to this gap in knowledge, very little is known about the extent to which undergraduate students in Zambia are using these resources and the challenges they face in the use of such tools. This research therefore sought to bridge the above knowledge gap

### **1.4 Purpose of the study**

To investigating the challenges of using Social Media tools for learning among undergraduate students at the University of Zambia.

#### **1.4.1 Research objectives**

1. To establish which Social Media tools are being used by undergraduate students
2. To establish challenges undergraduates face in the use of Social Media tools for learning purposes
- 3.

#### **1.1.2 Research questions**

1. Which Social Media tools do undergraduate students use?
2. What challenges do undergraduates face in the use of Social Media tools for learning purposes?
- 3.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

Social Media provides online users with interactive applications in which they can create, edit and have control over web-based content. These applications have continuously raised the concerns of researchers on the possibilities of using them for educational objectives. According to Ajjan & Hartshorne (2009), many Social Media tools, although not specifically designed for use in teaching and learning, have many characteristics that promote their use in different educational settings. This study concentrated on blogs, wikis, social networking sites and video sharing sites.

### **2.1 Blogs**

Redecker, Mutka and Punie, (2010), write that blogs are of great importance among university students because they are avenues through which students can connect with one another, to experts and lecturers. This enables them to tap into the tacit knowledge of their peers and experts in a given field of interest.

### **2.2 Wikis**

Learning methods that could most likely be supported by wikis are collaborative in nature. In collaborative learning, students work together in groups to support the learning of their individual members (Parker and

Chao, 2007).

Sahele (2008), states that wikis are increasingly being used for course information and for notes. Wikis offer the advantage of being easy to create, update and to link new pages as new thoughts emerge.

### **2.3 Social networking Sites**

SNS can be used for educational purposes, especially for exchanging information to support students' studies. According to Liu (2010), most university students are using SNS; they have established personal profiles which can be used by instructors to post class announcements. Additionally, students will be able to keep in touch with classmates and update each other on latest information. Therefore, SNS may be more suited for informal learning than as a publishing tool for syllabi and assignments.

### **2.4 Video Sharing Sites**

Social Media is witnessing a huge emergence of video creation and sharing sites. With such sites, students can create digital content themselves and publish it online, giving birth to a resource of user-generated videos from which students and lecturers can mutually benefit. This would encourage more pro-active approaches to learning.

### **2.5 Concerns of using Social Media tools in learning communities**

Literature shows that some scholars are concerned about the negative impacts the use of Social Media technologies in education would have on students. Below are some of the challenges and concerns pertaining to the use of Social Media in education.

#### **2.5.1 Access to ICT, basic digital skills and internet bandwidth**

The Internet market in Zambia is still developing as rightly stated by the Ministry of Communications and Transport (2006), in the Zambia ICT policy of 2006, the potential for vigorous internet use is undermined by poor telecommunication infrastructure development in the country, poor accessibility to telephony and high internet access costs. This brings about a huge challenge because if people have limited or no access to internet services, they cannot effectively use Social Media technologies. Bynum (2011), points out that while social media penetrates society with the availability of internet broadband, most institutions in the developing countries like Zambia lack stable broadband internet access. This deprives the students of unlimited access to Social Media tools.

Access to ICT in schools and basic digital skills make up a major barrier for the use of Social Media for educational goals. In particular, apart from problems associated with internet access and low bandwidth, some students do not have Social Media supportive infrastructures such as computers. And some students do not feel confident enough with their ICT skills to experiment with Social Media tools in a learning environment (Bynum, 2011).

#### **2.5.2 Time commitment**

Time commitment is another issue that worries experts concerning Social Media applications and its educational use. A research done by Collins and Hide (2010) on the use and relevance of Social Media for researchers demonstrated that time coupled with the number of Social Media tools available to researchers were hindrances in the widespread adoption of these applications. Several users felt that they would require a lot amount of time to sign up and explore the new technologies.

## **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

This study combined quantitative and qualitative approaches to research. Bryman (2004) suggest that using both allows for the advantages of both approaches while countering weaknesses inherent in each approach if used without the other. The study was conducted at the University of Zambia in one selected program; Library and Information Science (BALIS) which allowed the gaining of insights on the challenges students face in using of social media applications for learning. The total population was four hundred and twenty-seven (427). Using the Stratified random sampling procedure, 175 students were selected. Primary data was collected by the use of self-administered questionnaire which had both closed and open ended questions. In terms of data analysis, the Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) was used to analyze quantitative data while qualitative data was done by sorting the said data into categories of responses, generated themes, made interpretations and drawing conclusions.

## 4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 4.1 Use of social media tools

In order to investigate the use of Social Media, students were asked if they were familiar with the term Social Media applications. It was revealed that 9 (5.3%) said 'YES', while 161 (94.7%) said NO, as they were not familiar with the term. Respondents were further asked if they were familiar with the new technologies such as Social Networking Sites (SNS), Wikis, video sharing sites and blogs. As shown in table 1, it was revealed as presented in table 1 that 169 (99.4%) were aware of the existence SNS, 164 (96.4%) were familiar with wikis, 147 (86.4%) were aware of video sharing sites while 66 (38.8%) were familiar with blogs.

Social Media tool	Count	Percent of cases
Social networking site	169	99.4%
Wikis	164	96.4%
Video sites	147	86.4%
Blogs	66	38.8%

**Table 1: awareness of social media tools**

When asked about the use of Social Media applications, it was discovered that 168 (98.8%) respondents were using at least one of the Social Media applications. Those who indicated that they were using the Social Media tools were further asked to indicate the specific applications they were using. As shown in table 2 below, 164 (96.4%) of the respondents stated that they were using social networking sites, 149 (87.6%) were using wikis, 108 (63.5 %) were using video sharing sites while 50 (30.0%) were using blogs

Social Media tool	Count	Percent of Cases
SNS	164	96.4%
Wikis	149	87.6%
Video sharing sites	108	63.5%
Blogs	50	30.0%

**Table 2: use of social media tools**

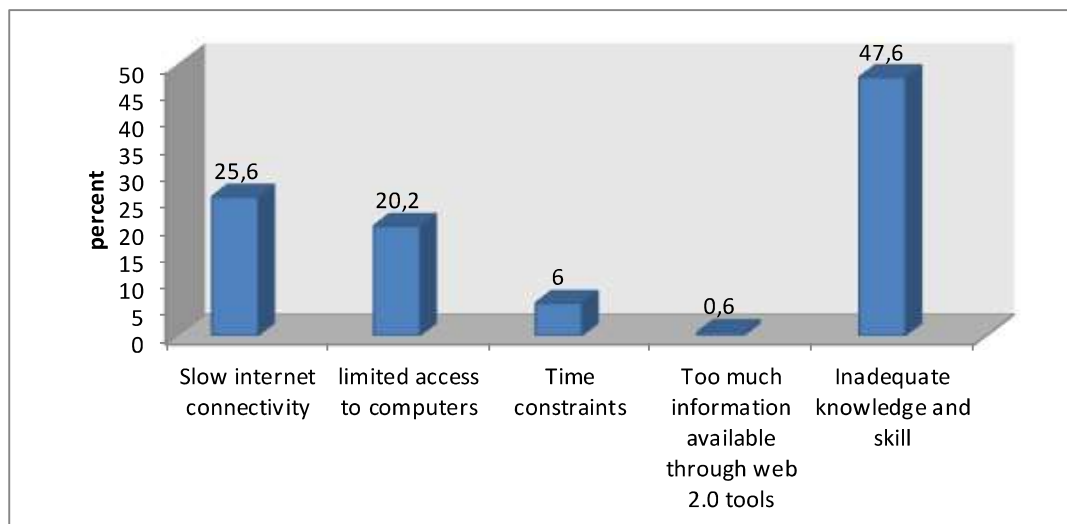
The research established that due to students' ignorance about the exact nature of Social Media, 94.8 percent indicated that they were not familiar with the term Social Media. However, when asked if they were aware of specific Social Media applications, it was revealed that social networking sites (99.6%) were the most popular followed by wikis, video sites and lastly blogs (39.5%). Furthermore, it was established that 99.3 percent were using at least one form of Social Media applications. From these findings, it is clear that despite the fact that most of the respondents were aware about some features of Social Media tools and that they were using those tools, they did not know that those tools are called Social Media tools. This entails that LIS students were using Social Media tools but were not aware of the exact nature of these applications. The research further found that the most used Social Media application among undergraduates were the social networking sites (SNS) with 97.4 percent. The high use of SNS could be because it is the most popular and most heavily used social media worldwide (eBizMBA, 2010). Although several scholars such as Venkat (2011) and Salehe (2008) place high academic value in the use of blogs in a learning environment, the findings of this study showed that blogs were the least used of the four applications under investigation. This could be attributed to the small number of students who were aware of these tools.

### 4.2 Challenges undergraduates face in the use of Social Media tools for learning purposes

#### 4.2.1 Problems encountered in using social media for learning

As outlined in figure one below, findings showed that of the problems encountered, 80 (47.6%) felt that they had inadequate knowledge and skill in the use of Social Media tools for learning goals; slow internet connectivity constituted 43 (25.6%); limited access to computers had a distribution of 34 (20.2%); those who had problems to do with time constraints amounted to 10 (6.0%) and one (0.6%) pointed to too much information available through Social Media applications.



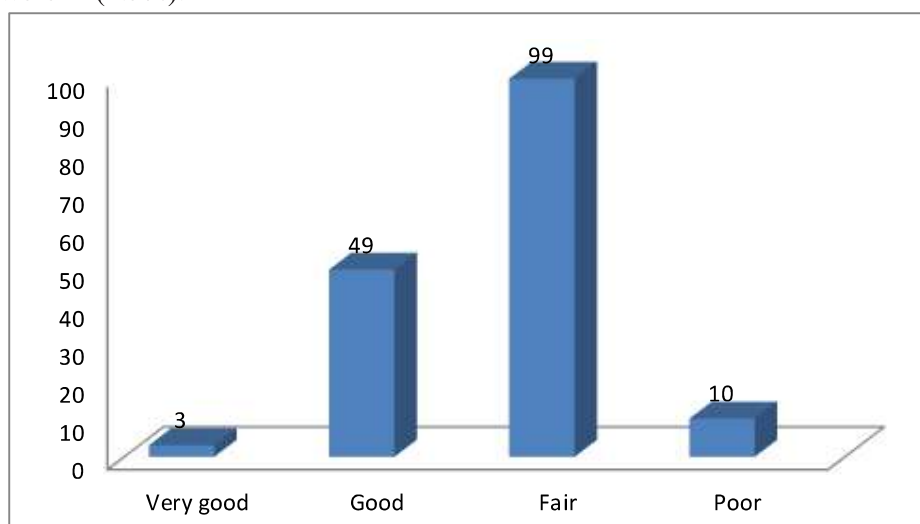


**Fig.1: problems encountered when using Social Media**

The study showed that inadequate knowledge and skill to use Social Media tools for educational purposes 116 (43.4%); was the major problem students faced with regards to the educational use of such applications. This was followed by slow internet connectivity and limited access to computers. These results are in line with Vassiliki (2011) who also found that lack of knowledge in the use of social media for education purposes was the main challenge faced by Greek students.

#### 4.2.2 Skill in the use of Social Media applications

In order to understand students' ability to use Social Media applications in education, data collected revealed as shown in figure 2, that students who rated their skill as fair were 99 (58.9%); 49 (29.2%) indicated that their skill was good; 10 (6.0%) rated themselves poor; and those who felt that their skill was very good were 4 (1.5%).



**Fig.2: rate of skill in using Social Media**

In probing further, respondents were asked to explain their rank in the use of Social Media applications. It was observed that those who ranked themselves as poor mainly suggested; Lack of training in the use of Social Media applications; inadequate exposure to such applications and lack of practice

Those who rated themselves as fair mainly suggested that; They were not very experienced in the use of Social Media applications; still learning some computer skills; not very computer literate; face challenges when using such tools; and have never had quality computer training but have basic knowledge to use Social Media applications through self-training. This was shown from for instance, respondent number 005 who stated that, *"my knowledge about Social Media is not much, am still acquainting myself with such technology."* Respondent number 030 indicated that, *"I have never had quality training to use these technologies; I learnt most of the skill through friends and self-training."*

Those who rated themselves as good indicated that they were; Computer literate; Rarely faced challenges in the use of Social Media applications; Able to surf the Internet with less difficult. This was revealed from

for instance, respondent number 134 asserted that, “I am computer literate and it is not difficult for me to obtain information from facebook and YouTube.” Respondent number 196 indicated that, “I am able to login, search and share information without much difficulty.” Additionally, respondent number 087 said that, “I hardly fail to use these applications whenever I want to.”

Those who suggested that they were very good mainly indicated that they; Had adequate exposure in the use of computers and surfing the Internet; and found Social Media tools are easy to use once one is computer literate

An understanding of the challenges encountered by the students in the use of Social Media applications required an investigation into their skill in the use of such tools. It was revealed that 161 (60.3%) rated their skill as fair. This group of respondents had basic knowledge to use Social Media applications but were not very experienced users. These students were not very computer literate as they were still learning some computer skills. Hence, they still faced challenges when using some of the Social Media tools. Students whose skill was good, 83 (31.1%) were computer literate. Therefore, this group of respondents rarely faced challenges when using Social Media applications and were able to surf the Internet with less difficulty. Students whose skill in the use of Social Media was poor 19 (7.1%) lacked training in the use of Social Media applications. They had inadequate exposure to such applications and lacked practice. And, 4 (1.5%) who were very good in the use of Social Media had adequate exposure in the use of computers and surfing the Internet and hence, to them, Social Media tools are easy to use.

Further investigations showed a fairly strong and significant relationship between the rate of skill possessed and the responses given in terms of the problems encountered in the use of Social Media applications. It was revealed that those who rated themselves as very good were less likely to have problems such as too much information available through Social Media as well as inadequate knowledge in the use of Social Media tools, as compared to the other ranks.

#### 4.2.3 Barriers in the use of Social Media for educational purposes

To further investigate the challenges encountered in the use of Social Media for educational purposes, respondents were asked to state the hindrances they were facing when using Social Media applications. It was revealed as shown in figure 3, that 79 (46.5%) students felt that lack of recommendation from their lecturers to use Social Media for learning prevented them from incorporating these tools in their education; those who felt that lecturers not incorporating Social Media tools in their teaching style amounted to 28 (16.5%); 26 (15.3%) indicated inadequate knowledge and skill in the use of such applications; limited access to computer and/Internet was 17 (10.0%); 11 (6.5%) stated taking up too much time; and six (3.5%) students did not see any educational benefits of Social Media applications.

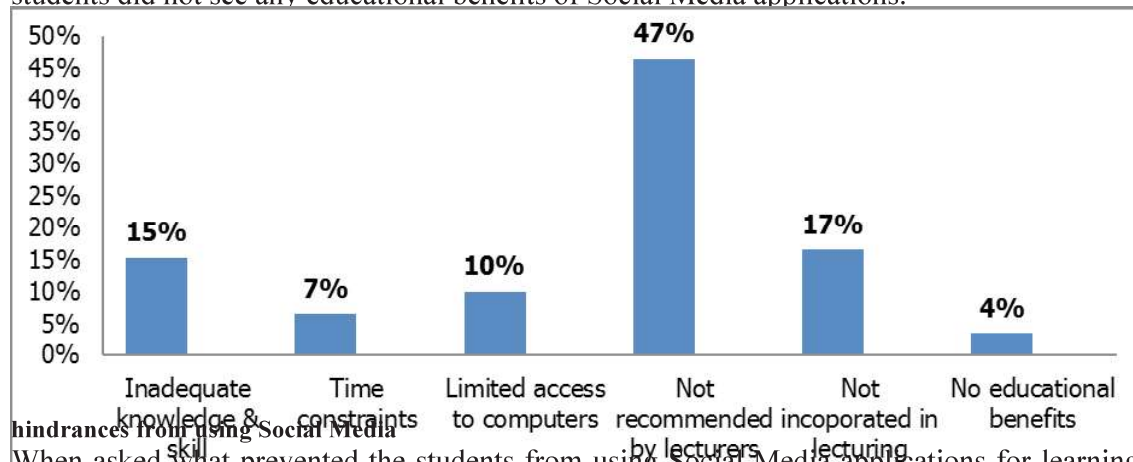


Fig. 3:

When asked what prevented the students from using Social Media applications for learning purposes, it was revealed that 47 percent of B.ALIS students lacked recommendations from lecturers. Lecturers play an important role in the adoption of new technology for educational purposes among students. Consequently, students were reluctant in adopting the use of Social Media applications in their education because their lecturers had not recommended the use of such applications.

Lack of incorporation of these tools in lecturing by their lecturers was second on the rank among the students. According to Hartshorne and Ajjan (2009), students' adoption and use of Social Media applications for educational purposes is likely to be affected by specific course requirements and instructions. Hartshorne and Ajjan (2009) further propose that learning style has an impact on attitude and adoption of new technology among students. They suggest that technology tools being implemented in coursework might influence students' perceptions towards the educational use of Social Media applications. Therefore, unless lecturers and other course instructors provide students with opportunities and environments that promote the use of

Social Media in their course work, students are less likely to adopt and use these tools.

An interesting finding is that only a few students less than five percent considered Social Media applications as not having any educational relevance, which implies that the students are well aware of the advantages of Social Media tools in education. However, the fact that students attach some educational value to some Social Media applications has not translated into actual educational use. This is attributed to challenges associated with the use of Social Media in education

When asked to explain what could be done in order to improve the use of Social Media in the education circles, the following themes emerged: Lecturers should encourage students to use of such applications in academics; Access to computers in the university should be improved; The university should increase internet bandwidth; and Short courses should be conducted in the use of Social Media applications

## **5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 Conclusion**

LIS students utilize all the four social media applications under study; SNS being the most used, followed by wikis, videos and lastly blogs. The current research also showed that students may relax to adopt the use of Web 2.0 in their educational lives because their lecturers had not incorporated such tools in teaching, needless to say that such tools were not being recommended by their lecturers and/instructors. Students therefore lack guided experience regards the use of these tools in a classroom environment and/ in their course work. It is however important noting that there is potential to increase the educational use of Web 2.0 among students. This can be achieved by raising the knowledge levels as the low usage levels were attributed to the lack of knowledge on the nature of Web 2.0 tools and its educational potential.

### **5.2 Recommendations**

- Students need to be educated on the internet use as well as the necessary hardware and software to enhance the use of social media applications.
- Lecturers must therefore play a role in determining which Web 2.0 tools their students should adopt for educational purposes. They should provide their students with opportunities to exercise the use of such tools in their coursework.
- Further research is needed that studies lecturers' acceptance and utilization of Web 2.0 applications for teaching and researching.

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