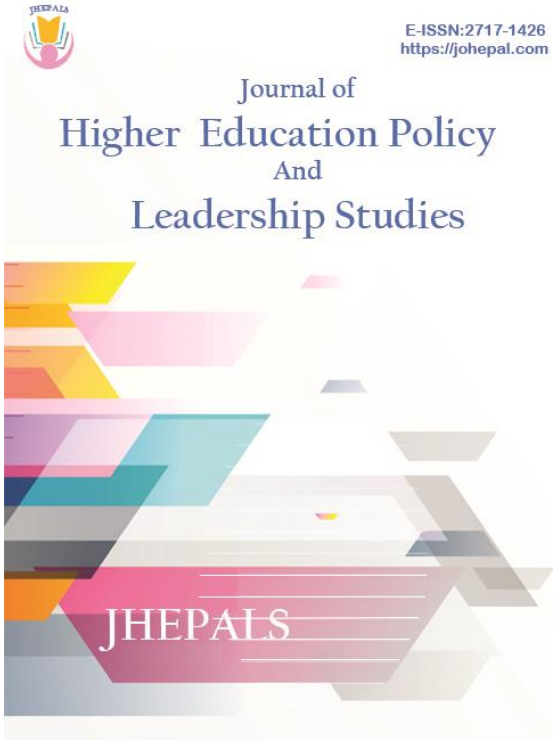
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Use of Social Media Platforms and Content Delivery in Higher Education



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Abstract

The outbreak of COVID-19 brought about global lockdown and educational managers were confronted with the unenviable choice of closing institutions until the pandemic plummeted or learning new ways of content delivery. The purpose of this article was to investigate use of social media on content delivery in higher education in Kenya: A case of School of Education, University of Nairobi. The objectives were to determine the social media platforms used in content delivery and the individual characteristics which determined their use. The case study research design included a target population of 150 Master of Education (M.Ed.) school-based students and 20 lecturers. The findings indicated that WhatsApp was the most popular platform for both lecturers and students, followed by YouTube and Facebook. Reasons for use of the said social media platforms were convenience, cost-friendliness, timesaving, and access of information to many. It was observed that there were no clear patterns on the types of social media platforms used by gender, age, year of study and teaching experience. The study concludes that while social media has been entrenched in content delivery; exploitation of the same to its full potential remains untapped. The study recommends that the University management reconsider the mobile provider for supply of SIM cards and bundles on basis of internet coverage and reliability of connectivity.

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Keywords: Social media platforms; Higher education; Content delivery; Demographic characteristics; Attitude

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Introduction

As the world gambles with unprecedented and unplanned Covid-19 impact on higher education, there are mixed feelings among educators on the next course of action. However, some forms of social media, which hitherto were considered as avenues of social exchanges have now become conventional modes of content delivery. Use of social media is one of the most popular online activities that people voluntarily engage in. In 2020, an estimated 3.6 billion people were using social media worldwide, a number projected to increase to almost 4.41 billion in 2025 (Clement, 2020). The use of social media has become very popular especially due to lockdown and "working from home policy" in many countries and of course "increase in cheap mobile devices" (Clement, 2020). Given the number of social media users and time spent, there have been informal discussions on whether universities can diversify methods of teaching especially during Covid-19 pandemic when universities are closed and teaching and learning is supposedly supposed to be done online. One student observed that "the social media platforms have no age limit and interactions border on nothing intellectual, especially on Facebook".

There are also widespread fears that social media may be a distractor to classroom management, and mostly, students are discouraged from using phones in class. However, this is now changing as even university management has embraced the use of social media to reach out to students who are spread out across the country. This change of mindset may have been informed by realization of the advantages of using social media to reach out to students; majority of who are digital natives. The College of Education and External Studies, at the University of Nairobi, handles many postgraduate students of different ages, gender and from different geographical locations. In order to guide any policy discussion on the use of social media in content delivery, it is important for the university to get students and lecturers' inputs and to understand their perspectives.

Background

The use of social networks is a growing phenomenon in both private and academic life. Initially, social networks were avenues of interaction on matters of social nature like exchange, update, and dissemination of messages of personal nature. Gradually, social media has been adopted in complementing the conventional classroom teaching. Such social media include YouTube, Facebook, wikis, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, and blogs among others which have become an avenue of sharing academic materials. Al-Mukhaini et al. (2014) noted that the most used interfaces are Facebook and Twitter. There is however a possibility that the usage of the two social media platforms by students in academic pursuits might have changed from what it was six years ago when Al-Mukhaini et al. (2014) conducted their study.

Facebook gives users a chance to create their own profiles and to interact with other users. This means that Facebook can assume both formal and informal nature based on the user and the intended use. In contrast, Twitter is a social media interface which allows users to share a small amount of content in a quick and easy way. The importance of these interfaces and other social media platforms has become focused on the education sector, specifically by higher education students. They have changed the way of learning by providing free courses on their websites and allowing students to interact with instructors and other students to gain and share knowledge. According to Tham and Wegner (2005), the world has changed from the conventional "chalk and talk" to the current highly technological world, in which learning has also changed from the

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conventional classroom methods of learning to distance learning, and now to online learning. With the increasing popularization of computer technology, the way of classroom teaching has also changed from plain lectures to multimedia presentations. The days when the instructor had to be physically present for learning to take place are long gone. Indeed the role of the instructor is now more facilitative and at times it is gradually becoming a peripheral because today's learners are digital natives as opposed to their instructors who are digital migrants.

Social media has become broadly adopted with over 3.6 billion users worldwide with Facebook alone claiming 2.5 billion monthly active users (Clement, 2020). Social media usage among college students is not only highly prevalent but also socially important as it improves social fluency (Burke et al. 2011). Ellison et al. (2020) noted that Facebook usage interacted with measures of psychological well-being, suggesting that it might provide greater benefits for users experiencing low self-esteem and compensate for anxiety, and low confidence issues (Desjarlais & Willoughby, 2010; Valkenburg & Peter, 2007). Certain behaviours such as one-to-one communication rather than broadcasting behaviours and simple actions such as "likes" are particularly important for developing social ties (Burke et al., 2011) as are profile enhancements (Utz et al., 2012) and the strategic displays of online relationships (Utz, 2010).

Kasahara et al. (2019) noted gender differences in use of social media and in cyber-bullying. General stereotypes tend to associate males with machines; a stereotype that tends to reinforce the feeling that women and girls may not be as proficient in gadget use and management as boys and men. The most plausible explanation from a sociological point of view is that men and boys have more time at their disposal, hence spend more time with gadgets which give them a headway. It is hypothesized on hunch that geographical locations determine the type of social media used. Rural areas are characterized by limited or even total absence of internet connectivity; which could influence the type of social media used.

Methodology

This study applied a case study research design with the aim of interrogating the types of social media platforms commonly used by students and lecturers at the College of Education and External Studies for content delivery, as well as establishing individual characteristics determining the use of such platforms. The target population included all the 150 M.Ed. school-based students currently undertaking their coursework and 20 lecturers (15 completed questionnaires and 5 coordinators were key informants). The key informants were purposively sampled as they were deemed to possess information about admission, registration, examinations, and teaching activities of the postgraduate programmes. The instruments were first peer reviewed to ascertain content validity. Some key informants were telephone interviewed while others were reached through Zoom meetings. Questionnaires were emailed to the students and lecturers in line with the "new normal" Ministry of Health Covid-19 protocols.

Results

Demographic Data

The rationale for exploration of demographic data rests on the assumption that respondents differ in their responses based on their characteristics. In light of the foregoing, demographic data such as gender, age, and year of study were gathered to determine whether there were variations in the usage of social media for content delivery by such characteristics.

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Use of Social Media Platforms in HE

Participants comprised of 150 M.Ed. students and 20 lecturers of the College of Education and External Studies of the University of Nairobi. Out of these 58 (38.6%) of the students and 8 (53.3%) of the lecturers completed the questionnaires. Another 5 (100.0%) of the lecturers responded to key informant interviews. Students ranged in age from 24 to 50 years with a mean age of 31.87 years. A majority of the students (65.5%) were female and 34.5% were male. Over a half of the students (65.5%) who participated in the study were in their first year.

Lecturers' ages ranged from 31 to over 65 years with most lecturers (37.5%) being between 51-55 years. Another 25% were within the age range of 56-60 and over 65 years. Only 12.5% fell within the age range of 31-35 years. There were more female (69.0%) lecturers than male lecturers (31.0%). Most lecturers (37.5%) had taught for between 16-20 years while 25% had a teaching experience of 6-10 years. A similar percent, (12.5%) of lecturers reported they had a teaching experience of between 11-15; 21-25 and 31-35 years.

Respondents' Usage of Social Media for Content Delivery

When students were asked if they use social media for content delivery, 96.6% answered in the affirmative. Responses on the types of social media used to share educational materials are presented in Figures 1 and 2.

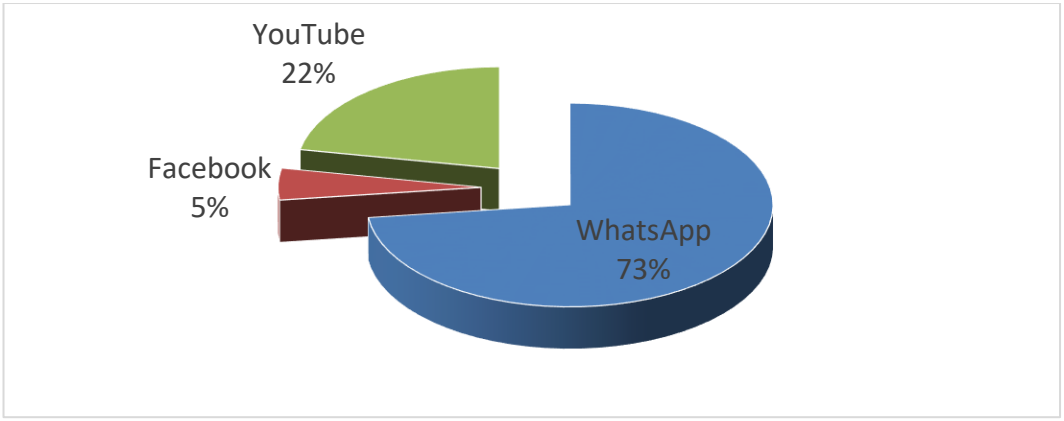


Figure 1: Type of social media used to receive educational content

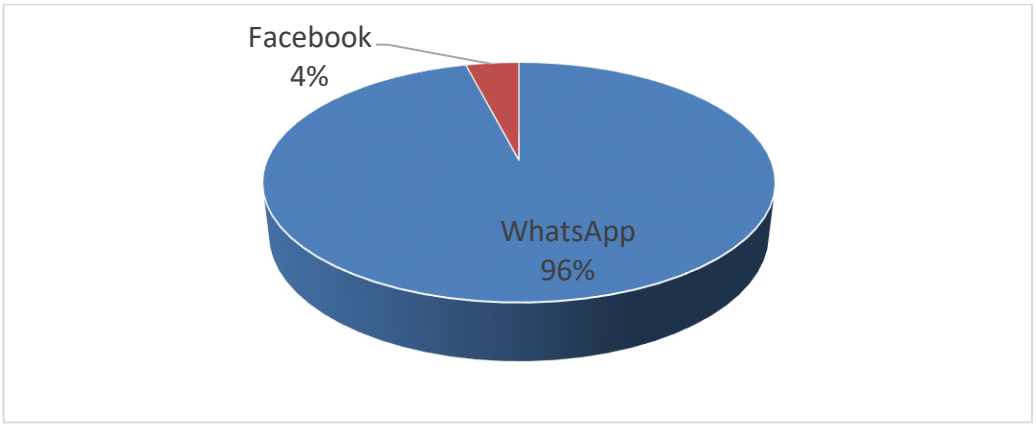


Figure 2: Type of social media used to send educational content

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Results in the two figures show that the majority of the students (73%) used WhatsApp to receive and 96.0% used it to send educational content. This implies that WhatsApp is the most popular platform used by students. Additionally, 22.0% and 5.0% of the students used YouTube and Facebook respectively to receive educational content. However, other social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest and LinkedIn were not used by students for content delivery. This is not surprising noting the perceived use of facebook as 'just a social platform' as indicated by some students (24%).

Most lecturers (87.5%) indicated that they use various social media platforms for content delivery. Only 12.5% said they do not use them but rather relied on e-mails to share educational content with students. Lecturers were further requested to indicate the types of social media they use and the results are summarized in Figure 3.

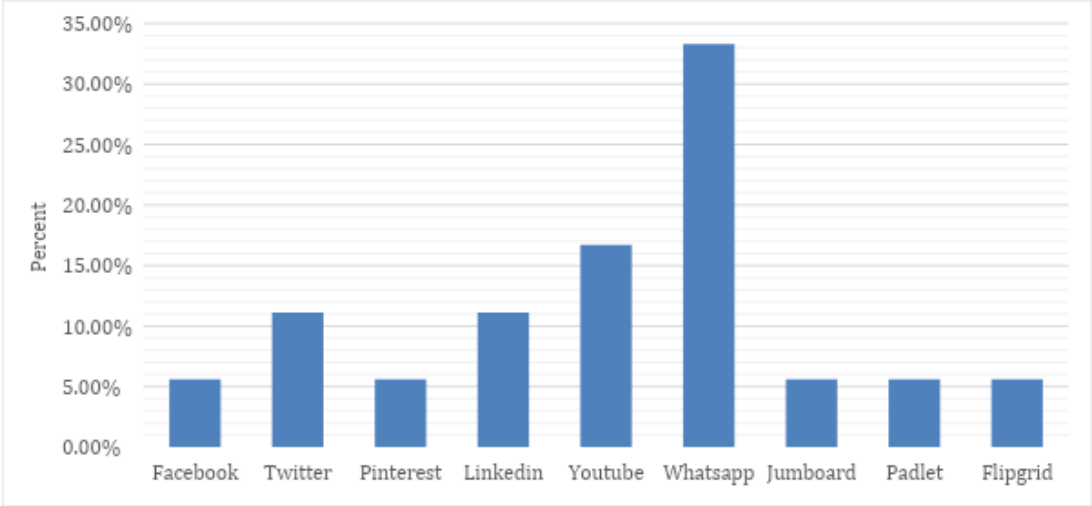


Figure 3: Lecturers' Responses on Social Media Used to Receive Educational Materials

As seen in Figure 3, most (33.3%) lecturers use WhatsApp to receive educational materials from students while 16.7% use YouTube. Another 11.1% use Twitter and LinkedIn while the rest use Facebook, Pinterest, Jumboard, Padlet and Flipgrid on equal measure of 5.6%. However, all (100.0%) lecturers use WhatsApp to send course materials to students.

Responses from the key informants indicated that the 'new normal' due to Covid-19 require innovative ways of content delivery. Specifically, one of the lecturers said that 'the only way to be ahead of time in relation to content delivery during the time of Covid-19 is to embrace social media platforms for content delivery'. Another lecturer said:

> *"There can be no excuse for not using social media for content delivery considering that social media has been used to solve many social problems in the society. For example, it is used to bring to limelight the plight of people in the society and many people respond positively to such plights by offering solutions. So, social media can effectively be used for content delivery in institutions of higher education"*

These findings mimic those of Al-Mukhaini et al. (2014) study who observed that social media has been adopted in complementing the conventional classroom teaching. Al-Mukhaini et al. (2014)

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also observed that YouTube, Facebook, wikis, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, and blogs were among the most popular types of social media used for sharing academic materials. The respondents were asked to indicate the source of the internet they use to share educational materials. Results are presented in Figure 4.

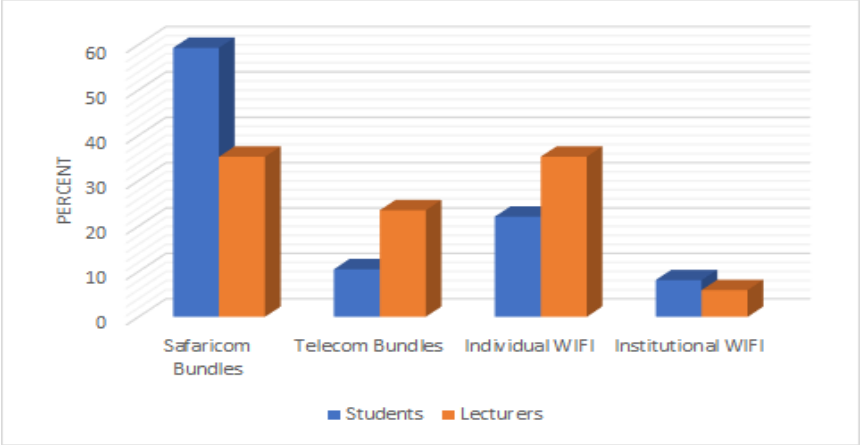


Figure 4: Internet Service Provider Used by Respondents for Content Delivery

From Figure 4, 59.3% of students use Safaricom bundles to share educational content while 22.1% use individual WIFI and 10.5% use Telecom bundles. Results further show that 35.3% of the lecturers use Safaricom bundles and individual WIFI equally. Only 5.9% use institutional WIFI. The low use of institutional WIFI is due to the 'work from home policy' during the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite the University of Nairobi providing lecturers and students with Telecom sim cards loaded with bundles, most of them still prefer to use other sources of the internet. Some students lamented that Telecom network coverage is poor in their regions. This is the same reason that makes it difficult for lecturers to conveniently use Telecom bundles for content delivery. Prevalence of Safaricom bundles could be associated with the wide coverage of the network across the country. Results on the gadgets used by students to access social media platforms are in Figure 5.

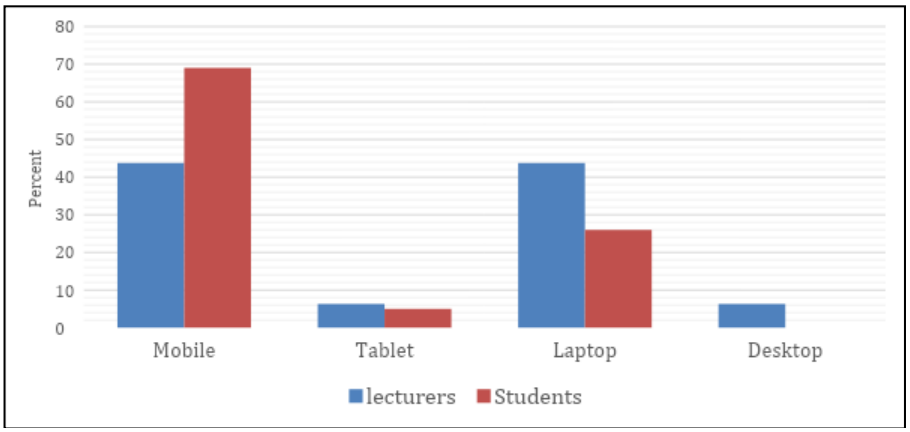


Figure 5. Gadgets Used by Students and Lecturers to Access Social Media Platform

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Figure 5 indicates that 69% of students use mobile phones to access social media platforms to share educational materials. The rest use laptops and tablets. The use of mobile phones to deliver educational materials mimics responses on internet service provider where 59% of the students said they use Safaricom bundles loaded into a sim card that can only be used in a mobile phone as opposed to laptop that can only use WIFI or mobile hotspot after loading bundles in a phone.

Results further show that 43.8% of the lecturers use mobile phones, 43.8% use laptops while others use tablets (6.3%) and desktops (6.3%). This implies that lecturers have a variety of gadgets at their disposal for accessing social media for content delivery. Responses on frequency of checking content posted on social media platforms are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Frequency of check-in to social media platforms for course materials

	Students		Lecturers	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Daily	50	86.2	6	85.7
Every hour	8	13.8	1	14.3
Total	58	100.0	7	100

Table 1 indicates that 86.2% of students and 85.7% of lecturers check into their social media platforms for course content daily. This implies that students and lecturers have fully embraced social media for delivery of course materials. This also shows efficiency of interaction between lecturers and students for quick feedback. Regarding the frequency of posting of course materials, the results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Frequency of posting course materials within a day

	Students		Lecturers	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Extremely often	5	8.9	1	12.5
Very often	15	26.8	1	12.5
Moderately often	23	41.1	5	62.5
Slightly often	4	7.1	0	0
Not at all	9	16.1	1	12.5
Total	56	100.0	8	100.0

Table 2 indicates that 41.1% of the students moderately post course materials on their social media platforms daily and another 26.6% post very often. The results further show that 62.5% of the lecturers post materials moderately often while the rest (12.5%) on an equal basis, post extremely often, very often and nothing at all. This implies that students and lecturers receive educational materials posted in their social media platforms within a day for their respective actions.

Respondents' Characteristics Determining Use of Social Media

The second objective sought to establish whether individual characteristics such as age, gender, year of study, and teaching experience determine the type of social media used by students and lecturers.

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This is discussed in the subsequent subsections. Gender and type of social media used by students were cross-tabulated and the results presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Students' gender and type of social media used

			Social media commonly used			Total
			Facebook	YouTube	WhatsApp	
Gender	Male	Count	2	0	16	18
		% within gender	11.1	0.0	88.9	100.0
	Female	Count	2	16	20	38
		% within gender	5.3	42.1	52.6	100.0
Total		Count	4	16	36	56
		% within gender	7.1	28.6	64.3	100.0

Table 3 indicates that 88.9% of the male students use WhatsApp for content delivery; 11.1% use Facebook; and none uses YouTube. This mimics female students where most of them (52.6%) use WhatsApp. However, unlike males, 42.1% also use YouTube and Facebook (7.1%). This implies that the type of social media platform used varies by gender of students. This finding agreed with that of Atanasova (2016) who found that choice of social media platform varied according to what men and women liked to talk about on social media. Female users preferred visual platforms such as Pinterest, Facebook and Instagram while men gravitated more to text-oriented mediums including online discussion forums such as Reddit or Digg. The results for the lecturers are indicated in Table 4.

Table 4
Lecturers' gender and type of social media used

Gender			Type of social media				Total
			Facebook	Twitter	YouTube	WhatsApp	
	Male	Count	0	0	1	1	2
		% within gender	0.0	0.0	50.0	50.0	100.0
	Female	Count	1	1	0	3	5
		% within gender	20.0	20.0	0.0	60.0	100.0
Total		Count	1	1	1	4	7
		% within gender	14.3	14.3	14.3	57.1	100.0

Results indicate that male lectures commonly use YouTube and WhatsApp for content delivery on a 50% basis. However, the female lecturers use a variety of social media platforms for content delivery with the majority (60%) using WhatsApp. One female lecturer had this to say during the interview:

> *"I find WhatsApp effective for sending content to a larger group of students. However, the mobile phone storage fills up with many forwarded messages which are not of academic importance. Students also take time to check on the posts."*

The other characteristic that was observed was age in relation to use of Social Media. Many social media services require the users to be at least 13 years of age. This includes Facebook,

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Snapchat, Twitter, Instagram, Musical.ly and Skype (Childnet International, 2018). However, Childnet notes there is no age restriction for watching videos on YouTube; users only need to be 13 years or older to have their own YouTube account (enabling them to subscribe to other channels, like videos, post comments, share their own content and flag inappropriate content). In this study age restriction was not considered as a challenge as university students are beyond the age of restriction. The results for students' age and type of social media used are in Table 5.

Table 5
Students' age and type of social media used

Age category		Social media platform commonly used for content delivery			
		Facebook	YouTube	WhatsApp	Total
24-30	Count	2	7	21	30
	% within age	6.7	23.3	70	100
31-35	Count	0	9	9	18
	% within age	0	50	50	100
36-40	Count	2	0	2	4
	% within age	50	0	50	100
above 40	Count	0	0	3	3
	% within age	0	0	100	100

From Table 5, it is evident that most of the university students between the ages 24-30 use WhatsApp (70.0%) and YouTube (23.3%) more as opposed to the 31-35 age category that prefer YouTube (50%) and WhatsApp (50%). Although the question of cost was not captured, YouTube uses more data. The assumption is that 31-35 are working or they have a steady source of income to afford extra money to spend on YouTube. This age category, and according to University entry records, were working either as teachers or as government officers. Since the data captured only preference levels, it is interesting to find out how Facebook especially, which is popular for socialization can be used for content delivery. The university management sends official communication using different social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp. During the interview, one lecturer said that 'it is just a matter of time and all lecturers will be using Facebook'.

WhatsApp is preferred by all age categories. It seems more flexible and acceptable by every student because it has features that are more private than Facebook or Twitter. This was confirmed by one key informant who emphasized that the privacy of social media is something most people consider when choosing a social media platform to use. This suggests that youthful people can comfortably use any of the social media platforms for content delivery. The question is whether lecturers are willing to use students' social media choices as platforms for content delivery. Table 6 presents lecturers age and type of social media used.

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Table 6
Lecturers' age category and type of social media used

Age category		Type of social media				Total
		Facebook	Twitter	YouTube	WhatsApp	
31-35	Count	0	0	0	1	1
	% within age	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	100.0
51-55	Count	0	0	0	2	2
	% within age	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	100.0
56-60	Count	1	1	0	0	2
	% within age	50.0	50.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
Above 65	Count	0	0	1	1	2
	% within age	0.0	0.0	50.0	50.0	100.0
Total	Count	1	1	1	4	7
	% within age	14.3	14.3	14.3	57.1	100.0

From the study findings, there is no clear pattern of the age category of lecturers that use a particular type of social media for content delivery. Between 31 -55 years, no lecturer had used Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube for content delivery. One key informant alluded that she is 'just catching up with social media, and only uses WhatsApp because her department uses it to pass formal information through the platform'. She stated: 'Facebook is associated with youngsters and my children discourage me from using it'. It is interesting to note however, those of ages 55-60 years use Facebook and Twitter at 50%. This finding is consistent with Madden (2010) who stated that social networking use among internet users of ages 50 and older had nearly doubled; from 22% to 42% over the past years. Although this was not associated with content delivery, majority of older people in Madden's study relied more on social media network platforms to manage their daily communications; sharing links, photos, videos, news and status updates. This was actually confirmed by a Key Informant who stated that "he never thought social media would be used for official content delivery but just to socialize when someone is tired". Many researchers assume that the older the person, the more the technophobia but, recent studies confirm that social media is becoming part of the elderly life (Madden, 2010). Results regarding students' year of study and type of social media used are presented in Table 7.

Table 7
Year of study and type of social media used

			Social media used			Total
			Facebook	YouTube	WhatsApp	
Level of study	First Year	Count	4	9	25	38
		% within year of study	10.5	23.7	65.8	100.0
	Second Year	Count	0	7	11	18
		% within year of study	0.0	38.9	61.1	100.0
Total		Count	4	16	36	56
		% within year of study	7.1	28.6	64.3	100.0

The results indicate that 65.8% of first year students use WhatsApp for content delivery while 23.7% and 10.5% use YouTube and Facebook respectively. None of the second-year students use Facebook. However, 61.1% use WhatsApp and 38.9% use YouTube. This implies differences in

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preference of types of social media by level of study with first year students using more social media platforms compared to second year students. Similarly, Wang et al. (2015) found that all lower classmen tended to be heavier users of social media and they primarily used Facebook, while upper classmen used social media less frequently and utilized other sites other than Facebook more often. Contrary to these findings, Budden et al. (2007) found no significant differences in media usage patterns of lower classmen (Freshmen and Sophomores), upper classmen (Juniors and Seniors), and graduate students. However, slight differences were noted in use of YouTube where Upper level students were found to use it more than their lower level undergraduate counterparts and graduate students. The lecturers' results are as summarized in Table 8.

Table 8
Lecturers' teaching experience and type of social media used

Teaching experience in years		Type of social media				Total
		Facebook	Twitter	YouTube	WhatsApp	
6-10	Count	0	0	1	1	2
	% within years of teaching experience	0.0	0.0	50.0	50.0	100.0
11-15	Count	0	1	0	0	1
	% within years of teaching experience	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
16-20	Count	0	0	0	2	2
	% within years of teaching experience	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	100.0
21-25	Count	1	0	0	0	1
	% within years of teaching experience	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
31-35	Count	0	0	0	1	1
	% within years of teaching experience	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	100.0
Total	Count	1	1	1	4	7
	% within years of teaching experience	14.3	14.3	14.3	57.1	100.0

There is no clear pattern of the type of social media used in relation to lecturers' teaching experience. However, it was observed that irrespective of years of teaching, lecturers use all the four types of social media platforms. Similarly, Roebuck et al. (2013) found no significant relationship between the use of social media, gender and academic ranks among lectures and professors. The responses on students and lecturers' attitude towards use of social media for content delivery is summarized in Table 9.

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Table 9
Respondents' attitude towards use of social media for content delivery

	Students		Lecturers	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Highly like it	41	73.2	3	37.5
Like it	15	26.8	4	50.0
Neutral	0	0	1	12.5
Total	56	100.0	8	100

Results show that 73.2% of students highly liked the use of social media for content delivery and 26.8% liked it. Additionally, 50% of lecturers liked using social media for content delivery; and another 37.5% highly liked it. This shows that lecturers and students hold positive attitudes towards the use of social media for content delivery. The reasons for students liking social media for content delivery are presented in Table 10.

Table 10
Students' reasons for liking the use of social media for content delivery

Reasons	Frequency	Percent
Highly reliable	2	3.6
Very convenient	27	48.2
Cost friendly and saves time	10	17.9
Information can get many students at a go	14	25.0
Easily used for future reference	2	3.6
Very fast in getting materials	1	1.8
Total	56	100.0

Table 10 indicates that social media is popular among students because it is a very convenient platform for getting course materials as attested by 48.2% of students. Other reasons include; information gets to many students at a go (25%) and that it is cost friendly (17.9%) compared to face-to-face mode where students have to travel to campus to get course materials. The reasons provided by the lecturers mimic those of students. Many lecturers said that through the use of social media they were able to reach out to many students at a go and it is very convenient as it saves time and money for travelling to meet students. The other reason is that one is able to share educational material with students regardless of their geographical distances.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, it was clear that both lecturers and students in the School of Education have embraced the use of social media for content delivery, though at varying levels. It was established that WhatsApp are commonly used by both lecturers and students for content delivery. This is not surprising given that the unprecedented Covid-19 impact on delivery of university programs required use of new delivery modes for learning to continue.

The type of social media platform used varied by gender. Female students use more social media platforms than their male counterparts. Similarly, female lecturers use a variety of social media platforms compared to male lecturers. Naturally, women tend to be more communicative than men. This could explain why they use many social media platforms. However, there were no

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marked differences on type of social media platforms with regard to other demographic characteristics such as age and year study for the students, and age and years of experience for the lecturers.

Both lecturers and students held positive attitudes towards use of social media platforms for content delivery. There are no lecturer-student differences noted in the reasons why they liked social media platforms as way of delivering academic content. Lecturers and students liked social media platforms because they are convenient to use, contents is received by many students at the same time and it is a cost friendly mode of communication. It is clear that the academic fraternity have realized the learning-related benefits that accrue from use of social media platforms. The use of social media for content delivery need to be unbundled and understood analytically and empirically.

Recommendations

In order to formulate policy guidelines on the use of social media, it is important to map students and lecturers' online interactions based on geographical regions to fully understand the different factors that influence choice of social media platforms. Provision of Telecom sim cards loaded with bundles to lecturers and students was only necessary but not sufficient for day to day use for content delivery. This calls for more collaboration between internet providers and university management and especially in regions where Telecom internet coverage is poor. There is also need for more sensitization on the benefits of social media usage among the university students and lecturers. Although the university encourages use of different applications for student-lecturer interactions such as Google meet, e-Class, Zoom and Webinar, it is important to explore further how the popular social media platforms can play a vital role in content delivery.

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