

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION: A STUDY AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS OF AMBROSE ALLI UNIVERSITY, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationship between social media use and social integration among undergraduates of Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Nigeria. A mix of descriptive design and correlational design was adopted. The population of the study comprised 5,569 undergraduates from faculty of Engineering and Technology, and faculty of Social Sciences in Ambrose Alli University Ekpoma, in the 2019-2020 academic session and sample size of 280 selected using random sampling technique to select 5% from each department in the two faculties studied. Data collected through questionnaire. The analysis of the data collected was done with both descriptive and inferential statistics. Specifically, the mean was to analyze research questions 1-3, while the t-test was used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 degree of freedom. The findings show that students used social media for social integration to a moderate extent; and that the rate of social integration among them was high. The findings equally revealed a significant relationship between social media use by students and their rate of social integration. This implies that when planning social integration initiatives in schools, social media should be considered as a critical platform for the exercise.

Keyword: *Social Media, Social Networking, Social Networking Sites, Social Integration, Students, Undergraduates, Nigerian Universities, Social Cohesion, Ambrose Alli University, Nigeria.*

1. Introduction

Every human being has the desire to communicate. This desire find ways for expression irrespective of natural or artificial barriers. Therefore, it is a common place to see people who speak different languages have a wordless conversation. This is because humans' desire to communicate and express opinions or pass information cannot be completely caged or hindered, no matter the barriers. This need to communicate and

integrate led to the invention of various media for human communication across centuries. Social media is an outcome of the need to create a system that helps human communication and integration. Unlike other online tools, social media is a robust system that can include "text, audio, video, images, podcasts, and other multimedia communications".

Generally, social media refers to online platforms or technology-enabled tools that

facilitate two-way and instant communication between and among people with the possibility of user-generated content. The ability of social media to create user-generated content and encourage dialogue has made it an interactive tool and a powerful tool for social integration and cohesion, especially among young people.

As Gupta et al. (2014) rightly pointed out, “social media can be easily understood as a means of connecting people from diverse communities who apply web-based technologies to connect, share, collaborate issues of mutual benefits”. So, whether it is Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram, social media creates a social space that allows the formation of new connections that could be transformed into social connections relevant to young people’s wellbeing. The ‘social’ in the ‘social media’ is the ability of ‘social media’ to facilitate interactions that cut across different topics using different formats ranging from text to pictures and even videos. Social media has also been seen as a tool for inclusive participation.

From around 2005, when social media became popular as a distinct concept from web 2.0, many researchers have conducted studies using various contexts ranging from the stock market, elections, education to youth-related activities (Evangelopoulos et al. 2012; Lacka and Chong, 2015; Quadri and Idowu, 2016). From all the studies, one notable aspect of social media is the capability of social networking sites to connect millions of people all over the world.

Social media is a powerful tool for achieving many youth-focused objectives and is used by undergraduates. For most of the youths, social has become a part of lives of youths, hence, the possibility of using social media for social integration.

As Jeannotte (2008) reported, social integration basically refers to “...the process

of fostering societies that are stable, safe and just and that are based on the promotion and protection of all human rights, as well as on non discrimination, tolerance, respect for diversity, equality of opportunity, solidarity, security and participation of all people, including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and persons”. Many organizations and nations have adopted many tools and strategies to promote social integration. As Lundberg (2020) reported, school administrators use different strategies to promote social integration among their youth population, whereas social media has been perceived as having the capacity to separate people physically, it could also have the potential to serve as a tool for social integration. This study is aimed to investigate the relationship between the use of social media and social integration among undergraduates in a Nigerian university.

2. Review of Literature

2.1. Social Media (SM) Usage by Undergraduates

SM emergence is traceable to a massive advancement in technologies. Nwangwa et al. (2014) regarded SM as “online applications for social networking sites, social bookmarking and sharing tools, virtual worlds, e-conference presentation tools, audio and video tools, research and writing tools, blogging, developed to foster user centered social interaction”. Idubor et al. (2016) defined SM as an “online communication channel dedicated to community-based input, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration”. SM is, therefore, a term generally used to describe digital communication technological podiums that supports social integration, online learning, collaboration and social integration. SM is synonymously used with “social networking sites, social networks, web based tools, social media technology communicative tools” (Wickramanayake and Jika, 2018). Some

special features of SM are “interactivity, networkedness and always- on”.

The global internet broadband connectivity associated with the availability of computers and smartphones has ushered in a scenario where billions of students participate actively in social media networking usage such as information sharing, learning, collaboration, communication, among others. SMU is an “ever-increasing phenomenon of the 21st century” (Bekalu, Mccloud and Viswanath, 2019). Thus, Social media usage is advancing in importance among university undergraduates (Anyanwu, Ossai-Onah & Iroeze (2013) and has gained attention over the years, influencing learning positively or negatively. Today, many students are digital natives or immigrants who are heavily engaged in SMU three hours or more per day for different purposes.

SMU has both positive and negative effects on undergraduates. Looking at the positive effect of SMU on university undergraduates, Hussan (2012) asserted that university students use SM to develop social networks for academic purposes and share learning experiences with classmates. Anyanwu, Ossai-Onah&Iroeze (2013) opined that SMU exposes university undergraduates to current information and communication with friends. Mostafa (2015) asserted that social media usage in universities increase collaborative ways of teaching, interaction and communication, and promotes participation in the teaching-learning process. This implies the students must use SM to search for relevant academic information to improve their grades. Students use SM to attend remotely to lectures, research, apps creation, connection to classmates, teachers’ communication and knowledge sharing (Adekonojo, Ajiboye and Adekonojo, 2019).

Ansari and Nawab (2020) viewed the positive usage impact of SM as students’

access to course contents, sharing of instructional materials and videos, and interacting with mentors; hence they concluded that SMU for collaborative learning aim, peer teacher interaction influences positively academic performances. In addition, three positive use of social networking are friendships, studying together and positive interactions (Stadfield, Voros, and Elmer, 2019). The use of SM is a current innovation that promotes largely collaboration and communication (Tahani and Petri-Nokelainen, 2020). Negative effect of SMU by undergraduates is visible as Abankwa and Yuan study in 2018, tagged it a “double-edged sword” and stated that SMU addition reduces time devoted to books and revealed that undergraduates’ academic performance would be affected if overexposed to social media usage. To this end, emerging SMU can affect students’ achievements (Stadfield, Voros, and Elmer, 2019)

2.2. Social Integration (SI)

Many research and models have reported academic SI as a vital component of the undergraduate program (Lakhal et al. 2020). On the contrary, not all researchers have found SI significant to student experience (Scholar Commons: University of South Florida). SI enhancement was accepted as a goal for 117 national leaders for social development at the world summit (Correll and Chai, 2009). SI is multifaceted and has attracted various perspectives. Thus, Social Integration (SI) means different things to different people; to some, it is a process of encouraging harmonious communications between communities and providing equal rights and the chance to everyone (United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, UNRISD). SI is the “broadening of us (party, groups) in the narrow sense to the feeling of us at the societal level (Ozgan and Aksab, 2018).

SI entails a subjective and active form of inclusion that results from participation in social networks and social activities (Nieminen et al. cited in Wei and Gao, 2016). Terms used for SI include “social equality and inequality, social mobility, social inclusion, social connection, and social participation” (Wei and Gao, 2016). SI fits with social capital composed of social networks and social trust (Jo, et al, 2020). SI incorporates a sequenc of social episodes and socialization as a vital process (Ozgan and Aksab, 2018). Laurentsyeva and Venturini (2017) classified SI proxies into four categories as culture, social participation, demographics and civil, and political participation. Ozgan and Aksab (2018) identified three essential factors of SI as “common values and norms, information sharing and participation in groups”. A combination of factors of friction of individual and institutional characteristics absorbing external (climate, institution) and internal (finance, emotions) elements (Scholar Commons: University of South Florida).

3. Theoretical Models

Uses and gratification theory of social media and the theory of Membership (new theory of social integration) were adopted in the study.

Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) of Social Media

Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) was developed in 1974 by Katz, Blumler and Gurevithch. UGT has been used globally to explain the use of mass communication. Though, Musa, et al. (2016) reported that Mcquail traced the theory to the 1940s when scholars surveyed why media’s like newspapers and radio were used. However, the theory lays a basic foundation on how people use some social media, why, the extent of satisfaction, and usage technique of social media. UGT assumption is that the extent of

use of social media and satisfaction derived from it concerning the audience’s self-perceived needs and motives influences their gratification, which leads to continuity in media use. Thus, media users are free to search for information of interest to satisfy their information curiosity, personal, socialization, and recreational needs. Therefore, people’s active participation in social media selection and usage is mostly rooted in their needs. Mehrad and Tajer (2016) asserted that these needs originate from “psychological and social states”. In effect, people’s need influences their social, behavioural pattern. The major components of UGT are needs, motivations, gratification, usage, outcome, and enthusiastic public. However, Use and Gratification Theory, over the years, has undergone four stages of development in research.

Stage 1: This stage is traced to the 1940s where research identified radio and the listeners as the focus rather than the extent of use and satisfaction. The lapses in this stage lead to the second stage.

Stage 2: At this stage, more sophisticated techniques were adopted to evaluate motivations type for more components of gratification. According to Mehrad and Tajer (2016), this stage involves what Blumler and Katz in 1974 regarded as a “practical application of sociological and psychological variables of media use”.

Stage 3: This stage emanated from more detailed research on the development and revision of the use and gratification theory. The proponents of UGT (Katz, Blumler and Gurevithch) asserted that people encounter psychological and social needs of their expectations from media, leading to different ways of media usage.

Stage 4: This stage is more advanced, structural and complex. The focus is on a more

practical theory that is tested. People might choose certain media they think is useful but, for some reason, might not use them.

Below is a typical representation of the revised Uses and Gratification Theoretical (UGT) model:

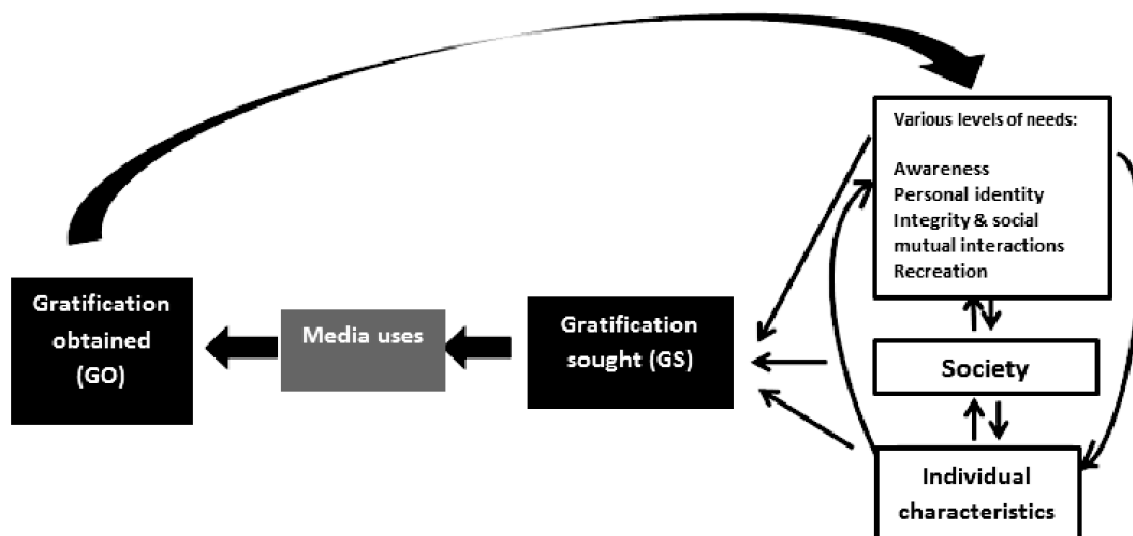


Fig.1. Revised model for Uses and Gratification
(Adopted from Mehrad and Tajer, 2016)

4. Objectives of the Study

- i. To find out the use of social media for social integration by the undergraduate students of Ambrose Alli University, Nigeria.
- ii. To determine the extent of use of social media by the students.
- iii. To examine the extent of social integration by the students.
- iv. To explore the relationship between social media usage and social integration by the students.

5. Hypothesis

H1 - Undergraduates social media usage does not have any significant relationship with their social integration.

6. Methodology

The study adopted descriptive and correlational research design. Descriptive for objectives 1-3, and correlational for objective 4. The population consists of 5,569 undergraduate students from the Faculty of Engineering and Technology, and Faculty of Social Sciences in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, in the 2019-2020 academic session and sample size of 280 selected, using random sampling technique to select 5 percent from each department in the two faculties studied. The research instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire entitled "Use of Social media for Social Integration". The questionnaire was divided into two sections. Section A was to elicit the personal data of respondents, while Section B was to elicit information from respondents. The questionnaire was validated by three lecturers in the Department of Library and Information Science, Ambrose Alli University

Ekpoma. To ensure a high response rate, the researchers were personally administered copies of the questionnaire, and 205 copies of questionnaires were returned and found useful out of 280 copies of the questionnaire administered. Data were analyzed using simple percentages, mean, standard deviations, and frequency counts for research questions 1-3, while t-test was used to answer research question 4.

7. Analysis of Data

7.1. Demographic Characteristics

The demographic characteristics show that age 20-24 respondents had the highest percentage (71.7%). Male responses were more, representing 63.4%, and females had 36.6%. Most respondents were in 300 Level (40%). Faculty of Engineering had the highest responses of 55.1%, while Faculty of Social Sciences had 44.9%.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
15-19	36	17.6
20-24	157	71.7
25-29	22	10.7
Total	205	100.00
Gender		
Male	130	63.4
Female	75	36.6
Total	205	100.00
Level		
100L	19	9.3
200L	60	29.3
300L	82	40.0
400L	44	21.5
Total		
Faculty		
Engineering	113	55.1
Social Science	92	44.9
Total	205	100.00

7.2. Types of Social Media Used

Research Question: What are the social media undergraduates who use Ambrose Alli University Ekpoma? The results given in table 1

shows that the type of social media mostly used by the respondents are WhatsApp (94.1%), Facebook (91.2%), Instagram (74.6%), YouTube (63.9%), and Google+ (57.1%) and other social media having low usage by the students.

Table 2
Types of Social Media Used by Undergraduates

Sl. No.	Types of Social Media	N = 205			
		Using	Percentage	Not Using	Percentage
1	WhatsApp	193	94.1	11	5.4
2	Facebook	187	91.2	18	8.8
3	Instagram	153	74.6	52	25.4
4	YouTube	131	63.9	74	36.1
5	Google+	117	57.1	87	42.4
6	Snapchat	86	42.0	119	58.0
7	Twitter	77	37.6	128	62.4
8	Hangout	52	25.4	153	74.6
9	Imo	34	16.6	171	83.4
10	Blogs	33	16.1	172	83.9
11	LinkedIn	25	12.2	180	87.8
12	Michat	25	12.2	180	87.8
13	Skype	24	11.7	181	88.3
14	Podcasts	17	8.3	188	91.7

7.3. Social Media Use for Social Integration

Research Question: To what extent do undergraduates use social media for social integration in Ambrose Alli University? Results (table 3) reveals that four (4) out of the fourteen social media application itemized are used in very high extent by the

undergraduate students based on the mean score rating which is found to be above the benchmark set of 2.50 for the study. These social media are: Whatsapp (\bar{X} = 3.76), Facebook (\bar{X} = 3.52), Instagram (\bar{X} = 2.92) and Youtube (\bar{X} = 2.63). The overall calculated mean score of 2.30 indicates that the extent of use of social media is low in the study area.

Table 3

Extent of Use of Social Media for Social Integration by Students

SI. No.	Items	VHE		HE		LE		VLE		N=205		
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	Mean	SD	Rmks
1	Facebook	138	67.3	43	21.0	16	7.8	8	3.9	3.52*	0.802	HE
2	Whatsapp	163	79.5	37	18.0	2	1.0	3	1.5	3.76*	0.541	HE
3	Twitter	47	22.9	56	27.3	42	20.5	60	29.3	2.44	1.139	LE
4	Instagram	79	38.5	62	30.2	33	16.1	31	15.1	2.92*	1.073	HE
5	Skype	14	6.8	34	16.6	62	30.2	95	46.3	1.84	0.93	LE
6	Snapchat	47	22.9	37	18.0	37	18.0	84	41.0	2.23	1.209	LE
7	Imo	17	8.3	31	15.1	52	25.4	105	51.2	1.83	0.981	LE
8	Hangout	26	12.7	32	15.6	49	23.9	98	47.8	1.93	1.069	LE
9	Blogs	16	7.8	29	14.1	45	22.0	115	56.1	1.74	0.975	LE
10	Podcasts	12	5.9	20	9.8	48	23.4	125	61.0	1.60	0.888	LE
11	YouTube	64	31.2	58	28.3	27	13.2	56	27.3	2.63*	1.187	HE
12	LinkedIn	6	2.9	28	13.7	62	30.2	109	53.2	1.66	0.822	LE
13	Michat	16	7.8	19	9.3	46	22.4	124	60.5	1.64	0.942	LE
14	Google	66	32.2	37	18.0	29	14.1	73	35.6	2.47	1.270	LE
Overall mean										2.30		

Mean Benchmark: 2.50

VHE = Very High Extent, HE = High Extent, LE = Low Extent, VLE = Very Low Extent

7.4. Extent of Social Integration

Research Question: What is the extent of social integration of undergraduates in Ambrose Alli University? The results given in table 4 shows the extent of social integration by undergraduate students of Ambrose Alli University, and was divided into 5 clusters of belief, peers, network availability, commitment and involvement. In the 1st cluster,

appreciation of good con game hearing was high extent (**X= 2.90**) while all items in the 2nd cluster were low extent; in the 3rd cluster, sharing thoughts with friends and having friends to help if in problem were high extent (**X=3.04; 3.05**), and goals to reach and education acquisition in the 4th cluster were high extent (**X=3.45; 3.24** respectively) while in the 5th cluster, respondents spending much time with family was high extent (**X=2.90**).

Table 4

Table Showing Extent of Social Integration by Undergraduate

SI. No.	Items	VHE		HE		LE		VLE		N=205		
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	Mean	SD	Decision
	Belief											
1	I always appreciate hearing about a good con game.	81	39.5	58	28.3	30	14.6	36	17.6	2.90*	1.113	High Extent
2	To get ahead, I have done some things which are not right.	26	12.7	63	30.7	62	30.2	54	26.3	2.30	0.997	Low Extent
3	It's ok to lie to keep yourself out of trouble.	44	21.5	52	25.4	62	30.2	47	22.9	2.45	1.068	Low Extent
	Peers											
4	I have gotten in trouble because I acted without thinking.	41	20.0	60	29.3	43	21.0	61	29.8	2.40	1.114	Low Extent
5	I hang out with friends who don't mind breaking a few rules	40	19.5	39	19.0	52	25.4	74	36.1	2.22	1.136	Low Extent
6	I have friends who get into physical fights.	18	8.8	41	20.0	41	20.0	105	51.2	1.86	1.025	Low Extent
	Network availability											
7	I share my thoughts with my friends	92	44.9	55	26.8	33	16.1	25	12.2	3.04*	1.049	High Extent
8	I have friends who would help me out if I had a problem	73	35.6	86	42.0	29	14.1	17	8.3	3.05*	0.912	High Extent
9	I have nothing to lose if I got caught breaking the law.	20	9.8	31	15.1	47	22.9	107	52.2	1.82	1.019	Low Extent
	Commitment											
10	I give up easily on difficult projects.	25	12.2	34	16.6	57	27.8	89	43.4	1.98	1.045	Low Extent
11	I have goals in life that I try to reach	135	65.9	38	18.5	22	10.7	10	4.9	3.45*	0.871	High Extent
12	I try to get as much education as possible.	109	53.2	58	28.3	17	8.3	21	10.2	3.24*	0.985	High Extent
	Involvement											
13	I rarely have anything to do with church activities	28	13.7	30	14.6	42	20.5	105	51.2	1.91	1.096	Low Extent
14	I spend a lot of time with my family	67	32.7	71	34.6	47	22.9	20	9.8	2.90*	0.970	High Extent
15	I attend a church, synagogue, or mosque once a month or more	58	28.3	35	17.1	23	11.2	89	43.4	2.30	1.286	Low Extent
	Overall mean										2.52	

Mean Benchmark = 2.50

7.5. Relationship Between SM and SI

Research Question: Relationship between undergraduates' social media (SM) usage and social integration (SI). Results (table 7) shows

the t-test value of 54,866, df 204 ($p < 0.001$) which indicate that there is a significant relationship between undergraduate students of Ambrose Alli University use of social media and their extent of social integration.

Table 7
One-Sample Test

	Test Value = 0					
	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Relationship between SM usage and SI	54.866	204	.000	2.29930	2.2167	2.3819
	122.774	204	.000	1.59818	1.5725	1.6238

8. Findings and Discussion

The demographic characteristics shows that age 20-24 years of respondents had the highest percentage (71.7%). Lenhart et.al. cited in Adekonojo et al. (2019) asserted that 57% of users of social media are between the age of 18-29 years. Musa et al.(2016), found that majority of social media undergraduate users between age 18-24 years. Thus other studies also shows similar results. Male responses were more representing 63.4%, and female had 36.6%. The implication of the gender findings reveals that in university, males are much easier to respond to research questionnaires and embrace social media more than females. Tahani and Petri-Nokelainen (2020) asserted that males were early adopt and use devices more than females. This reveals that in university, males are much easier to respond to research questionnaires and embrace social media more than females. On the contrary, Bekalu et al. (2019) found that the use of social media for social integration varies by gender and higher among

females than males. Most respondents were in 300 Level (40%), 200 Level (29.3%), 400 Level (21.5%) while 100 Level was the lowest with 9.3%.

Finding shows that the type of social media mostly used by the undergraduate students studied are Whatsapp, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Google+. This corroborates the findings of Kolan, and Dzandza (2018), who found that university students mostly use Facebook, WhatsApp, twitter and Instagram. In 2019, Alamri found WhatsApp and twitter as mostly used social media by students while Facebook, wiki and LinkedIn were the lowest used. The findings of Alamri slightly differs from the findings of the current study because Facebook is mostly used while twitter was not frequently used. Ansari and Nawab (2020) averred that Cain reported in his study that Facebook is a social media network sites majorly used by students. Thus, social media use preference revealed some distinctive variations.

Finding reveals that four (4) out of the fourteen social media applications itemized are used very highly by the undergraduate students based on the mean score rating, which is above the benchmark set of 2.50 for the study. The social media are WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram and Youtube. The study corroborates Anyanwu, Ossai-Onah and Iroeze (2013) findings that Facebook is the highest ranked social media used by university undergraduates. Adekonojo et al. (2019) found WhatsApp, e-mail, Facebook as highly used social media while Flickr and friendstar were least used.

With a grand mean of 2.52, it was found that the extent of social integration by undergraduate of Ambrose Alli University was high across the five (5) clusters of belief, peers, network availability, commitment and involvement. The specific areas of high integration were reported to be: appreciation of good con game hearing, sharing thoughts with friends and having friends to help if in problems, goals to reach, education acquisition, and spending much time with family. This finding is in line with the findings of Ozgan and Aksab (2018) who found high level of students' social integration. Also, Stadfield et al. (2019) reported that students indifferently develop relations through friendship, and the ties have conclusive influence on their academic performance.

From the results of the t-test, it was found that a significant relationship exists between undergraduate students of Ambrose Alli University use of social media and their extent of social integration. Previous findings such as Ozgan and Aksab (2018) who found that undergraduate students' integration with social environment significantly related with several factors supports this current findings in this sense that social integration among young people is related to their other life

activities. Also, findings from Wei and Gao study in (2016) show that positive relationship exists between students' social media use and subjective wellbeing and indirect relationship through social integration, and opined that SM may contribute to SI like social participation, building social identity and social network.

9. Recommendations

Rising from the findings for this study, the recommendations are:

- That school administrators and those who work with youths should focus on social media when planning integration programmes for them. Programmes aimed at making young people part of the school system should be executed through social media platforms.
- That government programmes aimed at integrating youths to the society should utilize social media and medium of communication for such programmes.

10. Conclusion

Findings from this study show that social media has been used for social integration by young people. Further analysis revealed that a relationship exist between the use of social media and social integration among undergraduates. While excess use of social media might have been reported to have adverse effects on other aspects of the lives of undergraduates, this study has shown that using social media could help organizations and societies to easily foster social integration among youths. As society grows apart due to several factors, social media provides hope for policy makers and the government to make young people integrate and become productive parts of the general society.

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