Exploring the Effects of Social Media on the Reading Culture of Students in Tamale Technical University

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Abstract
Numerous activities of educational development require the ability to read and write. Reading in general aids in the development of the mind and the personality of any individual. It also enhances an individual's intellectual capabilities. However, social media has become a vital component of the daily life of tertiary students and is steadily taking over the consciousness of the youth consequently affecting their reading culture. The current study sought to explore the effects of social media on the reading culture of tertiary students in Ghana. The quantitative approach to data collection and analysis was adopted. Self-administered questionnaires were distributed to 478 Tamale Technical University (TaTU) students. The study demonstrates that students are negatively affected by their constant access to social media platforms. The findings also revealed that excessive use of social media by students has a statistically significant impact on the reading culture and to an extent their academic performance. Since most of the students' access social media with a wireless network, it is recommended that authorities in tertiary institutions must establish rules and regulations that will limit students' use of social networking sites during lecture and library sessions.
Keywords: Reading culture, social media, tertiary students, academic excellence

1. Introduction
Social media is the latest technological explosion in the information world. It is an online platform that focuses on building and reflecting on the social relation among people, who share common interest or activities. Since the universalization of the internet in the 1990s and the emergence of social networking sites in 1994 and beyond, there is abundant evidence that millions of people across the world use social media on a regular basis for various reasons (Daluba & Maxwell, 2013).

Though social media use cuts across all age groups, studies have however shown that it is predominant among young persons (Onuoha & Saheed, 2011) and tertiary students (Dahlstrom, *et al.* 2011; Al-rahmi *et al.*, 2014). Adomi and Ejirefe (2012) refer to social networking as activities, practices and behaviour among groups of individuals who congregate online to share information, experience and express an opinion utilizing interactive media. The interactive media are web-based applications that make it possible to create and efficiently transmit content in forms of text, pictures, videos and audios. According to Kaplan and Halein (2010), social media is a group of internet-based application that builds on the ideological and technological foundation of the web and allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Social networking site allows users to share activities, event, ideas and interest within their individual network.

Tertiary students use social media for various reasons. Some use it to exchange ideas, feelings, personal information, pictures and videos (Loving & Ochoa, 2010). It is used to connect with friends and family regardless of location, keeping up with the latest events and happening and sometimes for academic purposes. Lusk (2010), considered some positive aspects of social media. He specified that going online can afford tertiary students' academic support. Social media hence provides easy access to virtual space which tertiary students can explore with friends having similar academic needs. Tertiary students who may be reluctant to express their feelings in class find blogs and other interactive web tools rewarding (Brydolf 2007).

Wang *et al.* (2011) researched into the effects of social media on college students. Their findings suggested that social media use is negatively associated with reading and academic performance. They also noted that about two-thirds of college students were found using social media while in class or reading. These multitasking increases distraction and becomes detrimental to student reading abilities. Similarly, Kalpidon *et al.* (2011) asserted that as social media such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter gaining popularity, they are increasingly becoming dangerous as they create modes for students to procrastinate their reading and other projects.

The intensification of the use of social media among tertiary students has no doubt affected their reading culture negatively. Reading is a conscious attempt towards comprehending and obtaining knowledge. It is also a systematic, deliberate task of gaining precise knowledge geared towards a criterion. Reading as Oloyede (2005)

specified is a behaviour that is easily manifested without conscious exertion on the part of the learner. Many activities of in our everyday lives require the ability to read. Acquiring the culture of in-depth reading aids to develop the mind and the personality of an individual, as it enriches intellectual abilities, provides insights into human issues, and impacts attitudes and behaviour. It is certain that developing the culture of reading assists in molding a person's character (Behrman, 2009).

Most parents and educators in Ghana are concerned with the effects of social media on the reading culture of tertiary students during the day and sometimes all-night browsing. Many parents, in particular, are concerned with their ward's social media habits such as browsing on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, telegram, palmchat, WhatsApp and other social media sites because they believe that their wards hardly have enough time to read or concentrate on their studies. The growing incidence of tertiary students using the internet not necessarily for academic purposes, but for social activities is worrying (Oji 2007).

As pointed out by Loving and Ochoa (2010), social media has proven to be generally addictive for tertiary students who are inclined to devote substantial amounts of their limited study time to chat, maintain social connections and make new acquaintances during their years of study. These, in effect according to Ofuani and Gberedio (2009), decrease the number of time students need to read their books and other study materials. The fundamental reason for conducting this study is the fact that as an educator seeing students' reluctance in reading books and other study materials widely due to this social media menace is a disturbing phenomenon. The problem most tertiary students have that contributes to their poor performance academically is the use of social media that affects their reading culture. Currently, as mentioned earlier, due to the influence of social media, tertiary students read much less their books. Even examination malpractices may be traceable to the use of social media.

Tertiary students' reading culture presently is stifled by the persistent use of social media. Consequently, they have become passive readers who will rather browse. They would rather spend many hours chatting with friends instead of reading. Some even use the social media in the lecture halls instead of paying attention to what is being taught; they do so because they rely on its information accessibility to provide direct lifting of answers. This study hence explores the effects of social media on the reading culture of tertiary students in Ghana. Specifically, the study will examine types of social media being used by students and some of the reasons why they use it in the first place; how it affects their reading culture; how much time they spend on social media daily and establish the relationship between social media usage, reading culture and academic performance of tertiary students.

2. Literature Review
2.1 The concept of social media
Social media, derived from the social software movement, are a collection of Internet websites, services, and practices that support collaboration, community building, participation, and sharing (Junco *et al.* 2010). Bryer and Zavatarro (2001), define social media as 'technologies that facilitate social interaction, make possible collaboration, and enable deliberation across stakeholders'. These technologies include blogs, wikis, media (audio, photo, video, text) sharing tools, networking platforms, and virtual worlds (Bryer and Zavatarro, 2001). The adoption of social media has grown extensively in recent years. As of July 2011, LinkedIn had over 100 million members, Facebook passed 750 million users, YouTube received 3 billion views per day, and Twitter held over 177 million tweets per day.(Chen & Bryer, 2012).

Social media according to Mozee (2012) is a term commonly used to describe different types of communication platforms and electronic ways of interacting. It is further described as a collection of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological underpinnings of Web 2.0 and permits the formulation and exchange of user-generated content and depend mostly on mobile and Web technologies to create highly interactive platforms through which individuals and communities share, create, discuss and modify user-generated content (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010).

Ezeah *et al.* (2013) describe social media as a modern interactive communication channel through which people connect to one another, share ideas, experiences, pictures, messages and information of common interest. Bryer and Zavatarro (2011) viewed it as technologies that facilitate social interaction, make possible collaboration, and enable deliberations across stakeholders. Others also describe it as a group of internet-based application that allows the creation and exchange of users' generated content (Anjugu 2013).

Social media is fast becoming a trendy means of public communication and interpersonal ways of interacting with each other in Ghana and the world over. The conventional way of meeting each other is long over and presently, the world meets at social media sites (Daluba and Maxwell 2013). What distinguishes social media from the conventional means of communication is their interactive nature which allows the audience to participate from any part of the world. McQuail (2010) differentiates social media from the traditional mass media asserting that conventional mass communication was primarily one-directional, while the modern forms of communication are essentially interactive. This interactive aura of the social media confers unprecedented

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popularity on them. Social media by their very nature have the ability to inform, educate, entertain and inflame its audience. Above all, they have a contagious and outreaching magnetism which the traditional media lacks (Ezeah *et al.*, 2013).

2.2 The concept of reading

As Dadzie (2008) puts it, reading is the technique of understanding words contained in a text. They make use of the knowledge for personal growth and development. This suggests making meaning out of recorded information either printed or non-printed. Individuals read for different reasons and purposes, some of which include for pleasure, leisure, relaxation, information and for knowledge. Reading is an individual's ability to identify symbols and the connection of suitable meaning to them. It needs identification and comprehension. Comprehension abilities assist the student in comprehending the meaning of words in isolation and in context (Palani, 2012). Palani views are reading as a process of thinking, evaluating, judging, imagining, reasoning and problem-solving. Reading, therefore, is an essential tool for knowledge transfer, and the culture of reading is an academic activity that increases skills in reading strategies.

To appreciate the world and things around us, we read books, newspapers and others. Once we have been taught to read and have developed the culture of reading, we can explore the wealth of human experiences and knowledge. Reading is an intellectual activity which is possible only if a man forms the habit of reading and practices these from childhood. Reading culture, thus, play a vital role in enabling an individual to achieve practical efficiency. Indeed, reading of books is the most suitable medium through which knowledge is transmitted from generation to generation (Issa et al., 2012). As Gallo (2007) pointed out, reading books, yield their best to the individual if they read them at the time at which a particular masterpiece may ideally be chewed and digested.

There is very little literature in Ghana about the effects of social media on the reading culture of tertiary students and how these affect their academic achievement. Reading for students consists of reading activities for a variety of purposes, such as for academic excellence, examinations, relaxation or for information (Issa. et al., 2012). Consequently, reading activities in which students engage may considerably influence their studying skills and academic performance. There is a general sense in which an individual appreciates the connection between excellent reading culture and the academic achievement of students generally, (Issa et al., 2012).

Guthrie et al. (2007) affirm that reading is the act of making meaning of printed or scribbled words, which is the foundation for learning and one of the most critical skills in everyday life. It follows then that if one develops the culture of reading regularly good reading culture has been formed. This is because a habit is formed unconsciously when an individual does something many times, and it then becomes a normal part of their life. Incidentally, many students do not belong in the category of those with a good reading culture; they prefer to be on social media than spend time acquiring knowledge through reading.

Parents send their wards to school to study. They are exposed on their various campuses to various experiences such as browsing on social media which influences their behaviour (Ogbodo 2010). Learning, therefore, is a change in behaviour. Such a change is seen in rational reasoning, physical maturity, manipulative abilities and development of specific values and interests. The transformation may be simple or complex depending on the school environment.

2.3 Social media use among tertiary students

Social media is commonly used on a regular basis by millions of people across the globe for different reasons as mentioned earlier. Tertiary students as Browning *et al.* (2011) pointed out are exposed to all types of technologies in many aspects of their lives. These include desktop computers, laptops, e-readers, tablets, mobile phones and so on to engage in social networking actively. A large chunk of social media users are made up of students. A recent survey of 3000 students from across the US confirms that 90% of university students use Facebook and 38% use Twitter (Dahlstrom *et al.*, 2011). Given the acceptance level of social media, a great number of tertiary institutions use these communication tools in the classrooms. Some University lecturers according to Al-rahmi *et al.*, (2014) are embracing the use of social media for productive discussions as well as dealing with their respective learners in matters concerning academics and improving learning benefits through better communication within and outside the lecture hours.

Studies have revealed that Facebook is the most popular social tool used where 85 to 99% of tertiary students use it for different purposes (Matney and Borland, 2009; Jones and Fox, 2009; Hargittai, 2008). Social media communication and collaborative technology capabilities such as threaded bulletin boards are used to support teaching as well as learning and have been found to be effective (Leask, 2004). The value of interactive social media technologies in tertiary institutions is now recognized in the way that teaching and learning strategies are in an increasingly globalized process (Kirkup 2010). The most commonly cited benefits of social media by scholars are their ability to facilitate collaborative learning and communication among peers and with individuals outside academia (Rowlands *et al.* 2011; Collins and Hide, 2010).

On the contrary, some researchers disagree with the previous statement (Lenhart *et al.*, 2010; Tiryakioglu and Erzurum, 2011; Chen & Bryer, 2010) who noted that notwithstanding the prevalence of social media for private use, a low percentage of students and educators use them for academic purposes. Junco (2011) asserted that time spent on social media were adversely related to the overall Grade Point Average (GPA), and time spent on Facebook is somewhat negatively correlated with time spent reading. Also, Paul et al. (2012) suggested a statistically significant negative relationship between time spent by students on social media and their academic performance in their study of the '*effect of online social networking on student academic performance*'. As time spent on social media sites increases, the academic performance of tertiary students deteriorates. This ties in well with the discoveries of Kirschner and Karpinski (2010), which demonstrate that addiction with social media by tertiary students can have negative impacts on academic performance.

Many parents as mentioned earlier have concerned about their wards, as they seem to have been carried away by the fascinating world of social media. Bello (2012) noted that if the dangerous trend of social media obsession is left unchecked, it may affect an already collapsing education system. According to Kuss and Griffith, (2011), most students engage in a variety of activities relative to social media some of which may be potentially addictive. The mass appeal of social media can be a cause for concern, particularly when attending to the gradually increasing amount of time students spend online.

Tertiary students spend more time on Facebook, Twitter and other social media through smartphones that are now in abundance. Many students cannot go for two-three hours without checking and updating their profiles on these social networks even to the detriment of reading activities. Morahan-Martin and Schumacher (2000) describe social media obsession as the extreme use of the internet and the failure to control this usage which seriously harms a person's life. Charlton and Danforth (2007) are worried hence noted that there seems to be an alarming rate of social media obsession among students today. A trend that might affect their academic, social and spiritual lives negatively if not controlled.

2.4 Negative effects of social media on reading habits of students in tertiary institutions

Tertiary students are expected to read and keep abreast of what is happening around them. However, that apparently does not happen anymore, thanks to the advent of the social media. Many tertiary students now spend quality time surfing the internet on gossips and other immaterial issues. Different studies have revealed that most individuals never finish reading a fiction book from cover to cover after leaving school (Brydolf 2007).

Also, there are distinct investigations which reveal that many students have graduated from institutions with inadequate reading abilities, attributing it to the weak culture developed during their university days (see Singh 2011). In most tertiary institutions, learners do not read, even the few who read, only do so as a means of passing their examinations (Paul et al. 2012). The libraries that are intended for reading have now been turned into browsing centres, points of reference and copying of lecture notes as only a few students are seen reading in the libraries most times.

As Shabo and Usofia (2009) pointed out, the reading culture of learners has been washed down the drain as a consequence of the evolution of technology and advent of social media. Reading is the fundamental factor that determines the foundation of prominence in people's lives irrespective of status, gender, and age. It improves and develops an individual and is also essential when writing an examination. One of the principal cause for the dwindling speed at which students read is as a result of the invasion of social media as mentioned earlier.

Further, users around the world, whether teens or college students share personal information on social media. Most individuals disclose personal information on their profiles. Research on social media found a paradox, a discrepancy between privacy concerns and actual privacy settings (Barnes 2006). Analyses of profiles have found that social media users, especially students provide a significant amount of personal information on public profiles. Gross and Acquisti (2005) examined the Facebook profiles of more than 4000 tertiary students and discovered that only a little percentage had changed the default privacy settings (Lukas 2006). The question that arises is it secured enough that students share their personal information since it has become a significant aspect of their lives.

3. Methodology

Saunders *et al.* (2009) emphasized that the selection of any research design is based on many factors with the ultimate being the features of the variables or participants being used. In this study, descriptive studies were adopted as it is essential to understand the dynamics of the effects of social media on reading culture of students. The study also adopted a case study strategy, since a case study strategy gives a rich understanding of the framework of the research and the processes being enacted (Morris & Wood 1991). To gain a representative sample, cluster sampling method was adopted. The entire student population of the Tamale Technical University (TaTU) were considered as the target population of the study. The university has a total of seventeen (17) academic departments out of which five (5) were randomly selected. From the selected departments classes were conveniently selected for the administration of the instruments. In the end a total of 520 questionnaires were

handed over to students for their responses and eventual collection. About 520 questionnaires were distributed to students of TaTU, and a total of 478 representing approximately 92% of the questionnaires were retrieved. As pointed out by Glaser (2008) an excellent face-to-face questionnaire administration should turn up an acceptable response rate of 80% and above making that of the current study valid for further analysis. In the backdrop of the research framework, a comprehensive survey questionnaire was designed to attain the research objectives. The questionnaire was self-constructed after extensive consideration of related literature to ensure that relevant items were included. The closed-ended questions were intended to collect data that would facilitate accurate analysis.

4. Findings and Discussions
Table 1: Types of social media sites mostly used by students

Media	*n*	*%*
Facebook	123	25.7
WhatsApp	145	30.3
Twitter	60	12.6
YouTube	44	9.2
Instagram	88	18.4
Others	18	3.8
Total	**478**	**100.0**

From Table 1 it could be observed that out of 478 respondents 145 representing about 30% of the students stated the social media site they mostly use is WhatsApp. Meanwhile, 123 (25.7%) of the students resort to Facebook as the social media site they visit. While 88 (18.4%) indicated, they use Instagram. From the trend of the responses it can be concluded that WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram are the Social Media(SM) sites mostly accessed by students in the tertiary institutions.

That notwithstanding, the students surveyed were asked to indicate the academic reasons for which they use the social media sites they visit. Summary of responses as shown in Table 2 gives the impression that nearly half (n=234, 49%) of the respondents stated they use SM to collaborate with their mates on assignments. Additionally, 178 (37.2%) of the respondents also noted that they use SM to stay up to date with current news and events whereas rather surprisingly; 42 (8.8%) of the respondents indicated that they use the SM to access literature materials. The results, therefore, imply that most students use SM as a collaborative tool to facilitate their academic work.

Table 2: Academic Reasons students use social media

Reason	*n*	*%*
Collaborate with classmates on assignments	234	49.0
Access literature	42	8.8
Discuss content with instructors	24	5.0
To be up to date with current news and events	178	37.2
Total	**478**	**100.00**

In Table 3, on the other hand, respondents were asked about their non-academic reasons behind their use of SM. The responses to that effect show that about half (n=265, 55%) of the respondents stated their reason for the non-academic use for SM is motivated by the need to keep up with friends whereas 138 constituting approximately 29% of the respondents use SM for entertainment purposes. Meanwhile, 43 respondents representing 9% of the respondents use SM so they can also share their opinions on issues that bother them. By implication, the students have shown that they use SM for the main reason of keeping in touch with their friends and also for entertainment purposes.

Table 3: Non-Academic Reasons students' use of Social Media

Reason	*n*	*%*
Keeping up with friends	265	55.4
To share opinions	43	9.0
To fill spare time	32	6.7
For entertainment	138	28.9
Total	**478**	**100.0**

The responses in Figure 1 show that more than half 62% of the respondents' access SM through their Mobile Phones whereas 27% indicated they access the media sites using their personal computers. That notwithstanding, the responses suggest further that about 11% use both mediums of access to SM platforms. From the responses it could be noted that tertiary students access SM platforms mainly using their mobile phones, this is because perhaps students find the use of phones to be quite handy compared to the use of personal computers to access the SM platforms.
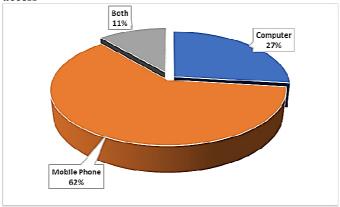
Medium of social media access

Figure 1: Mediums of SM access

In figure 2 respondents were requested to indicate how often they access the SM platforms. Summary of responses as being shown in Figure 2 reveals that the majority (n=321) of the respondents indicated they access the platforms 'Many times a day'. Meanwhile, out of the 478 respondents surveyed 109 pointed out they visit their preferred SM platforms. However, it is worth noting that 35% of the respondents indicated they sparingly visit their preferred SM platforms. The outcome of the responses proves that TaTU students are prone to frequently checking their phones or visiting their SM platforms.

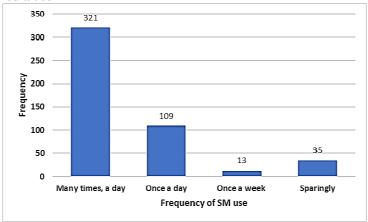**Frequency of social media use**

Figure 2: Frequency of social media use

Follow up with the frequency of accessing SM platforms; Table 4 presents a summary of responses concerning the average time's respondents spend accessing SM sites. The responses reflect the position that the majority (n=198, 41%) of the respondents indicated they spend on the average 1-2 hours on their preferred SM platforms. Also, 125 (26%) of the respondents stated they spend less than 30minutes on SM whereas 69 (14%) of the respondents also noted they spend about 31 – 1 hour on the internet accessing their preferred SM platforms. Even so, 86 (18%) of the respondents stated they could spend more than 2 hours accessing SM platforms. From the trend of the responses, it can be concluded that TaTU students spend more between 1 to 2 hours of their day on the internet accessing social media platforms.

Table 4: Average time spent accessing SM sites

Reason	*n*	*%*
Less than 30mins	125	26.2
31 – 1hr.	69	14.4
1hr – 2hrs.	198	41.4
> 2hrs.	86	18.0
Total	**478**	**100.0**

Table 5: Extent to which students rely on SM

Extent of reliance	*n*	*%*
Very large extent	79	16.5
Large extent	107	22.4
Small extent	149	31.2
Very small extent	98	20.5
Not at all	45	9.4
Total	**478**	**100**

Responses in Table 5 revealed that about one-third (n=149, 31.2%) of the respondents stated they are to a large extent rely on SM for their academic work whereas 107 (22.4%) of the respondents also indicated that to a small extent rely on SM platforms for their academic work. From the results, it can be concluded that students of TaTU relatively to a large extent rely on SM for their academic work.

Table 6: How SM affects the reading culture of students

Reason	*n*	*%*
Distractions	301	63.0
Affects reading	108	22.6
Affecting writing ability	69	14.4
Total	**478**	**100.0**

In Table 6, the respondents were asked about how access to SM affects their reading habits. The results show that more than half (n=301, 63%) of the respondents stated their reading periods get distracted by their tendencies to access SM platforms. However, 108 (22.6%) of the respondents stated it has also affected their reading habits whereas 69 (14.4%) of the respondents noted that it is also affecting their writing skills too. From the responses, it can be summed that TaTU students are negatively being influenced by their constant access to SM platforms.

Usage of SM has no statistically significant effect on students' reading culture

Table 7: Testing of hypothesis (Chi-Square χ2 Analysis)

Variables	N	*df*	Sig.	Critical χ2	Calculated χ2	Decision
Access to SM usage academic performance	478	2	0.05	8.661	16.973	Rejected

The null hypothesis of the study states that there is no statistically significant effect on students' reading culture. Results in Table 7 show that with the calculated chi-square of 16.973 being bigger than the critical chi-square of 8.661 suggests that the use of SM has statistically significant effects on the reading habits of tertiary students in the TTU. By implication, access to and use of SM platforms and applications has a significant influence on the reading culture of tertiary students in Ghana.

Table 8: Pearson's Correlation Coefficients between SM, Reading Culture (RC) and Academic Performance (AP)

	SM	**RC**	**AP**
Social Media (SM)	-		
Reading Culture (RC)	-.737[**]	-	
Academic Performance (AP)	-.275[**]	.303[**]	-

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 8 presents the correlation matrix showing the relationship between SM usage, Reading Culture and Academic Performance of tertiary students. Data in the Table shows a negative relationship between SM usage and Reading Culture was strong .737, giving the impression that SM usage does affect the Reading Culture of tertiary students negatively. Likewise, the output depicted a medium negative relationship between SM usage and Academic Performance suggesting that Academic performance tend to decline with SM usage. From the outcomes, it can be concluded that excessive use of SM has a statistically significant impact on the reading culture and to an extent their academic performance of TaTU students.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

Schill (2011) believes that the more time students spend on social media, the less time they spend reading. It is also acknowledged that social media encourages negative behaviour among tertiary students as they are exposed to fraud, use of drugs, easy point of access to pornography and other obscenities which distract student reading culture (see Kur & Olisah 2007). It is evident that most tertiary students in Ghana have taken advantage of social media to enhance their social relationship with others. These students also use social media to share and exchange some form of academic information. Although they take pleasure in these benefits from social media, some of them acknowledged they spend more hours of their day on the internet accessing social media platforms. Hence, it has resulted in distraction in the classroom, and even when reading in the library. This has affected

their reading culture because of the reduction in time spent reading.

Since social media has become a vital component of the daily life of tertiary students, the study, accordingly, concludes that social media should be used prudently, not only to stay in touch with family and friends but must be used reasonably as a vital information source and conducting academic activities. Time spent on the social media must also be reduced to enable students to improve their reading culture since it will consequently enhance their general academic performance.

The study consequently recommends relative orientation on when and how to manage social media by students in tertiary institutions in Ghana. Also, since most of the students access social media with a wireless network, authorities in tertiary institutions should establish rules and regulations that will curtail or restrict students' use of social networking sites during lectures and library sessions. Again, students must endeavour to use more of their time in reading their books than social media surfing. They can use wikis (a type of social media) like Wikipedia that promote learning and academic research. Finally, the campaign on the adverse effects of social media must be intensified to inform students about other issues such as the health threat of using social media.

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