

Information Sharing through Social Media Platforms among Higher Learning Institutions in Tanzania

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Abstract: This study assessed the use of social media for exchanging knowledge and information by postgraduate students at four higher learning institutions in northern Tanzania. The study used a convergent research design to collect both quantitative and qualitative data concurrently. The population of the study comprised of 633 postgraduate students from which the samples of 239 was drawn. Simple random sampling was used to select postgraduate students to participate in the study. The online survey was used to obtain 171 responses from 239 postgraduate students. Data from interview sessions was obtained from eight (8) heads of academic staff purposefully selected to participate in the study. Quantitative data was analyzed through descriptive statistics while qualitative data was transcribed and subjected to content and thematic analyses using Atlas Ti. The study establishes that postgraduate students were willing to exchange knowledge and information using social media to interact and socialize. Based on their willingness, the study revealed that social media offered various benefits to postgraduate students, including timely access to knowledge and information, collaborative learning, strengthening their knowledge base and enhancing their academic performance. Among other recommendations, the selected tertiary institutions need to formulate social media usage policies to guide postgraduate students on the use of such platforms. This includes informing them of the risks associated with the use of social media and alternative ways of avoiding such risks.

Keywords: Information sharing; knowledge sharing; postgraduate students; social media; tertiary institutions; Tanzania.

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Introduction

Knowledge and information sharing entails two concepts: 1) donation, that is when a person communicates knowledge and information by telling others, and 2) receiving, which happens when an individual obtains specific knowledge and information from others (Van Den Hoff & Ridder, 2004). Knowledge and information sharing enable postgraduate students in higher learning institutions to improve their academics (Adomi & Solomon-Uwakwe, 2019). Knowledge and information sharing is one of the important components of Knowledge Management (KM). It is the process of finding and using shared and personal knowledge inside a

company to give it a competitive advantage (Haque et al., 2016).

KM entails both explicit and tacit knowledge shared through face-to-face communications or through computerised networks (Turulja et al., 2021). Knowledge may be explicit or tacit intuitive and experience based (Adomi & Solomon-Uwakwe, 2019). Explicit knowledge is easily communicable since it has a negotiated meaning in smaller or larger circles, at least within a community of practice; yet, meaning is only temporary (Schalow, 2013). It is often expressed in formal language. Implicit knowledge, on the other hand, is transferrable but it is difficult to fully capture it in

written or verbal form. Tacit knowledge is embedded in the head/mind (Imhanzenobe et al., 2021). In tertiary institutions, KM core activities include Knowledge acquisition, knowledge management, knowledge utilisation and knowledge sharing to promote a positive learning system (Diab, 2021). Academic, non-academic staff and students collaborate in accomplishing academic endeavours to form the knowledge sharing environment (Alsuraihi et al., 2016).

Technologies offer opportunities for Academic, non-academic staff and students to access contents and networks from within and outside tertiary institutions. The widespread use of web 2.0 technologies such as social networking sites (SNS) has enabled students and lecturers in tertiary institutions to form platforms to interact and share classroom related matters which has promoted learning (Arshad et al., 2018). Jin (2022) asserts that the use of social media (SM) such as twitter can enable lecturers and students in tertiary learning institutions to create a platform that can facilitate the sharing of knowledge and information.

Today there are various SM that can be used to facilitate learning including WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Twitter, chats, blogs, wikis and Facebook (Abraham et al., 2018; Bagarukayo, 2018). According to Fauzi et al. (2019), the use of SM allowed the academic staff at Malaysian public universities to communicate with other experts in related and unrelated subjects, to share knowledge and to exchange information both inside and outside their institutions. Therefore, tertiary institutions need to use social network platforms to enable the academic, non-academic staff and students to collaborate and continue sharing knowledge and information to reach the intended end (Bagarukayo, 2018; Nisar ul Haq & Haque,

Fari and Ocholla (2015) aver that the majority of academics in South Africa and Nigeria preferred to use social media through mobile phones and computers in sharing knowledge and information. They used social media to keep informed on issues such as conferences, seminars and workshops, availability of scholarship, teaching methods, information on new technologies and research supervision. In their study, Kolan and Dzanza (2018) observed that despite the advantages that SM offers to students and academics such as knowledge and information sharing, interaction, collaborative learning and reduced costs of accessing knowledge

and information, such sites have some drawbacks including addiction and distraction of attention especially when students are addicted on the use of such platforms for non-academic matters, which may affect students' academic performance. Khamali et al. (2018) affirmed that the use of SM has proved to be useful in universities for exchanging knowledge and information in Kenya and therefore it needs to be integrated in educational settings.

Although the use of social media at tertiary learning institutions is increasing around the world, Tanzania remains behind because of financial difficulties and absence of policies to guide knowledge sharing practices (Maiga, 2017; Lubua et al., 2017; Mchome, 2017; Mosha et al., 2015). It is against this assertion that this study was conducted with the aim of examining the use of social media by postgraduate students in exchanging knowledge and information.

Methodology

This study was guided by the convergent research design through the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches. Convergent parallel design is a fashionable mixed methods strategy that is associated with MMR because it deploys triangulation design where various techniques are deployed in a single study to generate qualitative and quantitative findings on a phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Population and sampling

The population in this study was 633 postgraduate students from four tertiary learning institutions namely, Moshi Co-operative University, Mwenge Catholic University, Institute of Accountancy Arusha, and Nelson Mandela Institution of Science and Technology located in the Northern Tanzania. Using the table by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), 239 students were targeted as sample. Respondents were then chosen through simple random sampling procedures. Purposive sampling was used to select eight heads of academic departments responsible for managing postgraduate programs to participate in interview sessions through telephone calls. The online survey was shared to the postgraduate through WhatsApp groups. Out of the targeted 239 students, 171 (72%) completed the online survey.

Statistical Treatment of Data

Since this study employed the convergent research design, both quantitative and qualitative data was collected within a similar phase but each was

analysed using different techniques. Quantitative data was analysed through descriptive statistics while qualitative data was transcribed and subjected to content and thematic analyses.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher complied with ethical requirements including obtaining research authorization from the University of South Africa (UNISA) Ethics Review Committee. Respondents from selected tertiary institutions filled the informed consent to indicate their willingness to participate in the study. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured as respondents did not indicate their names.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the results and discussions as guided by the following research question: To what extent are students willing to share knowledge and information with others using social media?

Students were asked about their willingness to use social media in exchanging knowledge and information. Out of 171 respondents, 168 (96.7%) were willing to share knowledge and information through social media platforms while three (3.3%) were not willing to share the knowledge and information.

Interview findings with the heads of academic departments supported the findings that students in the studied institutions were willing to share information through social media platforms. One of respondents revealed that "most of postgraduate students are willing to share knowledge and information using social media. Such technology is widely used by students to interact, share news, entertainment and academic undertakings." Students exchanged information in their campuses and outside their campuses. The widespread use of smartphones had paved ways for social media use for interaction and communication among students and between students and their lecturers in various spheres of life.

Students were willing to share knowledge and information once engaged by their lecturers on social media platforms because of the expected benefits of their studies. This has had positive impacts on strengthening their knowledge base and has minimized hours of physical contact by providing more time for independent study among them. With social media platforms, students can access learning materials at home and share their

comments in groups for discussions. The findings are in agreement with those in Palestine by El-Ghorrah (2016), which revealed that the majority of postgraduate students were willing to use social media for exchanging academic knowledge and information. Chikono (2018) affirms that in higher learning institutions, the attainment of successful knowledge and information sharing is determined by individual readiness (an intrinsic factor) facilitated by rewards or extrinsic factors. According to Areekkuzhiyil (2016), the most essential aspect that accelerates the exchange of knowledge and information in universities is people's willingness.

Various reasons were provided by postgraduate students regarding their willingness to share knowledge and information using social media platforms. These included knowledge sharing culture as revealed by 112 (65.5%) students, possession of skills of using the social media platforms as revealed by 75 (43.9%) students, authenticity of the social media platforms as indicated by 52 (30.4%) students and organizational support by organising training sessions on information literacy and the use of social media as revealed by 40 (23.4%) students. Therefore, knowledge sharing culture, possession of skills and technical know-how, authenticity of the social media platforms and the organizational support were driving forces for students' willingness to share information through social media platforms. In Nigeria, Chidiebere (2014) discovered that a knowledge sharing culture influences postgraduate students' behavioral intention to exchange knowledge and information they own. The findings are consistent with Chipeta's (2018) study in Malawi, which found that organizational culture fostered knowledge and information sharing practices among employees through trust and openness. The findings are also in agreement with Mushonga's (2014) suggestion that when using social media platforms, users should be able to search, access and synthesize content in order to share knowledge and information in a more effective way. Self-learning, conferences, workshops and consultancy can help one gain these skills (Semode et al., 2017).

Through interview, it was revealed that postgraduate students' willingness was amplified by the benefits brought by the social media such as ability of students to create new knowledge, opportunities for online collaboration with national and international scholars, reduced cost of accessing

knowledge and information, enhancement of students' academic performance, timely communication and improved quality of academic works.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

The power of social media in disseminating knowledge and information enhanced postgraduate students' willingness to use such platforms. With social media, postgraduate students were able to search, access and use the knowledge they accessed to strengthen their knowledge base, which in turn enabled them to excel in their studies. Furthermore, the use of social media enabled students to keep informed of various issues taking place in the world. Finally, social media platforms enhanced collaborative learning and classroom participation because postgraduate students who encountered challenges could pose a question on the platform for discussion solutions.

Recommendation

The study recommends that awareness-creation sessions be put in place to encourage students who are unwilling to use social media platforms for exchanging knowledge and information to make use of such platforms because such attempt will help them to strengthen their knowledge base and keep them informed on various issues in their areas of specialization. The awareness-creation campaign should go hand in hand with informing the students that they should not spend much of their time on social media platforms for non-academic matters as this may affect their academic performance.

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