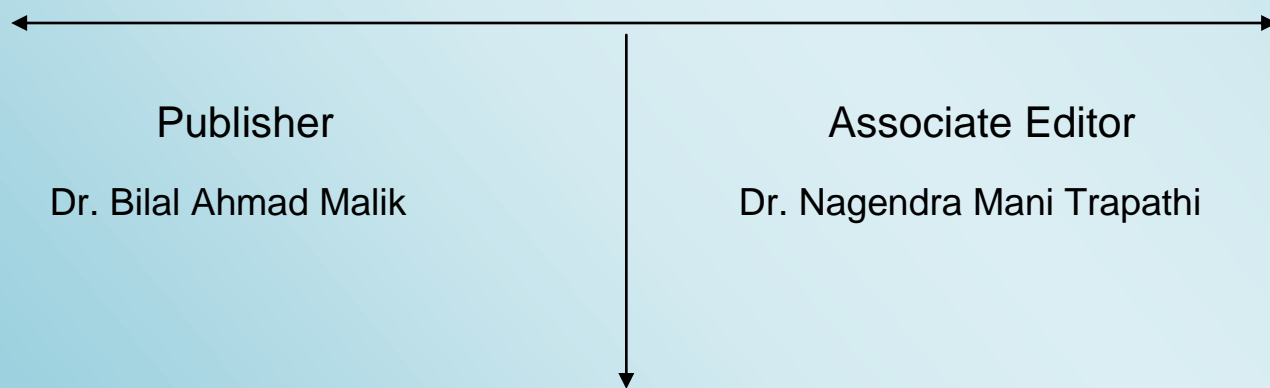# North Asian International Research Journal Consortium

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THE NATURE AND EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE BY STUDENTS IN AN ELECTRONIC LEARNING ENVIRONMENT IN ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the effects of social media use by students in an Electronic learning environment with special reference to Chilisa Secondary School in Hwange, Zimbabwe. The case study design was used and the targeted population were form one to four students. A sample of 89 (N=89) students was used to accomplish the study and Questionnaires were used as research instruments to gather data. The research results from the study showed that most students were using social media during school hours and the media included Facebook, YouTube, Blogs and WhatsApp. The E-learning platform at the school was not supported by any social media applications yet students were highly participative in social networking platforms and most of them had more than one account. The students had access to social media despite the school having banned access to the use of social media tools such as banning the use of mobile phones in the school campus. Researchers concluded that students' use of different social media tools had both positive and negative effects on their learning, psychological and emotional development. The study recommended that the students' use of social media during school hours should be banned or should be allowed under strict supervision by school authorities. The school should select careful the social media to incorporate on its E-learning platforms. In addition, the school authorities should open social media accounts that students are active on so that there is beneficial E-learning dialogue between teachers and students while students should be taught on how they can enhance their E-learning programmes though appropriate use of social media.

Key words: Social media, E-learning, E-learning environment, education.

1.0   INTRODUCTION

Globally, 'social media' has become one of the most common catch-words in modern day language and its use particularly by children and youth has become so wide spread. Social media is a term that is generally used to

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refer to a variety of web-based tools used to connect, collaborate and create web-content and experiences. Zanamwe (2013) defined social media as an aspect where individuals in a community share ideas and interests. The current study was a survey of the effects of social media use by students in an Electronic learning (E-learning) environment. In the context of the current study, the use of media tools (i.e. by students)such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube come into mind.

As noted by Shumbayawonda, et al (2012), the 21st Century students are digital natives who now have the privilege of accessing school related information online via social media and other E-learning platforms. The ability of these facilities to support virtual learning means that the information can be accessed from any place where there are computers like libraries and computer laboratories or gadgets with similar capacity (Pappas, 2013).

It is notable that when educators or classroom practitioners teach, they aim at giving their learners the best quality education aided by the most efficient and effective ways; of which E-learning platforms are key (Alnhart, 2009).Essentially, E-learning was adopted in many schools in Zimbabwe and other parts of the world in order to support teaching and learning. E-learning in educational institutions is generally utilised in order to enhance accessibility and dissemination of educational information.

1.1 Background to the Study

The modern generation has unique information seeking behaviours. For Jones and Shao (2011), this generation think, learn differently and exhibit social characteristics and have different expectations about life. Tap scoot (1999) cited in Jones and Shao (2011) supported this by saying that today's young people prefer receiving information quickly and relying on communication technologies. In the same context, the popularisation of E-learning in Zimbabwe and other parts of the world influenced the introduction of E-learning facilities at many institutions in Zimbabwean schools; and Chilisa Secondary School in Hwange, Zimbabwe was no exception.

The general shift to engage schools to E-learning requires that schools have fully trained teachers and counsellors to conduct both pedagogical and social learning activities. The increased pressure placed upon schools to use technology in general and E-learning in particular by district, government, and other organizational authorities, left most schools with no choice but to adopt the new development in order to move with the times. Gwembire, et

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al (2011) contend that in its own right, the use of social media in an E-learning environment is expected to enhance learning as students become members of the global knowledge village.

Chilisa Secondary school adopted the E-learning programme in 2008 after receiving their first donation of computers from the government. To date the school has a total of forty (40) computers that are mostly used by form one upto form four students. Students open social media whenever they are communicating and involved in other activities such as working during lessons, watching soccer, wrestling, exchanging music or pictures and even cyber bullying. The unpredictable use of social media by students, however, tends to worry school authorities including the school administration and the teachers who feel that it may affect the performance of students at the school if used for wrong reasons (Shuttleworth, 2014).

While social media use has a host of advantages to learners, staff and parents in most schools have a feeling that some of the students' performance has gone down and the assumption is that it is because of the social media tools that are used by students and consequently take the students' study time(Pappas, ibid). It is against this background that this study focused on the effects of social media use in the E-learning environment of Chilisa Secondary School in Hwange.

1.2 Statement of the problem

While the use of social media in an E-learning environment is a welcome development, some students tend to abuse social media as not all students will be on academic research upon its use. The problem therefore, is that while the use of social media is meant to enhance E-learning, it may have both positive and negative effects on teaching and learning in a school situation; when yet, its use is meant to promote increased access to and dissemination of educational information.

1.3 Aim and Objectives of the study

The study was aimed at exploring the nature and effects of social media use in an E-Learning environment with Chilisa Secondary School in Hwange; Zimbabwe, being the case under spotlight. The study was guided by the following specific objectives:

i.   To find out students' understanding of social media

ii.   To determine the social media tools preferred by students

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iii.   To explore the relationship between social media use by students and E-learning

iv.   To examine the benefits and harmful effects of social media use by students at the school under study.

1.4 Significance of the study

Researchers expected that this study would benefit students and the school in general and the library in particular in the incorporation of social media for easy accessibility and the disseminating of educational information, hence meeting the clientele's needs. The teaching staff and the administration are expected to benefit on the possible measures that they can input when incorporating social media in the schools' E-learning programmes.

The study is also expected to provide some information to other schools where students use social media in order that they may utilise it to augment E-learning programmes. Considering that E-learning has become the in-thing in modern educational trends, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in Zimbabwe and other countries may also tap on the findings of the current study to come up with relevant policy on the use of social media in schools in order to enhance E-learning outcomes.

2.   REVIEW OR RELATED LITERATURE

2.1. Scope of 'Social media' and 'Electronic Learning'

According to Boyd (2007:98)"Social media sites essentially allow visitors to do several things including surfing, sending e-mail, posting comments, building web content and taking part in online audio or video chats. Social media allows clients to develop a public profile and to electronically communicate with other users whom they share information". The question is whether the use of social media enhances or impedes E-learning in educational settings.

E-learning is referred to as the intentional use of networked information and communications technology (ICTs) in teaching and learning. For Kasse and Balunywa (2013:145);

> *E-Learning is a term that is used to refer to all information communication technologies (ICTs), networks like the Internet and other forms of media that can be used to enhance teaching and learning so as to transfer knowledge and skills. Other commonly used terms, include online learning, virtual learning, distributed learning, networking and web-based learning.*

Barnes et al (2000) cited in LeSueur (2010) pointed out that the 21st Century generation is generally bored with the traditional means of teaching and delivering of learning content. For Barnes (ibid), young people seek for hands-on, active learning experiences and are less willing to passively absorb information. This may be the reason why most of the teenagers are active participants in the use of social media, both in and outside E-learning environments.

2.2. Social Networking sites used in an e-learning environment

Yu et al (2010) cited in Hart (2009) explained that from an educational perspective, online social networking also offers good learning practice for students. This is so because it is self-initiated learning, in which individuals create a system of information and support by building and nurturing personal and group links. The social networking sites largely used by young people include Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, LinkedIn, Micro-blogging (Jones and Shao, 2011).

Facebook is a web-based service that helps people to communicate more efficiently with their friends, family and co-workers. It facilitates the real world social connections and allows anyone to participate within a trusted online atmosphere (Balaklshaman, 2008). The fundamental mission of Facebook is to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected. One of its characteristics is that it allows synchronous and asynchronous communication functions (Bosch, 2009). It allows users to chat with each other as long as they are connected to the web-based server. It also allows people to share videos and information on status.

MySpace is an online social network that is free for people to establish their own personalised websites and share their contents with other people. It has incorporated interactive videos, pictures, music and blogs to be posted on the user profile (Magnuson & Dundes, 2008 cited by Hart, 2009). In learning environments, MySpace has a bulletin feature where participants can post messages that their entire friends can read. Other features that appear on this social network site include instant messaging, teacher ratings, message boards and groups (Bosch, 2009). YouTube is a free video-hosting website that allows visitors and members to store and save video and audio content. YouTube members and website visitors can share YouTube such items on a variety of 10 web platforms by using a link or by embedding HTML code. According to Mullen and Wedwick (2008) cited in Welikala (2012), YouTube provides a quick access to archived videos and audios. Their uses and scanning enhances student learning and comprehension of the usually abstract concepts.

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According to Guardia et al (2012), Micro-blogging is a social media that provides an opportunity to communicate worldwide using a small number of characters that enables users to share information. These platforms can serve to motivate students by narrowing the physical and psychological distances separating teachers and students, thus increasing their confidence and engagement in the learning process.

An example of Micro blog is Twitter; which was launched in 2006 as a micro-blog service that enables users to post what they are doing at anytime and anywhere (Calvert and Jordan, 2001). This social media is used as a backchannel to connect E-learning communities or smaller classrooms over a specific topic or event, to share highlights, make statements and upload pictures. It has an advantage that it updates simultaneously other social media tools like Facebook and Blog (Moore, 2011).

Waddington (2011) demonstrates that Twitter enhances the collaboration and interaction in learning situations including E-classroom environments. An example was given of an English teacher who incorporated Twitter during the study of a book. As the students were attentively watching the Twitter, they ended up joining in by asking their questions as well. Waddington (2011) observed that this does not distract the learning process; instead it allows students to become more active and interested in the learning process.

2.3 Empirical Findings on the Effects of Social Media Use by Students

Essentially, progression to social media use was rooted on the emergency of new technologies that were suitable to meet the needs of the millennial generation (Pappas, ibid). According to Guorang (2011:98),

> *Social media networks have a collection of online tools that can support learning and teaching. The tools mentioned include blogs, virtual classrooms and collaborative software. However, the E-learning programmes use different and various delivery methods in which social media are included.*

Guorang (ibid) classified top 10 tools used in education for E-learning and among the tools mentioned as delivery methods include Twitter, YouTube and Facebook.

Social media platforms have advantages, especially in enhancing access to information, however, research made by Calvert and Jordan (2001) indicated that most secondary school students spent at least two hours a day using social media for non-educational purposes. Ironically, by the time the children reach their tertiary education, they

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would have spent more time on social media compared to studying. The time that is spent using social media gadgets generally varies with age. Selwyn (2011) realised that the more time the children spent on social media, the more influence on their behaviour was yielded. In other words, the children tend to interpret what they interact with on social media including Facebook, MySpace and YouTube as being real due to increased peer exposure.

Reid (2012) noted that using social media somewhat messes with one's ability to think independently. School children find it easy to use certain social media tools when solving social and mathematical problems than for them to deeply think over the problems. People are more open to peer pressure within social networks and youngsters are likely to change their minds about liking certain or hating certain things. It has also been established that the more time the children spend surfing the Internet, the less time that the pupils spend with family, friends and relatives. Time for regular exercise, reading, physical, social and mental development is greatly compromised (Alenhart, 2009).

Social media have the ability to intensify latent communication learning among students. Wohn (2013) states that social media is useful to high school students in facilitating transfer of information and ultimately enhancing expectations of future success. Boyd and Ellison (2007) support this by saying that social media engages students in active learning and the tools of social media can be taken as distributors of information. Communication of information is easily processed because students are always online and they may easily share the information with other peers. For example, if the library uses Twitter, the tool may be used as a back-channel to connect learning communities or smaller classrooms over a specific topic or event, to share highlights, make statements and students can upload picture Boyd and Ellison (2007). In addition, it has an advantage that it updates simultaneously other social media like Facebook and LinkedIn.

According to Calvert and Jordan (2001), engaging in various forms of social media use is a routine activity that research has shown to benefit children and adolescents by enhancing communication, social connection, and even technical skills. Social media sites such as Facebook and MySpace offer multiple daily opportunities for connecting with friends, classmates, and people with shared interests. Marx (2010) added that during the last decade, the number of preadolescents and adolescents using such sites has increased dramatically.

Thus, a large part of this generation's social and emotional development is occurring while on the Internet and on cell phones. The students' limited capacity for self-regulation and susceptibility to peer pressure, students and adolescents are at some risk as they navigate and experiment with some forms of social media. Recent research by

Nye (2007) indicates that there are frequent online expressions of offline behaviours, such as bullying, clique-forming, and sexual experimentation that have introduced problems such as cyber-bullying, miscellaneous privacy issues and so on.

3.0. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, the researchers employed the case study research design. Stake (1995) in Dodgy (2013) described case study methodology as 'a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explores in-depth a programme, event, activity, process or one or more individuals'. For Shuttle worth (2014:123), "cases are bounded by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time". The researchers used the case study design because it helped to gather more realistic responses than other research designs.

The population of the study were students at Chilisa Secondary School where there is a total of 389 students (i.e. boys and girls). For Borgatti (1999) in Melville and Goddard (2006), the concept of a sample arises from the inability by researchers to test all the individuals in a given population, and in the current study, the researchers sampled only 89 students which comprised 22% of the population.

Quota sampling was used which aims to sample reflecting proportions in different categories (Kathari, 2004). The major basis for using the quota sampling is that one selects people in a non-random manner (William, 2006) and the different categories that were used in this study were students in different forms from 1 to 4.The importance of quota sampling was that it enhanced quick data collection which saved time and costs and also gave the researchers a broad picture on social media use by students of different ages and classes at the research site.

The study used Questionnaires as the research instruments to collect data from the student sample. According to Melville (1996), a Questionnaire is a printed list of questions in which respondents are asked to answer usually in a confidential manner. To ensure validity and reliability, and in consistence with Hughes (2006), the researchers pilot tested the Questionnaires with a few students who were not part of the study. Melville (1996) outlines that Questionnaire are practical when dealing with large populations and answering of questions may be done at a time suitable to the respondents, which was the case in the current study. Questionnaires were also preferred because of their anonymity; hence, students could freely give suitable and honest responses. The Questionnaires

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were distributed to 89 sampled students and the researchers gave students ample time to answer the questions and follow-ups were made after they were done with the work.

4.0 STUDY FINDINGS

The response rate of the Questionnaires was 94% which was high from the researchers' perspective. The following were the major findings of the study:

- The students were asked what they understood by social media. From the sample, a total of 50% managed to clearly define social media and also giving examples while35% of the students thought that social media was merely computer packages. However, 15% were honest to say that they were never exposed to any social media tool but could give examples like WhatsApp, Twitter and Facebook.

- Students were asked how whether the introduction of E-learning was beneficial to them or not. The results showed that 74% of the participants said they were benefiting from the introduction of E-learning while 26% did not really realise the benefits of E-learning.

- Students were asked the regulations regarding the use of social media at school. As many as 98% of the students were in agreement that personal social media gadgets such as cell phones are not allowed at school. However, the school owned social media facilities are used with supervision. The only 2% of the students did not respond to the question probably because of lack of information on social media

- Students were asked if they had ever used social media during school hours. Results showed that 58%of the participants did not use social media during school hours while 42% are frequent users of social media for different purposes. The results revealed may not be the actual results since some students may have feared to present the truth for fear of victimisation despite assurance of confidentiality by the researchers.

- Students were asked if they had access to Internet use during school hours. The results showed that 58% of participants had access to Internet during school hours while 42% of participants had no access. Students went for computer lessons every day and the assumption was that all had access to internet

- Students were asked if they were supervised when accessing information from the Internet. As many as 79% of the students responded that they were closely supervised during computer lessons and they were not allowed to be alone in computer rooms However, 21% of participants highlighted that the classes were too large that they open social media in the presence of the supervisor without being noticed. More so, some of the students indicated that a few of them had access to Internet even outside school hours as they used their smart phones without the permission of school authorities. Two students admitted on the side

lines of the study that they loved watching wrestling, hence used their smart phones even during lessons without being noticed.

- Students were asked which social media tools they used at school and the following figure shows their choice of the social media tools;

Fig 4.1 Distribution of Social Media Use by Students
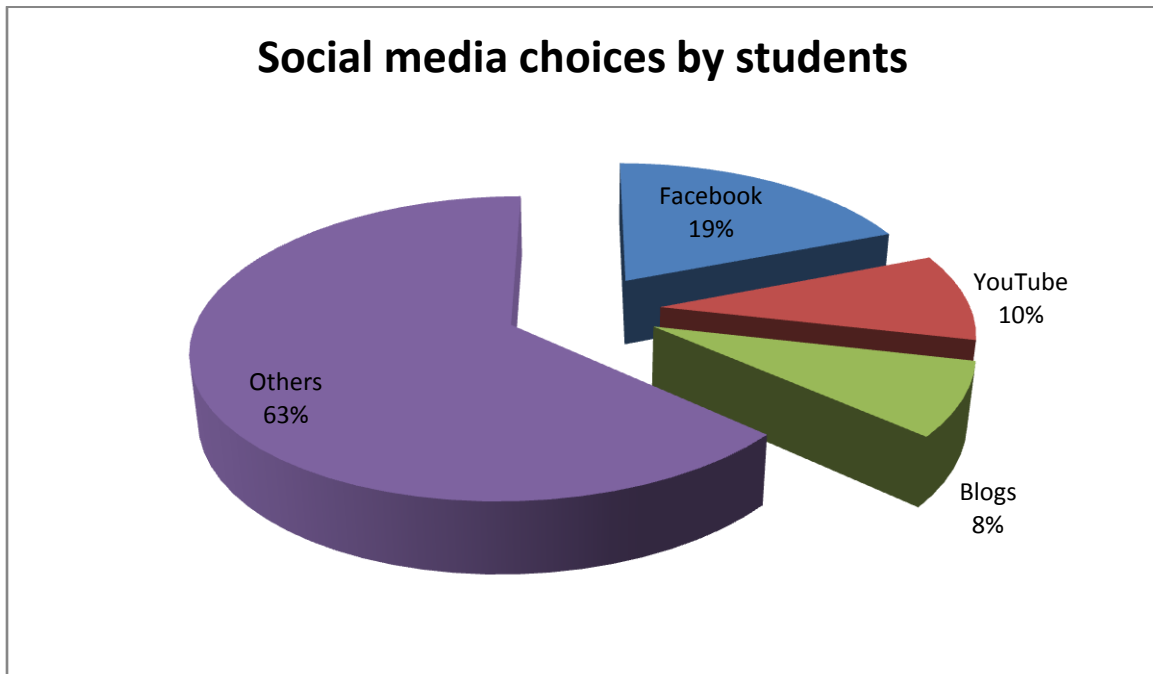
Fig 4.1 Responses for social media

The results showed that 19% of participants used Facebook, 10% used YouTube, 8% used Blogs while as many as 63 of the students used others social media that included WhatsApp and Twitter. The results indicated that students were active on social media use to interact with their peers. The researchers inferred that such high use of social media meant high implications too for E-learning at the research site

- Students were also asked about challenges of using social media at school. As many as 74% of participants had problems with social media which include cyber bullying. Some of these students indicated that social media also has a negative impact on culture as it leads to culture degradation since some students may copy and emulate foreign life styles they. Fernald and Fernald (2013) argue such problems may result in psychological trauma and time wasting because there are so many sites to browse

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for information. The rest of the students (26%) could not state any challenges maybe due to limited exposure to social media use or had not encountered any of the challenges yet.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

The study concluded that:

- Social media use was rife at the school with most students using tools such as Facebook, YouTube, Blogs, WhatsApp and Twitter. This finding was consistent with Mehmoods and Taswir (2013) who found out that secondary school students were generally active participants in social media use.
- The E-learning platform at the school was not supported by any social media applications yet students were highly participative in social networking platforms and most of them had more than one account.
- Students had access to social media despite the school having banned access to the use of social media tools including the Cell phone. This, however, contradicted with Guorang (2011) who stated that social media has a collection of online tools that could support E-learning and teaching
- Students' use of different social media tools had both positive and negative effects on their learning, psychological and emotional development.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions, the study recommended that:

- The students' use of social media during school hours should be banned or should be allowed under strict supervision by school authorities
- The school should select careful the social media to incorporate on its E-learning platforms; for example Wikis, Blogs and Micro-blogging, which students may use under the supervision of teachers and administrators
- The school authorities should open social media accounts that students are active on so that there is beneficial E-learning dialogue between teachers and students
- Students should be taught on how they can enhance their E-learning programmes though appropriate use of social media.

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Dreams are not what you see in sleep,

it is the thing that doesn't let you sleep.

- APJ Abdul Kalam