

# Social Media Addiction and Formal Writing Skills among Mass Communication Students in Osogbo, South-Western Nigeria

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This current study looks at a direction that had rarely been looked at by earlier researchers— influence of social media on formal writing skills of mass communication students in a private university in southwestern Nigeria. Using a multi-level sampling technique involving purposive, stratification and total population sampling, 143 answer scripts of a first-year writing course in the Department of Mass Communication were examined through content analysis. The study found that in the case of mass communication students, social media do not have such overwhelming adverse influence as associated with it on the writing competence of undergraduate students. Among all

types of social media chat language, graphemes rank highest in use among the study population. Many other factors, including writing training, interplay with social media to cause the poor writing competence among university undergraduates. It was then recommended that further research is conducted in this area of enquiry to unveil specific areas yet untrod. Colleges and tertiary institutions should institute courses that can improve the writing skills and the ability of the students.

*Keywords:* social media, writing competence, media effect, undergraduates, digital natives

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The popularity and acceptability of social media, especially among youths, has gone beyond both imagination and control. Youths cannot think of communication in isolation of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Black Berry Messenger, Yahoo Messenger, Whatsapp among others. All these social media sites and others have removed boundary barriers in communication and information dissemination leading to an age of information explosion facilitated by computer-aided and digital devices (Patience, Titanji, & Nnode, 2017). As social media become about the easiest and fastest media of communication, they become an indispensable platform for communication among youths who are naturally impatient. Hence, youths between ages of 18 and 34 have been identified as the most active users of Facebook, for instance (Facebook Statistics, 2014).

The overwhelming active involvement of the generation of the 21st-century youths, referred to as digital natives or Generation Z, has various effects on how things used to be done, one of which is writing. Social media have reduced the vast gap between formal and informal contexts of writing to a very thin line. This is because the same medium on social media sites can both be deployed for formal and informal writing. As an expressive language skill, writing provides opportunities to express one's feelings, emotions, opinions, positions, etc. More importantly, apart from the informal benefits of writing as stated above, it is a significant means of assessing knowledge in formal education. Students therefore are obliged to be proficient in writing to reflect their knowledge for proper assessment (Begaga, 2016). Much as social media facilitate writing habit enhancement in youth through mobile devices giving the opportunity of writing-on-the-go, among other benefits (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007), the introduction of social media chat languages has undoubtedly bastardised the writing culture among the younger generation alongside social addiction (Smith & Caruso, 2010) distracting them from the core aspect of life, one of which is their academic life.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The mobile digital devices of the 21st century provide engaging opportunities online for students to be engrossed in the facilities of the smartphones: playing video games, listening to music, sometimes studying, uploading pictures, updating status as well as chatting on social networking sites (Salaudeen & Raji, 2018). Studies on social media use by students and youths have established that many students have a negative perception of social media and use them basically for negative purpose (Ufuophu-Biri, 2013). Earlier, Kalpido, Castia, and Morris (2011) had found that the popularity of social media among students was becoming increasingly dangerous as they make students procrastinate and be less productive regarding their homework and academic assignments. About 10 years ago, in a study among undergraduates of public universities in the eastern part of Nigerian, Omenugha (2009) found that that pages of students' answer scripts were littered with the language of text messaging and social media, adding that in extreme cases the students under study had more than 20 spelling errors involving the use of informal abbreviations borrowed from the social media, creating an impression of generation in a hurry. Although Belal (2014) reported that social media were not

responsible for poor grammar among students as most of his respondents were highly grammatically conscious, a recent and related study by Mensah (2016) revealed that the use of social media among students has reached high levels and has affected their study time, caused poor grammar and wrong spellings as well as diverting their attention from their studies. Begaga (2016) similarly said students themselves admitted to the adverse effects of social media chat languages on their language proficiency.

This study, therefore, has its crux in the influence of social media chat languages on university students' formal writing skills. The study seems to be treading a new path yet untrodden in literature. This is reflected in the fact that only students of the communication department in a private university are involved. One, these are students expected to have basic language background usually fortified by the writing courses embedded into their curriculum. Two, there is a general notion that students of private universities in Nigeria are remnants of students who could not obtain admissions into public universities. All these stress the significance of the present study.

### **Research Objectives**

The general objective of this study is to find out the extent to which social media chat languages affect formal writing skills among mass communication students in a private university in the southwestern region of Nigeria. It is assumed that, with appropriate training in writing skills, this category of students should be able to distinguish between informal writing, especially on social media and formal writing contexts such as academic examination. The specific objectives of the study are 1) to investigate if the students under study have enough competence to distinguish between formal and informal writing contexts, 2) to find out the types of social media chat language common among university undergraduates, and 3) find out the rate of social media chat language in the students' answer scripts.

### **Research Questions**

This study was driven by the following research questions:

1. To what extent do mass communication students have the competence to differentiate between formal and informal contexts of writing?
2. What types of social media chat language are common among the students in formal writing context?

### 3. What is the rate of social media chat language in students' formal writing?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Human Generations Based on Digital Orientation

The evolution of technology has always marked the shifts from one generation to the other. Scholars have identified five generation of human beings based on the technological advancement of their age. These include Veterans (1925-1944), Baby Boomers (1945-1964), Generation X (1965-1980), Generation Y (1981-1995) and Generation Z (1995-2010) (Reilly, 2012; Rothman, 2014). From these, only three, Generations XYZ, are regarded as digital native (Prensky, 2001). That is people who were born into the computer age and never knew the era of no computer. Following this, Moran (2016, identified the different generations in the technology realm as Generation Z (2000s-today), Millennials (1980-2000s), Generation X (1960s-1980s), Baby Boomers (1946-1964), Silent Generation (1928-1945), and Greatest Generation (before 1928). Obviously, both Rothman (2014) and Meyer (2016) refer to the same generations of people with slight difference in date and nomenclature. Prensky (2001) had earlier pigeonholed the five generations into two broad categories: Digital Natives and Digital Immigrants. Having defined the younger generation as the digital natives who are native speakers of the digital language using computers, video games as well as the Internet and people who were born before this new digital era, which began around 1980, as digital immigrants. Prensky (2001, p.3) explains:

Digital Natives are used to receiving information really fast. They like to parallel process and multi-task. They prefer their graphics before their text rather than the opposite. They prefer random access (like hypertext). They function best when networked. They thrive on instant gratification and frequent rewards. They prefer games to "serious" work. ...Digital Immigrants typically have very little appreciation for these new skills that the Natives have acquired and perfected through years of interaction and practice. These skills are almost totally foreign to the Immigrants.

There is, therefore a clear line between a digital native and a digital immigrant. The former is hardwired as the native speaker of digital language while the latter tries to acquire the same. However, the extent and frequency of interaction with digital facilities

tends to improve the digital immigrants' comfort level with digital culture and language. Prensky (2001), for instance, pointed out that digital immigrants, in this age of simply clicking away your activities on digital devices, still print or ask an assistant to print out emails for them to read; need to print out a document written on the computer in order to edit it (rather than just editing on the screen); and they bring people physically into their offices to see an interesting website (rather than just sending them the URL). All the foregoing seemingly awkward attitude of the digital immigrants separates them from their digital native counterpart, a younger generation not interested in anything analogue and cumbersome due to their hasty, get-things-done-quickly trait. Invariably, digital natives spend most of their lifetime online.

### **The Concept of Social Media and Social Networking Sites**

One of the features of the information and communication technology (ICT) is the social media, which according to Peter (2015), is a group of internet-based application that builds on the ideological foundation and allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Social media have made available major channels of chatting through platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Messenger, 2go, BB chat, Blog and Wiki. Dickey and Lewis (2010, p. 140) describe social media as "just about any website powered by user on a constant and mandatory basis."

Alejandro (2010) says that the great wave of web innovation since Google in 1998 has been in social media and social media are about networking and communicating through text, video, blogs, pictures, status updates on sites such as Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn or microblogs such as Twitter. Chahra (2013, p. 17) states that "Social media mediate the social relationships of human beings." Therefore, social media sites allow for easy online interaction among people who have internet access. This is made possible by web services that give room for individuals to have their own public or semipublic profile within a bounded system. Social networking sites provide avenue for an online discussion forum, group chats, among others. Belal (2014) states that people can now access important information and the trendy online culture to learn about things that were unknown to them before, as well as new values and symbols for communication developed for learning in an online environment that gives rise to new cultural cues. SNS provide platforms that touch almost all the spheres of life such as politics, business,

religion, romantic, sport and academics. SNS, just like mass media, play the role of informing, educating and entertaining the people.

### **The Contexts of Writing and Social Media Chat Language**

Writing is an integral part of communication involving putting down one's thought and imagination into textual form. Oyeyinka and Akinola (2013) posit that written communication is the conversion of the idea or message of an oral communication into visual alphabetical symbols, that is organization or printed or written letters and symbols to convey idea or messages. The dual patterning of communication distinguishes human communication from that of other living things. Sambe (2005) indicates that all living things communicate but human communication differs because of our ability to create symbols, ascribe meaning and interpret messages. Identifying writing as a type of communication, Sambe (2005, p. 10-11) says, "writing is a type of communication that essentially is in written forms." There are two main style or contexts of writing which are formal and informal writing both of which are correct; it is just a matter of tone and setting. In the formal context of writing involving academic and business writing or communication, formal English is adopted, whereas informal or casual English is appropriate and acceptable in informal context when communicating with friends and other close ones. Therefore, the kind of audience a write-up is directed to will determine whether it is formal or informal. Meanwhile, informal writing gives room for more flexible ways of writing while formal writing is largely strict.

The flexibility of informal writing as a medium of communication is further aided by social media giving room for the emergence of the neologism called social media chat language. Using the same platform for formal and informal writing, therefore, poses a challenge of separating between the two contexts while writing online. On this premise, the chat language otherwise regarded as textese creep into formal writing unconsciously. The term chat, when it is used in the field of the internet, refers to synchronous or (real time) communication between two or more people by using the key board as the means of communication (Dedeney, 2007, p. 42). While chat languages are numerous, literature has identified 23 most common among them. Wallace (2015), for instance, identifies the acronyms used by teens on social media to include: OOTD - Outfit of the day; KOTD - Kicks of the day -- Typically refers to sneakers; HMU - Hit me up -- Usually asking for

someone's Snapchat username, a phone number to text or for a direct message; Smash - I would have sex with you -- A girl might post a provocative picture and a boy might write "smash."; Cook session - When one or several teens gang up on another kid on social media; TBH - To be honest -- A teen might post a picture of himself or herself and ask for a TBH, usually looking for positive responses; TBR - To be rude -- While TBH often leads to positive responses, TBR is usually followed by a negative response; OOMF - One of my followers -- A secretive way to talk about one of their followers without saying their name, such as "OOMF was so hot today."; BAE - Baby -- affectionate term for someone's girlfriend, boyfriend etc.; WCW - Woman Crush Wednesday -- A girl will post a picture of another girl she thinks is pretty, while guys will post pictures of girls they think are hot; MCM - Man Crush Monday -- Similar to Woman Crush Wednesday, but featuring pictures of men; BMS - Broke my scale -- A way to say they like the way someone looks; RDH - Rate date hate -- As in "rate me, would you date me, do you hate me?" A typical response might be "rate 10 date yes hate no" or "10/y/n."; IDK - I don't know; RN - Right now; KIK - Another social media app, Kik, that they want to communicate; FML - F\*\*\* my life; AF - As f\*\*\* -- A teen might tweet "mad af" or "you seem chill af."; LMAO - Laughing my ass off; S/O or SO - Shout out; ILYSM - I like you so much or I love you so much; CWD - Comment when done -- Similar to TBH, urging others to comment on their photo of whatever they're posting; LOL - Laugh out loud.

In order to give a clear description of this new morphological trend, Oyeyinka and Akinola (2013, p. 139-141) conceptualise the categorization into eight groups with a clear nomenclature and description:

1. Pronounceable Spelling Techniques/Graphones: spelling manipulation techniques in which word are written in the way they are pronounced. For example Good- gud, Sweet- swit, what-wot;
2. Word Shortening/Reduction: when the letters in a word are reduced making the word shorter. E.g. Because- bcos, school-schl;
3. Abbreviation: involving shortening a word or phrase by leaving out some letters or using the first letter of each word. E.g. Rest in peace- RIP, I rest my case- IRMC;
4. Vowel Deletion: deleting vowels within the word for the purpose of brevity.

E.g. Love- lv, text- txt;

5. Phonological Approximation reducing orthographic word to phonological level. E.g. what- wot, night- nait;

6. Phoneme/ Letter for Word Representation: phonemes or letters are used to represent a whole word. E.g. see- c, be- b, okay- k;

7. Letter to Number Homophones: number that sounds like a word or a group of letters within a word is usually used to replace them. E.g. Great-gr8, thanks- 10ks;

8. Spelling Manipulation: some words are just manipulated to achieve brevity. This kind of distortion is both not standardized and inconsistent. E.g. thanks- tankx, 10ks, have- av, etc.

The major and most common social media chat languages fall into any of the above categorization. However, because it is not guided by rules, people choose as they feel when chatting online. To this end, the traditional morphological and syntactic rules are often violated in online chatting. This is because word usage and sentence construction do not follow any grammar rule.

### **Students between Online and Offline Realities**

In view of the impact on students' writing, social media can be likened to a two-edged sword having both negative and positive effects. According to Peter (2015), the SNS grab the attention of the students and then diverts it toward non-educational and inappropriate actions including useless chatting. On the other hand Peter (2015), citing other scholars, informs that using social media, students are socially connected with each other for sharing their daily learning experiences and converse on several topics. This shows social media are neither a curse nor blessing, the usage to which they are deployed by individuals determines the end result.

Social media can both enhance or damage students' academic attainment such as proficiency in writing, speaking as well as interpersonal skills. On this, Mensah (2016) found that the use of social media among students has affected their study attention span, study time and language proficiency. Similarly, Chahra (2013) found that majority of students are facing difficulties in their formal writing due to the overuse of chat messages. Students in the study fall under the generation Y and Z, so they are basically

digital natives largely addicted to social media. This is why some scholars even opine that SNS such as Facebook, Whatsapp, Twitter, and YouTube are increasingly dangerous at the level of their popularity among students (Kalpido et al., 2011). The popularity of social media among students was documented by Ellison et al. (2007), who stated that the students use SNS approximately 30 minutes throughout the day as a part of their daily routine life. In a study among students, Chahra (2013) found that 95% of the respondents confirmed that they were chat addicts. In another study of 884 students of different universities in Nigeria, it was discovered that students were spending too much time on social networking sites at the detriment of other necessary things such as their studies (Peter, 2015).

Both adverse and positive effects of social media have been reported on students' writing habits. For instance, Belal (2014) found in a survey conducted among university students that most of the students (95%) were very conscious about grammatical structure, spelling etc., while Begaga (2016) found in his study that 70% of the population attested to the negative effect of chatting on their writing.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is hinged upon the precepts of the new media theory. This theory is about the emergence of new technologies which come into being in the 1990s. The accelerated diffusion of digital media from telecommunications and information technology sectors in the 1990s has led media and communication studies to be defined by new objects of investigation. The theory explains how technological innovations have changed the traditional media landscape and lifestyles of media consumers/audience (Holmes, 2009). According to Holmes (2009), social media are part of new media features whose emergence has led to a lot of changes in people lives. Trying to describe how new media works, McQuail (2007, p. 143) identifies seven unique characteristics of new media: 1) Interactivity: as indicated by the ratio of response or initiative on the part of the user to the 'offer' of the source/sender; 2) Social Presence (or sociability): meaning the sense of personal contact with others that can be engendered by using a medium; 3) Media Richness: the extent to which media can bridge different frames of references, reduce ambiguity, provide more cues, involve more senses and be more personal; 4) Autonomy: The degree to which a user feels in control of content and use, independent of

the source; 5) Playfulness: uses for entertainment and enjoyment, as against utility and instrumentality in serious situations; 6) Privacy: the level of confidentiality felt by users of a medium and /or its typical or chosen content; and 7) Personalization: the degree to which content and uses are personalized and unique to users.

Obviously, all these features put media users and consumers at seemingly absolute liberty under which gatekeeping and content control would be difficult as opposed to the traditional media operations. With this, the supposed formal context drifts between formality and informality dissolving the boundary in grammar, diction and expression.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In this study, content analysis was adopted to gather data from the answer scripts of 100-level mass communication students at one university in southwestern Nigeria. The approval to access the scripts for research purpose was formally sought by the researchers and granted by the head of the concerned department. The study, which covers a period of four academic sessions (2013/2014 to 2016/2017), has a population of 143 scripts — the total number of students in 100-level across the four sessions involved in the study. Purposive sampling was first adopted to select the scripts of Writing for the Mass Media I, the first course involving rules and technicalities of writing in the first semester of the first year in the Department of Mass Communication of the institution under study. The department and the course were so chosen to measure the extent to which writing course can assist students in differentiating between the formal and informal context of writing despite the adverse effect of social media on digital natives' compliance with writing rules in formal contexts as reported in the extant literature. Stratified sampling technique was then adopted to group the scripts into four sampling units based on the sessions covered by the study. Therefore, the 2013/2014 session had 22 scripts; 2014/2015 had 36 scripts; 2015/2016 had 42 scripts while 2016/2018 had 43 scripts. This gave a total of 143 scripts, which form the sampling frame of the study. Due to the manageable size of the study population, the entire 143 scripts was adopted as the sample size. This sampling decision is regarded as total population sampling which is a type of purposive sampling technique that involves examining the entire population that have particular set of characteristics. This sampling technique is recommended when the population is relatively small, and the

members of the population share common characteristics (Lund Research, 2012). To therefore achieve a high level of precision, a census is recommended for small populations of 200 or less (Israel, 1992).

The unit of analyses were textese (social media short-hands/chat language) in form of words, phrases and sentences. The content categories were derived from Oyeyinka and Akinola's (2013) categorization of words in text messaging, which include: *Pronounceable Spelling/Graphones; Word Shortening/Reduction; Abbreviation; Vowel Deletion; Phonological Approximation; Phoneme/Letter for Word Representation; Letter to Number Homophones; and Spelling Manipulation.*

## FINDINGS

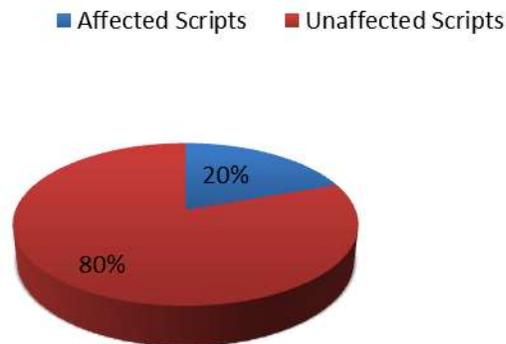
This section contains the presentation and discussion of data collected through content analysis. The data were presented in form of charts followed by textual analysis and description of the statistics in the chats. It is, therefore segmented based on themes derived from the guiding questions that drive the study. These themes include the ability of the students to distinguish between formal and informal writing contexts, the categories of social media chat language found in students scripts and the rate of social media chat language used by the students during examinations which is a formal writing context.

Since traditionally, an examination is, perhaps, one of the highest levels of formal writing situation during which students are not expected to use text-language or social media chat language. The data, therefore, examine the level of consciousness and capability of the students in avoiding social media chat language, which is a strand of informality in their examination scripts.

### **Students' ability to differentiate between formal and informal contexts of writing**

The findings of this study have shown that undergraduate students of mass communication to a large extent have competence to differentiate between formal and informal context of writing. The examination scripts (Writing for the Mass Media) that were analyzed represent formal context and the course awakes consciousness of the need to write formally. Very few social media chat languages were found in their scripts for a period of four years. What this implies is that students are very careful when it comes to

formal writing because as they try to avoid elements of informality especially as related to social media chat languages. The chart below is showing the number of scripts affected in general.

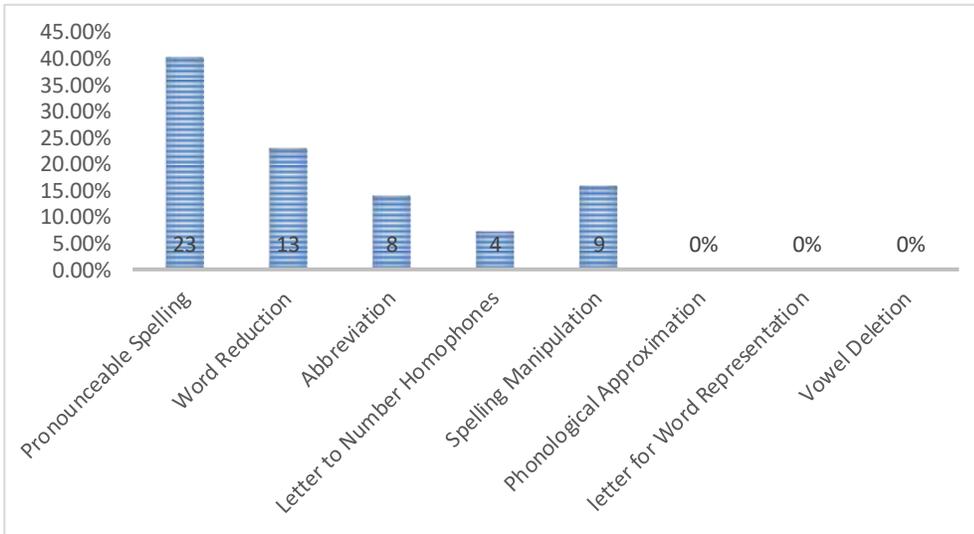


**Figure 1.** Showing the number of scripts affected in general

Out of the 143 scripts analyzed only 20% (approximately 29) of the scripts contained social media chat language (see Figure 1). Going by this revelation with the fact that up to 114 (80%) of the students were conscious in their choice of diction and expression to avoid social media chat language in their answer scripts. However, it should be noted that one out of every five students in the study used social media chat language in formal contexts such as an examination. Yet, it is observed that only a few of the students transfer social media informality to formal writing contexts This is contrary to Chahra (2013) who found out in his study that majority of students are facing difficulties in their formal writing due to the overuse of chat messages.

### **Categories of social media chat language found in students' scripts**

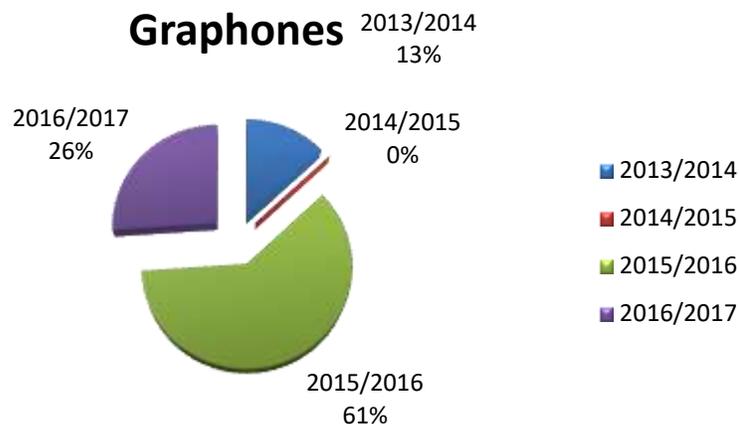
From the analysis of students' scripts, it was discovered that out of the eight types of social media chat language forming the content categories as identified in literature, only five were found in students' scripts: pronounceable spelling techniques, word reduction, abbreviation, letter to number homophones, and spelling manipulation. The chart below shows the percentage graphically.



**Figure 2.** The types of social media chat language in the scripts

In figure 2, phonological approximation, letter for word representation and vowel deletion were obviously avoided by the students in examination as a formal context of writing.

This study gathered that pronounceable spelling techniques (graphones) has the highest usage with 40.35% showing that almost half of the entire *textees* found goes to pronounceable spelling technique and ranking it the most common among the students. Arranged in anti-climax order, word shortening or reduction follows with 22.80% after which spelling manipulation comes with 15.78%; abbreviation has 14% and letter to number homophones has 7%. With the fact that word shortening or reduction that follows graphones in frequency is almost half of it, it further stresses the finding that graphone is the most common among the students either in formal or formal context (see Figure 3).

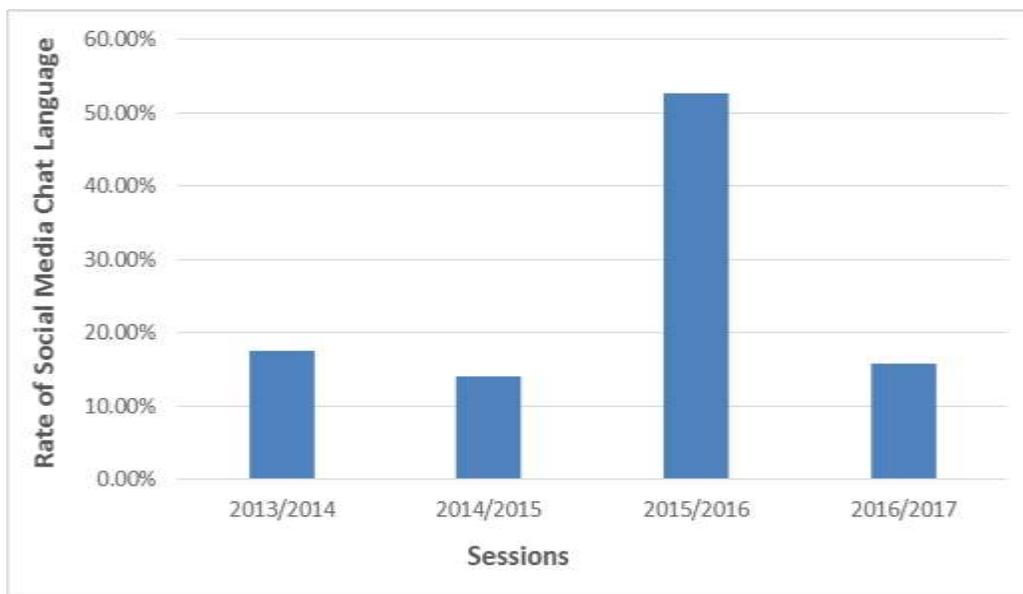


**Figure 3.** Showing the total number of graphones found in all sessions.

Graphones, which happens to be the most common chat language among students, had high usage in 2015/2016 with 61% followed by 2016/ 2017 with the rate of 26% graphones, 2013/2014 had 13% graphones while 2014/2015 recorded with no graphones (see Figure 3).

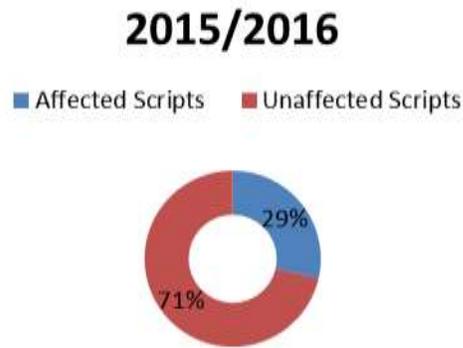
#### Rate of social media chat language used by students in formal writing

The rate of the social media chat language in students' formal writing is minimal. Each stratum has little social media chat language and it was recorded in this study that 2015/2016 had the highest number of chat language. The chart below gives the graphical representation of the rate in each stratum.



**Figure 4.** Rate of Social Media Chat Language in the Scripts Analyzed across Sessions

As figure 4 shows, the 2015/2016 session has the highest usage of social media chat language (52.63%), 2013/2014 follows in declining ranking with 17.54%, then 2016/2017 with the total number of 15.78% while 2014/2015 has the least with 14.03%. The 2015/2016 is the session with the highest social media chat language and in this session, only 29% of the total scripts have social media chat language.



**Figure 5. Showing the number of scripts affected in 2015/2016 session**

Figure 5 shows the scripts with social media languages and the ones without. It shows that majority (71%) had no chat language while 29% had chat languages. This implies that the influence of social media chat language is not solely determined by social media but by some other immediate and remote factors. These factors may include the students' pre-university training in writing and use of English language, individual ability of the students, the effectiveness of the writing courses taking immediately after university admission, and levels of addiction to social media chatting among other.

## DISCUSSION

There are three main findings in this study. The first has to do with the ability of the students in this study to avoid social media chat language when writing formally. It was then discovered that majority of the students were able to distinguish between formal and informal writing by avoiding social media chat language in their writings during the exam. This was measured by noting that only 20% (about 29) of the 143 scripts analyzed contained social media chat language. What this implies is that students rarely use social media chat language in their formal writing as they seem to be conscious of the writing context — 80% of the students had no single social media chat language in their scripts. This contradicts the findings of Omenugha (2009), who found each student in her study had at least 20 errors in their work. She, therefore, described them as a "generation in a hurry" based on this perceived careless writing habit. Similarly Mensah (2016) and Chahra (2013) reported that majority of university students face difficulty in formal writing due to overuse of social media chats. But the current study reveals that

students of mass communication in this sample rarely use social media chat language in their formal writing. It is, however, important to note that the population under study here are mass communication students whose language use competence and skills should be better than other students covered by previous studies. This, however, correlates with the finding of Belal (2014) who reported that 95% of university undergraduate students were conscious of correct grammatical structure and spelling while writing. He stressed this finding by noting that those students even make their social media statuses grammatically perfect. In essence, this study has revealed that social media chat languages would not mar students' grammatical structure and spelling usage while writing in formal context if the students have the appropriate writing competence training and skills.

Secondly, the study found that only five of the eight social media chat language were common among the students under study. For instance, the content analysis did not reveal any use of phonological approximation, letter for word representation, and vowel deletion in all the scripts examined. This reverses the general notion and some research findings that social media addiction would precipitate 100% transfer of online habits including writing to real life behaviour, just as Begaga (2016), Mensah (2016), Peter (2015) and others have noted. It also calls attention to the precept of the new media theory that social media being a feature of new media have changed how many things are done in people's life (Holmes, 2009). Our observation here is that, even when the influence of social media on human activities is uncontested, there could be other interplaying factors that limit the extent of the influence in a different situation, student level of writing competence in this case. Hence, we stress that a belief in the absolute influence of social media on human activities is like a return to the era of the magic bullet theory. Again, the autonomy, playfulness and personalization features (McQuail, 2005) enjoyed by social media users seem to be moderated by their level of language use and writing skills competence when they switch to formal writing context. Moreover, this study found that among the five social media chat language type found in the students' scripts, pronounceable spelling techniques (graphemes) has the highest usage with 40.35%. This is consistent with the finding of Belal (2014) who reported that teachers confirm that students are habituated with short forms in formal writing context. For

instance, students' scripts analysed contained expression such as *"I want to tank god"*, *"one of the pupulas"*, *"mension"*, *"gotasion mark"*, *"summry"*, etc. It can then be concluded on this premise that graphone is the most common chat language among university undergraduates in this study. This finding is perhaps unique to this study as literature seems to be silent about frequency of use of the chat language types since scholars like Oyeyinka and Akinola (2013) and Wallace (2015) have conceptualized the categorizations.

When analyzed based on session, the 2015/2016 academic session, with a total of 42 scripts, had 12 scripts containing social media chat language. This is the highest (53%) from the entire scripts containing chat language. This is also estimated as 29% of the entire scripts in that stratum. This is not as high as what is found in extant literature, for instant Belal (2014).

This study, therefore, concludes that social media do not have serious adverse effects on mass communication as reported generally about net generation students in previous studies like Begaga (2016) who found that 70% of the study population confirmed the negative effect of chatting on their writing. Hence, with 80% of the content of the script analysed not containing chat language, it can be inferred that majority of mass communication students should be able to distinguish between informal and formal writing contexts

## CONCLUSION

From the findings of this study, it can be concluded that students in communication and related department are not likely to encounter difficulty in switching from informal to formal context either online or offline. Also, when students undergo the appropriate writing competence training the influence of social media chatting on their writing would be limited. In addition to the above, social media do not possess the hypodermic needle or magic bullet powerful effect; their effects, just like those of the traditional media, are being moderated or restricted by a number of varying intervening factors depending on situation and contexts.

## Recommendations

In view of the foregoing, this study has brought forth a few policies and research-

oriented recommendations. First, it is recommended that social media effect studies of the future focus on some sort of homogeneous population so that the result can be applied within that study setting and any other population sharing its specific features.

In addition to this, universities and colleges should structure curricula to address the contemporary challenges posed on writing culture by social media. It is believed as found in this study that effective and appropriate training in writing skill and competence will automatically ward off all sorts of writing challenges be it from social media or elsewhere. Further studies may also be conducted on other categories of students, college teacher/lecturers and other stakeholders in the educational industry to aggregate their perspectives and experience on the relationship between addiction to social media chatting and students' writing culture.

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