

**THE EMERGENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA DISCOURSE AMONG GHANAIAN
UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE ACQUISITION OF ACADEMIC
LITERACY**

by

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Abstract

Language, in general, has always been evolving and dynamic; the same can be said of the English language. Spontaneously, but not unexpected though, since the beginning of this 21st century which saw the introduction of the internet, there have been noteworthy manifestations in the structure and use of varied forms of the English language on social media. This study aimed at exploring, describing and explaining the linguistic features associated with the new communicative order – social media – and their communicative functions, vis-à-vis their impact on Ghanaian university students' acquisition of academic literacy.

To do this, the study adopted a qualitative method and an ethnographic approach in understanding the netnographic realities on social media. In addition, the sociocultural theory and the theory of error analysis served as the philosophical underpinnings which guided the research. Participants of the study (largely undergraduate students) were drawn from two universities in Ghana – the University of Ghana, and Valley View University. The total sample size was one hundred and eighty eight (188).

It was found that frequent and prolonged use of social media discourse does impact negatively on the academic literacy of students. The findings also indicate that social media use overtime becomes addictive and this directly results in limited time span and low attention span of students. Again, the study found that over engagement on social media discourse leads to a general breakdown in both sentence and discourse structure of academic writing resulting into uncontrolled deviant spellings, omission and misuse of punctuation marks and capitalisation, as well as a high level of colloquialism.

Despite these negative influences, it was found that there are some positive potentials of social media that can be harnessed to support academic literacy. The study, thus, recommends that the affordances of social media communication should be retooled to support the teaching and learning of academic literacy.

Key words: Social Media, Media and Discourse, Academic Literacy, University Students, Social Media and English, (toddler) netizens