

Perceptions of the Impact of Social Media on College Student Engagement at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

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ABSTRACT

This research study explored the impact of social media on college students' engagement at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). The study used a qualitative methodology to examine how social media influences students' social experiences, classroom engagement, and academic achievement. George Kuh's Student Engagement Theory was used as the theoretical framework. Data from interviews with 20 undergraduate students from two HBCUs in Mississippi revealed that social media enhanced social connectivity and campus involvement. However, social media had a dual impact on classroom engagement, promoting collaboration while risking distraction. The findings identified nine themes from the perceived impact of social media on college students' social experiences, classroom engagement, and academic achievement at HBCUs in Mississippi. The study's significance underscored the need for strategies to leverage the benefits of social media while mitigating drawbacks and providing valuable insights for educators and policymakers in higher education.

Keywords: social media, student engagement, HBCUs, classroom engagement, academic achievement, social experiences.

INTRODUCTION

Social media has gradually emerged as a fundamental component in higher education circles. The COVID-19 pandemic led to the increased utilization of social networking platforms among learning institutions as they switched from conventional in-class lessons to virtual learning environments to adhere to social distancing regulations imposed by the government to curb the spread of the virus (Giancola et al., 2023; Katz & Nandi, 2021). In 2020, approximately three billion people communicated through social media platforms (Iwamoto & Chun, 2020; Kemp, 2020). Many students used social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter during the pandemic to communicate, share ideas, and collaborate (Gulzar et al., 2021; Malik et al., 2020). Since 2020, more and more educators have transitioned from traditional in-person teaching to utilizing social media for instructional purposes (Stoeher et al., 2021; Ndung'u et al., 2023). Thus, social media platforms have increasingly become a vital teaching and learning tool, especially in the post-COVID-19 era.

Incorporating social media into class contexts has positive and negative implications (Alawan, 2022; Mahdiuon et al., 2019; Manu et Al., 2023). From a positive perspective, social media interactivity features can promote student engagement with peers and lecturers, leading to better learning outcomes (Alawan, 2022; Mahdiuon et al., 2019). Benefits notwithstanding, Manu et al. (2023) found that social media can adversely affect social engagement by diverting students' attention to classwork, altering sleep patterns, and exposing them to increasing bullying. Due to the potential moderating influence of emerging dynamics in higher learning environments, further research is needed to examine whether the use of social media in higher education can promote or obstruct student engagement.

STUDY PURPOSE/RESEARCH QUESTION

This qualitative study sought to understand the perceived impact of social media on college students' engagement at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). The HBCUs may better understand efficient student engagement practices using social media platforms that may or may not impact student social experiences, level of classroom engagement, and academic achievement. Therefore, the study, guided through the lens of George Kuh's Student Engagement theoretical framework, focused on the perceived influences of social media on college students' social experiences, classroom engagement, and academic achievement. Specifically, it answered three research questions:

- **RQ1** - How does social media impact college students' social experiences at HBCUs?
- **RQ2** - How does social media impact college students' level of classroom engagement at HBCUs?
- **RQ3** - How does social media impact college students' academic achievement at HBCUs?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK / LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical framework for this study was based on George Kuh's theory of student engagement. Kuh (2009) defines student engagement as "the time and effort students devote to activities empirically linked to desired outcomes of college and what institutions do to induce students to participate in these activities." The framework emphasizes individual behaviors and institutional practices that contribute to positive student outcomes, such as academic achievement, personal development, and persistence. Kuh's theory outlines two critical student engagement dimensions: academic and social engagement. Academic engagement refers to attending class, participating in discussions, completing assignments, and interacting with faculty (Kuh, 2009). Social engagement includes joining student organizations, attending campus events, and developing meaningful peer relationships. Kuh (2009) argues that high academic and social engagement levels are critical for student success in college. However, the study acknowledges that Kuh's framework was developed before the prominence of social media. Therefore, some assumptions about how this theory may apply in the current digital context had to be made. The significance of applying Kuh's theory in this study is that it provides a well-established lens through which to examine the impact of social media on student engagement at HBCUs, an area that has yet to be explored in the literature.

While several scholars have advanced multiple theories to understand critical issues surrounding student engagement in higher education (Baytiyeh, 2021; Ginting, 2021), Kuh's Student Engagement Theory provides a suitable lens for examining the relationship between social media and student engagement at HBCUs. The theory is a well-known model for

comprehending and evaluating student participation in higher education. In addition, Kuh's Student Engagement Theory posits that the amount of time and energy students spend on activities is directly related to education and development inside and outside the classroom (Ginting, 2021). The theory maintains that the more engaged students are, the more likely they are to succeed academically and personally. Kuh's approach can provide insights into how social media may affect student participation in HBCU settings. For example, social media platforms may allow students to communicate with classmates, instructors, and staff and participate in academic and social activities outside the classroom (Baytiyeh, 2021). This form of participation may foster a feeling of belonging and community on campus, which has been demonstrated to be essential in HBCU students' retention and success. Overall, Kuh's Student Engagement Theory provided a helpful framework for comprehending how social media may influence student participation at historically black colleges and universities and how this engagement may lead to academic and overall success.

Kuh argues that not all types of student interaction are equally helpful. Some kinds of participation, such as excessive social media use, may harm academic and personal growth. Spending excessive time playing games on social media or chatting with peers on non-academic issues could imply valuable class time losses for students. Consequently, such students may lose learning concentration, resulting in poor academic performance. Potential adverse implications underline the need for an effective policy to manage social media use in higher learning, which aligns with the Kuh hypothesis. For HBCUs, administrators and instructors must design rules and procedures that motivate learners to partake in activities most inclined to promote students' academic and personal goals (Pendakur et al., 2019). Thus, Kuh's Student Engagement Theory provides a valuable framework for comprehending how social media may influence student engagement at HBCUs and how participation may influence student academic and personal success (Pendakur et al., 2019).

Kuh's theory emphasizes that engagement is fundamental to student learning and success in higher education. Kuh (2009) states, "The time and energy students devote to educationally purposeful activities is the best predictor of learning and personal development." The theory is operationalized through the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), which identified critical engagement indicators, including academic challenge, learning with peers, experiences with faculty, and campus environment. It postulated three basic characteristics of student engagement components: behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement. Students' participation in educational activities inside and outside the classroom is referred to as behavioral engagement (Teng & Wang, 2021). Attending courses, participating in extracurricular activities, and engaging in academic debates with students and instructors all fall under this category. Behavioral engagement is vital for student academic performance because it allows them to interact with the learning environment (Teng & Wang, 2021). Consistent with this assumption, the Kuh Student Engagement Theory can provide valuable insights into the steps or actions that HBCUs can implement to improve student behavioral participation amid the proliferation of social media. Emotional commitment to educational experience is called emotional engagement. This dimension includes feelings of drive, contentment, and devotion to academic goals (Teng & Wang, 2021). Students must be emotionally engaged to persevere in academic endeavors and overcome various obstacles. Social media has the potential to influence student emotional commitment, especially in

classroom contexts, which underscores the need for HBCUs to develop appropriate usage policies (Teng & Wang, 2021).

The cognitive component is also vital in higher education. Based on the Kuh model, cognitive engagement implies a student's intellectual dedication to learning (Teng & Wang, 2021). Critical thinking, analysis, and problem-solving abilities are part of this dimension. Cognitive engagement enables students to comprehend the course information better and apply it to real-world situations. The three dimensions are related and have an impact on one another. For instance, emotionally involved learners may be more inclined to engage in extracurricular activities behaviorally and cognitively engage in academic work (Tang & Hew, 2022). Institutions can build supportive surroundings that promote student achievement by concentrating on the behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement elements. Higher learning institutions, especially HBCUs, can use Kuh's Student Engagement Theory to create resilient structures to avert the potential adverse effects of social media on classroom engagement.

As indicated in Table 1, engagement is a multifaceted concept analyzed through various engagement indicators identified by the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). These indicators provide a comprehensive perspective on the behaviors and practices that enhance the educational experience.

Table 1: Indicators of Behaviors and Practices for Enhancing the Educational Experience.

Indicator		Description
Academic Challenge:	§	Kuh's model underscores the significance of challenging academic work and encourages students to learn and grow.
	§	NSSE indicators propose that higher-order learning, reflective and integrative learning, learning strategies, and quantitative reasoning are crucial components of academic rigor that can lead to deeper engagement (Kuh, 2009).
Learning with Peers:	§	Collaborative learning and discussions with diverse peers are central to the Kuh framework, corresponding with NSSE indicators.
	§	The theory highlights that engagement is both an individual and a social activity, suggesting peer interactions enhance learning and development, particularly in diverse settings.
Experiences with Faculty:	§	According to Kuh (2009), interaction between students and faculty is vital for student engagement.
	§	NSSE indicators such as effective teaching practices emphasize the faculty's role in delivering content and mentoring, advising, and facilitating learning beyond the curriculum.
Campus Environment:	§	The quality of interactions and a supportive environment are NSSE themes that align with Kuh's assertion that the institutional setting contributes to fostering engagement.
	§	The theory posits that students' perceptions of the campus environment, including the extent to which they feel valued and supported, significantly impact overall engagement (Kuh, 2009).

In the context of HBCUs, social media may uniquely influence these engagement indicators. Social media platforms enable students to extend learning through peer collaboration, engage in reflective discussions, interact with faculty, and perceive the campus environment as supportive, potentially enhancing educational experience and success. This form of participation via social media may foster a sense of belonging and community on campus, which is essential for student retention and success at HBCUs. Overall, Kuh's Student Engagement Theory, complemented by NSSE indicators, offers a valuable framework for understanding how social media may impact student engagement at HBCUs, underscoring the need for further research on how this engagement may lead to student success.

The popularity of social media in higher education has increased in the past decade due to technological advances in Web 2.0 tools. These platforms have demonstrated an immense potential for teaching and learning due to the ability to facilitate online communication, document exchange, and knowledge dissemination (Hosen et al., 2021). Across the globe, higher education students use social networking sites, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok, for entertainment, communication, and knowledge sharing. Manca (2020) established that higher education students use WhatsApp, Pinterest, and Instagram to learn, especially when developing content and undertaking peer assessments. This potential makes social media networks a critical tool for higher education students.

Research also links social media to enhanced social experiences among higher education students. Ortiz et al. (2019) established that historically black college students are likely to use social media to contact and communicate with people. HBCU students may use social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to join organizations and communities and discuss their thoughts, interests, and experiences. Social media can build a feeling of belonging and community among HBCU students who would otherwise feel alone or detached (Ortiz et al., 2019). Excessive social media use might harm HBCU students' social experiences. According to research, learners who spend more time on social media sites tend to be less happy, feel lonelier, and experience more anxiety and despair (Hussien, 2022). Students should use social media in moderation and balance online and offline social activities to prevent detrimental effects on mental health and social experiences. Students can use social media platforms to share college experiences, meet new people, and discover mutual interests, which can help them feel more connected to the campus community (Hussien, 2022). Thus, students can maximize the advantages of social media while avoiding its potential disadvantages by utilizing it sparingly and combining it with offline social activities.

Social media has become a powerful tool for promoting classroom engagement among higher education students. Paulsen and McCormick (2020) noted that student engagement is one of the most crucial elements for success in higher education. Student participation is particularly vital at HBCUs given the inherent difficulties that many Black students have in higher education, such as financial limitations, cultural isolation, and prejudice. In recent years, social media has become a potent instrument for higher education community development, communication, and cooperation (Malik et al., 2019). Students, professors, and staff have widely embraced social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, opening up new options for interaction and learning. Social media can help students and professors communicate and work together more effectively by offering a forum for exchanging knowledge, ideas, and resources (Malik et al., 2019). Thus, social media can also build online communities and support

networks, giving students who would otherwise feel lonely a feeling of connection and community.

Available research highlights social media's negative and positive implications for higher education students' academic progress (Islam et al., 2021; Malik et al., 2020). While social media may help students and teachers communicate and share information, it can also be a distraction from academic work and waste time. According to one study, excessive social media usage can contribute to poor academic performance, including lower GPAs and test scores (Islam et al., 2021). Similarly, Malik et al. (2020) research found that students who spend more time on social media are less likely to participate in deep learning and are more inclined to put off academic obligations. However, other evidence indicates that social media can improve academic performance. For instance, research discovered that utilizing social media to exchange information about course content and work together on group projects can increase marks and improve overall academic performance (Iglesias-Pradas et al., 2021). Social media can increase student involvement with the information they are learning, subsequently improving comprehension and idea memory. The influence of social media on academic accomplishment may differ based on a student's self-regulation and time management level. Students who successfully balance social media use with academic duties are less likely to suffer academic consequences.

METHOD

Qualitative methods were employed in this study to explore the impact of social media on student engagement among college students, particularly within HBCUs. The approach was chosen for its ability to capture rich, detailed narratives and provide a deeper understanding of students' lived experiences with social media. While Kuh's Student Engagement Theory, derived from the NSSE, offers valuable quantitative insights into behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement, it needed a specific focus on social media's role. Qualitative research fills this gap by allowing for an in-depth exploration of how social media influences these engagement dimensions. Through semi-structured interviews and static analysis, this study uncovered how social media platforms facilitate academic participation, emotional connection, and cognitive investment. The methodology aligns with the need for a comprehensive understanding of modern student engagement, including digital interactions, providing theoretical and practical insights into how social media can be leveraged to enhance student experiences and outcomes in higher education.

Site Selection and Population

University A and College B were selected as the sites for the study. The study sites comprised two historically rural Black institutions in Mississippi that utilized social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, as instructional platforms. University A, established in 1950 in the heart of the Mississippi Delta, served as one of the primary research sites for this study. It offers a high-quality education with a total undergraduate enrollment of 1,694. During the 2022-2023 semester-based academic calendar year, the university ranked in the Regional Universities South edition of Best Colleges. Sixty-three percent of students were commuters, while approximately 37% live on campus. About 54% of the students were from surrounding Delta counties, and 25% were from out-of-state, with a smaller population of international students. In addition, the university provides comprehensive undergraduate and graduate programs in education, arts, sciences, health, and related professions.

College B, founded in 1866 and considered the second-oldest private college in Mississippi, served as the second research site for this study. The institution is a private, historically Black college affiliated with the United Methodist Church, which is one of ten HBCUs established before 1868 and still operational. College B's total undergraduate population currently stands at 623. The institution offers associate and bachelor's degree programs in education, humanities, sciences, mathematics, and business.

Sample Selection

The researcher employed purposeful sampling, a common technique in qualitative research for identifying and examining cases related to a specific phenomenon, to select participants. Crouch and McKenzie (2006) proposed that less than 20 participants in a qualitative study help a researcher build and maintain a close relationship with participants, improve the “open” and “frank” exchange of information, and help mitigate some of the bias and validity threats inherent in qualitative research. Creswell (2017) noted that the purposeful sampling method is a nonprobability sampling method that is selected based on the characteristics of a population and the study objectives—the non-probability sampling process aimed to select a minimum of 20 undergraduate students (10 per institution). Purposeful sampling was suitable for this study because it enabled the researchers to select the participants with the attributes and characteristics to meet the study criteria. To ensure only students with the desired qualities or attributes were selected, three-pronged inclusion criteria were established to guide the process. Participants for the study met the following inclusion criteria: (a) had to be undergraduate students enrolled full-time at one of the participating institutions; (b) must have participated in one campus program or activity; and (c) must have used social media to engage in and out of the classroom. Participants excluded from the study were students who did not attend either HBCU full-time as an undergraduate student, did not use social media academically and socially, and did not engage in campus programs and activities. The research identified participants through the Student Leadership and Engagement, University College, and Academic Affairs offices at University A. College B participants were identified through the Student Affairs and Admissions office. An invitation flier describing the focus of the study was shared throughout campuses and on social media platforms.

Data Collection

Before recruitment, the researchers secured the required approvals from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the relevant institutions. Coordination with various departments facilitated the delivery of concise informational sessions outlining the study purpose, process, and ethical considerations during recruitment. In-depth interviews were conducted with the recruited participants. The 60-90 minutes interviews were used to (1) greet the interviewees and remind them of the purpose of the interview, (2) record the participant names along with the time, date, and place of the interview, (3) seek permission to record the conversation and 4) asking the actual and probing questions. Each participant was interviewed virtually (via Zoom) for 60-90 minutes, providing a truthful understanding of the phenomena for the study. Before the interview, the participants received an official email with details regarding the research and a letter of consent to review, sign, and return by email if participating in the study. The interview guide, formulated based on the research questions, was disseminated to each participant and the interviews were conducted in environments selected by the participants to ensure a comfortable and conducive atmosphere for discourse. Comprehensive field notes were meticulously recorded, detailing observations, interactions, and contextual environmental

factors. Each interview document was systematically processed, including precise information on dates, times, locations, and the formats of interactions with the participants. Audio recordings and transcription of all interviews were executed verbatim to ensure fidelity and accuracy for subsequent data analysis. All recordings and transcriptions were securely stored to uphold participant confidentiality.

Data Analysis Procedures

Five steps were involved in the qualitative data analysis process: (1) preparing and organizing the data; (2) studying and exploring the data; (3) developing initial codes; (4) evaluating the codes and revising or grouping them into emerging themes; and (5) cohesively presenting emerging themes. To understand the ideas being addressed, the researchers read and extensively reviewed all participant responses and the data transcribed from the interviews. Key phrases or words relating to the phenomena were extracted from each transcript. The key phrases were used to create themes from the meanings and then divided into theme clusters and categories. After transcribing into a narrative format, handwritten notes were converted into digital interview notes. The data were gathered, coded, categorized, and examined to determine any common themes. Structural coding was used to identify emerging themes. According to Saldana (2016), structural coding “applies a content-based or conceptual phrase representing a topic of inquiry to a segment of data that relates to a specific research question used to frame the interview” (p. 98). The researchers read the interview transcripts thoroughly to uncover common trends and patterns. This process revealed several codes related to the association between social media and student engagement. In line with Saldana (2016), a coded color system was utilized to ensure proper alignment by highlighting specific responses, research questions, probes, and follow-ups. Using a color-coded method for categorization allowed the researchers to identify themes and conduct a preliminary analysis. The codifying process yielded unique codes throughout this study. The researchers analyzed these codes repeatedly to unearth inherent categories. The codes were then grouped into categories based on observed similarities and differences. This process resulted in initial themes capturing critical insights in the codes. The preliminary thematic patterns were subsequently examined to generate final themes by combining similar ideas. Moreover, the number of relevant phrases in categories associated with the research questions were examined to identify themes. In addition, recoding and recategorizing were conducted to ensure careful attention to the language and reflection of the developing patterns and meaning of human experiences. The emerging themes were defined carefully to reflect the ideas and opinions expressed in the transcribed interview transcripts.

Description of Participants and Sample

The 20 study participants were undergraduate male and female students aged between 18 and 26 years, with an average age of 22. Thirty-five percent ($n=7$) of the participants were under 21, while 65% ($n=13$) were aged 21 and older. The majority (25.0%, $n=5$) of the respondents were 22 years old, with most older participants affiliated with College B, as evident in Table 2. Additionally, as indicated in Table 3, 50.0% ($n=10$) of the participants were male, while the female learners accounted for the remaining 50.0% ($n=10$), suggesting that the sample was gender-representative. Forty-five percent ($n=9$) of the participants were senior students in the respective learning institutions and had relevant social media experience. Additionally, 10.0% ($n=2$) of the respondents were freshmen, 15.0% ($n=3$) were sophomores, and 30.0% ($n=6$) were juniors. About 65.0% ($n=13$) of the respondents were from the local state of Mississippi,

in cities such as Jackson, Tunica, Greenwood, Mound Bayou, Greenville, Holy Springs, Cleveland, Rolling Fork, and Itta Bena. The remaining 35.0% (n=7) came from other states, such as Tennessee, North Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Arkansas.

Table 2: Description of Research Participants.

Participants (P)	Institution	Age	Gender	Academic Year	City of Origin	State
Participant Alpha	University A	18	F	First	Jackson	MS
Participant Beta	University A	19	M	Second	Jackson	MS
Participant Gamma	University A	21	F	Fourth	Chattanooga	TN
Participant Delta	University A	21	F	Fourth	Tunica	MS
Participant Epsilon	University A	22	M	Fourth	Greenwood	MS
Participant Zeta	University A	20	M	Third	Greenwood	MS
Participant Eta	University A	19	F	First	Durham	NC
Participant Theta	University A	22	M	Fourth	Mound Bayou	MS
Participant Iota	University A	20	F	Third	Greenville	MS
Participant Kappa	University A	23	F	Third	Atlanta	GA
Participant Lambda	College B	25	F	Third	Little Rock	AR
Participant Mu	College B	26	M	Fourth	Holy Springs	MS
Participant Nu	College B	22	F	Fourth	Memphis	TN
Participant Xi	College B	23	F	Second	Greenville	MS
Participant Omicron	College B	25	M	Fourth	Mound Bayou	MS
Participant Pi	College B	19	M	Second	Cleveland	MS
Participant Rho	College B	21	M	Fourth	Huntsville	AL
Participant Sigma	College B	22	F	Fourth	Memphis	TN
Participant Tau	College B	22	M	Third	Rolling Fork	MS
Participant Upsilon	College B	23	M	Fourth	Itta Bena	MS

Table 3: Demographics of Participants.

Demographics	Variables	n	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	10	50
	Female	10	50
Age Range	18-20	6	30
	21-23	11	55
	24-27	3	15
Institutional Affiliation	University A	10	50
	College B	10	50
Academic Year	First	2	10
	Second	3	15
	Third	5	25
	Fourth	10	50

Phenomenological Analysis

The study participants provided insightful responses to the interview questions, generating considerable themes regarding the impact of social media on college students' social experiences, classroom engagement, and academic achievement at HBCUs.

Table 4: Category of Themes: Research Question 1

Research Question	Themes
RQ1: How does social media impact college students' social experiences at HBCUs?	1.1: Impact on Social Connectivity 1.2: Social Engagement Platforms, Trends, and Influencers 1.3: Formation of Social Groups and Communities

➤ **RQ1 asked: How does social media impact college students' social experiences at HBCUs?**

Theme 1.1: Impact on Social Connectivity

Theme 1.1 focused on the impact of social connectivity as an aspect of the engagement indicators of learning with peers and campus environment within the George Kuh Student Engagement framework. Participants suggested that social media fundamentally transformed social experiences as students at HBCUs. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter were used to broaden social circles and inform students about campus events and opportunities. Participants actively used social media and felt more integrated into the campus community. They often learn of events, discussions, and opportunities for activism and engagement through these platforms. Participant Beta stated, "Students who heavily use social media seem to have broader social circles and are more plugged into campus happenings." Participants heavily utilize social media platforms and often exhibited a more extensive and diverse social network. Frequent online interactions facilitated connections with a broader array of peers, transcending typical boundaries such as academic disciplines, year groups, and extracurricular interests. Participants increased engagement by broadening social circles and enhancing awareness and involvement in campus events and activities. These participants were typically well-informed about upcoming events, news, and opportunities, allowing participation in the campus community. Connectivity and awareness often positioned them as nodes in the social fabric of the higher education institution, bridging various groups and contributing to a vibrant, interconnected environment. The idea that social media enhances the connectivity of students by enabling them to stay informed about campus events, participate more in activities, and feel more connected within the HBCU community was corroborated by participants Nu, Omicron, Xi, Pi, Rho, Sigma, Upsilon, and Tau.

Social media provided a platform for students at HBCUs to connect and communicate with each other. Participants considered social media platforms essential for facilitating relationships and communication among the tertiary learners, enabling them to stay more informed and wellengaged with various activities and events within the campus. Participant Nu, a 22-year-old senior, underscored the role of social media in enhancing social interactions, stating:

Social media has positively impacted my social interactions by helping me connect with classmates and join groups where we share academic and extracurricular interests. It's an excellent tool for building our community spirit.

She further noted that active social media users "tend to be more informed about campus events and more engaged in school activities." Participant Omicron echoed this sentiment, observing, "Students active on social media are generally more connected and participatory in campus life, creating a vibrant and engaged community atmosphere."

Theme 1.2: Social Engagement Platforms, Trends, and Influencers

Theme 1.2 focused on platform-specific social engagement, the influence of social media trends, and influencers as engagement indicators of learning with peers and the campus environment. Study findings indicated that different social media platforms shaped social engagement, offering students distinct social experiences. For example, Instagram focused on visual storytelling, with students sharing photos and videos that showcased involvement in campus events or personal interests. Twitter encouraged real-time conversations on current events, making it a platform for activism and advocacy. Conversely, TikTok was known for its entertainment value, where students can share fun and creative content. Participant Delta said, "Instagram is more focused on business, while on TikTok, I see students mostly having fun." Participant Upsilon said, "Twitter and Instagram are essential for promoting campus events." Despite these differences, each platform is a valuable tool for students to connect and engage with peers.

The social experiences of students using social media at HBCUs varied depending on the platforms they primarily engaged in. Participant Alpha stated, "Students who are more active on Twitter might engage in more real-time conversations about current events or trending topics, fostering a sense of immediacy and interconnectedness." On the other hand, those who favor platforms such as Instagram might focus more on visual storytelling and building personal brands. Participant Epsilon stated, "Social media platforms like Snapchat and Twitter often reveal a distinct difference in user behavior." Users can remain anonymous on platforms like Twitter; individuals tend to express themselves boldly and authentically, sometimes leading to more candid and uninhibited interactions. Despite these differences, it is essential to note that social media served as a common ground for connecting and engaging with peers within the HBCU community.

Participants suggested that social media trends and influencers shape cultural norms, fashion choices, and social behaviors at HBCUs. Influencers manifested in several ways, affecting how students perceived themselves and peers, made lifestyle choices, and engaged in the campus community. In addition, influencers' standards on social media platforms reflected broader social trends that contributed to the cultural fabric of HBCUs. Participant Kappa said: "Influencers can influence fashion choices, cultural norms, and even academic pursuits." They saw media as a trendsetter that resonated with the student community, influencing lifestyle choices, fashion, and academic pursuits. Participants felt these influences were only sometimes positive. Some participants pointed to pressure to conform to unrealistic standards set by influencers. Participant Delta commented on the significant impact of social media influencers on student behavior. He stated:

In my opinion, people of this sort, like vloggers, significantly influence students. I will say this because you will see on social media or YouTube where the majority of these students, I mean, a majority of these individuals, have houses, cars, and a lifestyle that you're not used to seeing a 21-year-old or anyone in their twenties live. So, this right here influences many students to push harder, although it's okay. They're doing it for the wrong reasons. They're doing it based on someone else's life.

Similarly, Participant Gamma articulated the detrimental effects of these influences, stating: "It's become a lot of pressure on a particular student, which could possibly cause mental health

issues.” Participant Epsilon elaborated, noting that social media trends and influencers significantly shape the social dynamics among students at HBCUs. She mentioned:

Social media influencers and trends play a significant role in shaping social dynamics among students at HBCUs. Influencers with large followings can influence the campus community’s fashion choices, cultural norms, and academic pursuits. Trends and viral challenges circulated on social media platforms can quickly gain traction and influence student behavior, shaping the overall social atmosphere and dynamics within the HBCU community.

Theme 1.3: Formation of Social Groups and Communities

Theme 1.3 focused on forming social groups and community engagement indicators of learning with peers and the campus environment within the George Kuh Student Engagement Theoretical framework. The study revealed that social media has become instrumental in forming social groups and communities at HBCUs with learning environments. Participant Theta pointed out that “social media influences the formation of social groups by providing platforms for students to connect based on shared interests or identities.” Platforms such as Facebook and Instagram offer spaces where students can connect with others based on shared interests, backgrounds, or activities. Students could join group chats centered around academic majors, follow Instagram pages dedicated to cultural organizations, or participate in Twitter conversations about campus events. These virtual communities help students find a “tribe” within the campus, fostering a sense of belonging and solidarity. Participant Beta emphasized the role of social media in connecting students with like-minded individuals. He shared, “Social media helps students find tribe and feel like they belong. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter make it easy for students to connect based on shared interests, backgrounds, or activities.” Participant Gamma provided a specific example of how social media platforms like GroupMe support forming social groups. She stated, “As a student who entered college during a global pandemic, I relied heavily on different social media platforms in order to ‘virtually meet’ my other peers in our freshman class.” Participant Eta highlighted how social media influencers and trends shape cultural norms and social dynamics at HBCUs. She noted, “Influencers, especially those from within the HBCU campuses or aligned with values, can shape cultural norms and trends among students.”

The research findings revealed that social media fostered a sense of community and improved engagement among learners at HBCUs, allowing them to collaborate with peers and faculty members, support each other, and build stronger relationships. This perception was evidenced by Participant Xi stating, “Social media has been a crucial tool in building my network within the HBCU. It has helped me connect with peers and faculty, creating opportunities for collaboration and support that enhance my social and academic life.”

Table 5: Categories of Themes: Research Question 2

Research Question	Themes	Engagement Indicators
RQ2: How does social media impact college students' level of classroom engagement at HBCUs?	2.1: Managing Academic Distraction 2.2: Academic Engagement 2.3: Navigating Personal and Academic Life	Academic Challenges Experiences with Faculty

➤ **RQ2 asked: How does social media impact college students' level of classroom engagement at HBCUs?**

Theme 2.1: Managing Academic Distraction

Theme 2.1 focused on managing academic distraction as an aspect of engagement indicators of academic challenges and experiences with faculty within the framework of Kuh Student Engagement Theory. The study revealed that social media can be a significant source of distraction for students during lectures. Participants noted that checking notifications or scrolling through social media feeds often distracts class discussions and lectures. Participant Alpha acknowledged this issue by stating, "Yes, I do find myself occasionally distracted by social media during class lectures or discussions. The temptation to check notifications or scroll through feeds can be strong especially when lectures are long or topics are challenging."

Similarly, Participant Gamma described how social media usage can interfere with academic responsibilities. He stated, "Social media interaction can make it harder for me to interact in class, and I say this when certain things are going on. I'm more drawn to my phone versus what's going on." Gamma's narrative illustrated the competing priorities that social media creates, often diverting attention away from classroom activities and discussions.

Participant Delta also highlighted the pervasive nature of social media distractions and sharing. She said, "I will say it depends. I have days where I can sit in class and not want to look at social media, and I can look at social media, but then I have days where I'm more drawn to my phone versus what's going on." Participant Alpha said, "Social media usage can affect my ability to concentrate and actively participate in classroom activities." The destructive effect of social media usage can result in reduced classroom participation, lower comprehension, and decreased engagement. While students strive to stay focused, the constant temptation to check phones impacts their ability to concentrate and participate actively.

Theme 2.2: Academic Engagement

Theme 2.2 focused on faculty-student interactions on social media, managing social media usage for academic success as aspects of engagement indicators of academic challenges and experiences with faculty. The study revealed that faculty members on social media were perceived as more approachable, fostering a sense of community and support. Participant Beta said, "Faculty member's active presence on social media can positively impact students' perception of accessibility and approachability." Positive interactions with faculty on platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram can encourage students to seek academic or professional guidance, enhancing the learning experience. Participants suggested that interactions reduced barriers and created virtual spaces where students feel valued and supported.

Participants believed social media interactions with professors and classmates outside the classroom impacted campus experiences by enhancing learning processes and facilitating informal social and scholarly discussions. They described how online networking with colleagues and faculty members fostered a sense of community and belonging and enhanced access to academic and non-academic resources. Participant Alpha said, "I believe that social media interactions with professors and classmates outside of the classroom impact my overall learning experience." In addition, Participant Beta said: "Social media interactions with professors and peers provide an additional avenue for communication and collaboration,

allowing for more informal discussions, quick clarifications, and the sharing of resources that enrich my understanding of course materials." Participants Alpha, Omicron, and Xi expressed similar views. The research results suggest that social media interactions with lecturers and co-learners enhance students' overall social well-being and academic experiences at HBCUs by increasing access to course contents, fostering community, and reaching the faculty.

Furthermore, the research established that the students at HBCUs perceived professors' active online engagement as more beneficial to the learners. The perception was corroborated by Participant Alpha, who remarked: "Absolutely, faculty members' active presence on social media can positively impact students' perception of accessibility and approachability. When professors engage authentically and responsively with students on social media platforms, it can break down barriers, foster a sense of connection, and create a more welcoming learning environment." Participant Beta concurred, adding that lecturers increased involvement in digital interactions "creates a more informal and accessible way for students to engage with professors outside of the classroom, fostering a sense of community and support within the HBCU community." Participants Gamma, Delta, and Epsilon expressed similar views. The research results suggest that Students at HBCUs positively perceive faculty members' active presence on social media because it enhances learning experiences.

Theme: 2.3 Navigating Personal and Academic Life

Theme 2.3 focused on navigating boundaries between personal and academic life as an aspect of engagement indicators of academic challenges and experiences with faculty within the framework of George Kuh's Student Engagement Theory. The study established that students and faculty are conscious of maintaining professional boundaries on social media to avoid conflicts between personal and academic interactions. Clear communication and mutual respect are crucial in navigating these boundaries effectively. Privacy settings and appropriate channels for academic inquiries help ensure that interactions remain respectful and professional.

The participants were also asked whether they had encountered any challenges or concerns regarding the boundaries between personal and academic interactions with faculty on social media platforms. The study findings suggest that the tertiary students' key challenges and concerns at HBCUs included difficulty maintaining boundaries between academic and personal responsibilities and uncomfortable online engagements. For instance, Participant Alpha observed: "It is important for both students and faculty to be mindful of privacy settings, professional conduct, and the distinction between personal and professional communication channels. Clear communication and mutual respect can help navigate these boundaries effectively." Additionally, Participant Gamma talked about uncomfortable social networking, saying: "The interaction with a donor during an online popcorn fundraiser I hosted with my sorority sisters made me feel uncomfortable because this individual frequently reacts romantically to the photos that I post on my Facebook story." Based on the research findings, students at HBCUs are concerned about the thin academic-personal boundary in social media usage, which potentially predisposes them to scams and sexual exploits.

The participants thought balancing digital engagements and coursework is critical for ensuring students' social well-being and academic success at HBCUs. For attendance, Participant Beta pointed out: "It is all about finding that balance and using social media as a tool for productivity

rather than procrastination.' Participants Alpha, Theta, and Lambda also echoed Participant Beta view. For example, Theta observed: "I try to strike a balance by using social media as a reward for completing academic tasks rather than allowing it to detract from my responsibilities." Social media can inspire students at HBCUs to participate in class discussions and complete assignments if they find the necessary balance between online and classroom engagements.

Table 6: Categories of Themes: Research Question 3

Research Question	Themes	Engagement Indicators
RQ3: How does social media impact college students' academic achievement at HBCUs?	3.1: Academic Distraction and Performance 3.2: Peer Comparison and Mental Health Challenges 3.3: Inspiration, Motivation, Faculty Support, and Academic Success through Social Media	High-Impact Practices

➤ **RQ3 asked: How does social media impact college students' academic achievement at HBCUs?**

Theme 3.1 Academic Distraction and Performance

Theme 3.1 focused on academic distraction and performance as aspects of the engagement indicator of high-impact practices with faculty within the George Kuh Student Engagement Theoretical framework. The research findings suggest that students who frequently use social media during lectures often show lower academic performance. This behavior affects the ability to retain information, participate actively, and perform well on assignments or exams. Some participants noticed a clear correlation between frequent social media usage during class and reduced academic success.

The interviewers asked the participants if they had noticed any variations in academic performance between colleagues who frequently consumed social media content during class and those who refrained. The research results indicated that the respondents noted a correlation between social media usage and academic performances among learners at HBCUs, with those who regularly engage in the activity exhibiting poor learning practices and outcomes compared to those who abstain. For instance, Participant Alpha noted an association between frequent online networking and lower academic achievement: "Students who are constantly on phones during lectures often struggle to retain information, participate actively, and perform well on assessments." In contrast, those who forego digital engagement during lectures and other academic sessions tend to be "more focused, attentive, and successful academically." Furthermore, the interviewees noted that too much online presence caused absenteeism among tertiary learners in historically black institutions. This notion was corroborated by Participant Zeta, who noted that he had "observed that students who are highly engaged on social media are often absent from class or tend to skip classes frequently." Therefore, the research findings suggest that regular social media engagement adversely impacts students' academic performance at HBCUs by limiting attention and classroom participation.

However, the research findings also indicated that heavy social media used by undergraduate students at HBCUs may increase engagement in campus activities as they became more aware of the occurrences. As an illustration, Participant Kappa pointed out, "Students who are active

on platforms like Facebook and Instagram tend to have larger social networks and may be more involved in campus activities." Such learners often have more opportunities to connect with peers outside of class, share experiences, and engage in online discussions. On the other hand, Participant Kappa noted that "students who don't use social media as frequently may rely more on face-to-face interactions or other forms of communication to stay connected." Thus, regular users of social media at HBCUs tend to be more aware of campus events than those who rarely network on digital platforms. This assertion was corroborated by Participant Pi, noting that: "Students who use social media know more about what happening on campus and get more involved." Therefore, the findings suggest that heavy consumers of social media content at HBCUs benefit more from the activity than those who do not.

Theme 3.2: Peer Comparison and Mental Health Challenges

Theme 3.2 focused on peer comparison and mental health challenges as aspects of the engagement indicator of high-impact practices with faculty within the George Kuh Student Engagement framework. The study established that constantly comparing themselves to curated online personas can lead to feelings of inadequacy, imposter syndrome, and anxiety among students. Participant Tau said: "The pressure to look perfect on social media can be overwhelming and sometimes makes real interactions feel less genuine." Social media can exacerbate these challenges, creating pressure to conform to unrealistic standards and negatively affecting mental well-being.

Thus, increased access to social media information and regular consumption of its content can subject students at HBCUs to peer pressure to attain and maintain a curated online persona. Additionally, regular online content consumption adversely impacted the learners' health and wellbeing. Peer pressure was a significant concern raised by the respondents. For instance, Participant Sigma noted that "the pressure to appear perfect on social media can be stressful and detract from real interactions." Moreover, Participant Upsilon thought that "excessive use of social media can lead to anxiety, depression, social isolation, and harm academic performance." Additionally, regular usage of social media may also predispose students to online risks, such as cyberbullying. Therefore, despite the social networking opportunities associated with social media, the study findings indicate that excessive usage may also be detrimental to tertiary learners at HBCU campuses.

However, the research findings suggest that the emotional issues associated with social media usage may be prevented if the students at HBCUs engage responsibly. For instance, the participant's responses imply that they had observed several variations in academic performance and classroom engagement among students who had positive interactions with faculty on social media compared to those who did not. The respondents identified higher levels of student classroom engagement, enhanced academic performance, and increased sense of community as the primary outcomes of the positive online interactions between the tertiary learners and professors. For example, Participant Omicron noted: "Students who interact positively with faculty on social media often show higher engagement and academic interest, leading to better academic performance." Based on the results, positive social media usage has a significant potential for enhancing the learning experience and improving students' academic performance at HBCUs.

Theme 3.3: Inspiration, Motivation, Faculty Support, and Academic Success through Social Media

Theme 3.3 focused on inspiration, motivation, faculty support, and academic success through social media as aspects of the engagement indicator of high-impact practices with faculty within the George Kuh Student Engagement framework. The study findings indicate that positive interactions on social media with peers and influencers can motivate students to participate actively in class discussions and complete assignments. Seeing classmates share insights or achievements can inspire students to engage in academic pursuits and set ambitious goals.

The interviewees thought social media could inspire or distract tertiary learners at HBCUs, depending on how they utilize the technology. For instance, Participant Alpha observed that the influence of online networking on her motivation to engage in class discussions and complete assignments varied. According to her, "seeing peers share insights or achievements on social media can be a source of inspiration and motivation to engage in academic pursuits actively. In addition, Participant Beta observed: "Seeing classmates discussing interesting topics or sharing helpful resources on social media can be a source of inspiration and motivation." On the other hand, excessive comparison or exposure to negative content on social media can sometimes dampen my motivation or self-confidence." Overall, students at HBCU campuses strived to maintain a healthy balance between online and offline activities, prioritizing academic goals while staying connected with social networks.

Furthermore, social media interactions with faculty provide academic support and help students feel more connected to instructors. For instance, Participant Beta said: "Faculty member's active presence on social media can positively impact students' perception of accessibility and approachability." Faculty members who share supplemental materials, host live Q&A sessions, or create dedicated class groups on social media can contribute positively to students' academic success. The participants identified several ways professors at HBCUs can leverage social media to enhance student engagement in the classroom. For instance, the university dons can create dedicated social media platforms to facilitate class discussions among learners. This idea was espoused by Participant Alpha's narrative, stating that: "Professors can leverage social media by creating dedicated class groups or pages on platforms like Facebook or Discord where students can ask questions, share resources, and engage in discussions outside of class time." Additionally, they can utilize online communities to share relevant articles, videos, or discussion prompts related to course material, sparking interest and facilitating deeper exploration of course topics. Moreover, live-streaming or recording lectures and posting them on platforms like YouTube can also allow students to review content. In addition, the participant observed that professors could incorporate multimedia content into pedagogical practices and real-life examples from social media into course content to enhance student engagement in classroom activities. They could also foster scholarly discussions through online communities to stimulate the learners' active participation. Participant Beta supported this perspective by stating: "Professors can use social media to enhance student engagement by creating class-specific groups or pages where students can discuss course materials, ask questions, and share resources. They can also use platforms like Twitter or Instagram to share relevant articles, videos, or announcements related to fields of study, sparking discussions and keeping students informed outside of the classroom." Furthermore, Participant Theta noted that "incorporating multimedia content such as videos or infographics can make learning more interactive and accessible." Participant Delta added that "bringing viral

stories from social media into the classroom can enhance interaction during class discussions." Moreover, Participant Beta suggested that the lecturers at historically black tertiary learning institutions could "utilize platforms like Twitter or Instagram to pose thought-provoking questions, share real-world examples related to course content, and encourage students to participate in online discussions." Thus, social media provides professors with many innovative opportunities to foster student engagement in the classroom at HBCUs.

CONCLUSION

Social media use by students at HBCUs can positively or negatively impact the learners depending on how responsibly they interact with peers and faculty. While it enhances connectivity, engagement, and motivation, it also poses challenges like distraction, mental health issues, and blurred boundaries between personal and academic life. Social media usage among students at HBCUs enhances social experiences and encourages classroom engagement by positively influencing study habits, leading to better academic outcomes. Consequently, navigating these complexities requires a balanced approach, leveraging the positive aspects of social media while mitigating its challenges. Professors at historically black tertiary learning institutions can foster online social networking among learners by creating dedicated social media platforms for class discussions and sharing relevant instructional content and course materials through social media. Additionally, HBCU faculty must incorporate multimedia content into pedagogical practices, integrate real-life examples from social media into course content, and foster scholarly discussions through online communities. Implementing these strategies can help HBCUs stay abreast of technology-driven pedagogical trends, improve students' campus experience, motivate class engagement, and foster better academic outcomes. This qualitative study generated valuable insights into the influences of social media usage on the social campus experiences, classroom engagement, and academic performance of students at HBCUs. The study findings suggest that students, faculty, and HBCUs benefit substantially from social media platforms if implemented effectively and responsibly. Leveraging the potential of social media platforms to enhance students' social experiences, classroom engagement, and academic success at historically black tertiary learning institutions requires a concerted implementation effort involving various relevant stakeholders, including policymakers and school administrators. For instance, policymakers may foster successful implementation by formulating the necessary guidelines for ensuring responsible usage and addressing unethical practices, such as cyberbullying, and malpractices, such as the dissemination of fake news and manipulation by social media influencers. The managers of HBCUs can support students and faculty's successful adoption of social media by implementing the formulated policies and providing the necessary support, including offering training on online networking techniques and counseling services to the student community.

The study's strengths include its focus on an under-researched demographic, providing valuable insights for improving student engagement at HBCUs. The qualitative approach allowed for a deeper understanding of students' experiences. However, the methodological design, with its small sample size, limits the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, George Kuh's Student Engagement Theory, developed before the prominence of social media, required assumptions about its applicability to the current digital context.

Reflecting on the research process, researchers recognized the evolving nature of social media and its pervasive impact on student engagement. Conducting this study has underscored the

need for continuous adaptation and revaluation of educational theories to remain relevant in an increasingly digital world. This research has enhanced our understanding of the intricate balance between leveraging technology for educational benefits and managing its potential distractions. The insights gained from this study will inform future work and contributions to the field of education, particularly in the context of enhancing student engagement through thoughtful integration of social media.

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