ABSU *Journal of Arts, Management, Education, Law and Social Sciences*.
Vol. 8&9; 111 - 118, 2018/2019 www.absujamelss.org

INCORPORATING SOCIAL MEDIA AS MLEARNING TOOLS FOR TEACHING DIGITAL LEARNERS IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS: BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES

Ayeni, J. O.
Department of Curriculum and Teacher Education
Faculty of Education, Abia State University, Uturu

Abstract
Social media, once relegated to the realm of digital interaction and entertainment, has transcended its original purpose to emerge as a potent tool in the educational landscape, particularly in higher institutions. Incorporating social media as mlearning tools for teaching digital learners in tertiary institutions harnesses its ubiquity among students to enhance learning experiences. This allows the extension of classroom discussions to a broader and more flexible environment. Moreover, social media equips students with digital competencies that are increasingly demanded in the modern workforce. The relationship between social media as teaching tools and connectivism theory is quite significant. Although, incorporating social media as teaching tools in the digital age comes with challenges as tertiary educators face the challenge of engaging a generation of learners who are deeply intertwined with technology. Other challenges include digital divide and inequality, distractions, cyber bully among others. Nevertheless, the benefits are overwhelming.

Keywords: Social Media, mLearning tools, Digital learners, Tertiary Institutions, Benefits, Challenges

Introduction
Social media refers to online platforms and websites that enable communication and information exchange among individuals or groups. It plays a significant role as a mobile learning platform as it enables accessibility, engagement, collaboration and personalization among others. The world is experiencing a wave of social and technological transformation as the society is becoming more oriented towards the usage of Information communication and Technology (ICT) (Isah, Omoyajowo and Aladesusi 2017). This transformation is especially evident in the teaching of undergraduates, where the integration of social media as mlearning tool for teaching has revolutionized traditional pedagogical approaches.

Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN), (2013) in her National Policy on Education affirmed that the goal of teacher education in Nigeria includes inculcating the spirit of enquiry and creativity in teachers as well as providing them with the intellectual and professional background that is capable of helping them in their assignments and make them adaptable to changing situations.

The development of technology towards the end of the 20th century has made possible the emergence of the internet and satellite which led to what is called social media (Afolabi & Nwaezuke, 2017). Consequently, the ubiquity of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, and Instagram has facilitated a seamless blend of academic discourse and social interaction. According to Pack (2011), mlearning refers to the use of mobile or wireless devices for the purpose of learning while on the move. This is why Izyani and Mohamed (2016) maintained that knowledge can be found everywhere, anytime and in various formats.

In a study on growing the use of social media in education, Ferriman (2013) reported that 78.9% believe the use of e-learning and mobile technologies has increased the teacher and student communication. These platforms offer a plethora of functionalities that are conducive to educational purposes, including content sharing, real-time feedback, collaborative learning, and the creation of academic communities. Ike and Ihebereme (2008) asserted that it is believed the use of technology will revolutionize teaching methods. The interactive nature of social

media aligns with the learning preferences of the digital native generation, fostering an engaging and participatory learning environment.

Social media's capacity for instant communication and information dissemination makes it an invaluable asset for educators. Sayan (2016) observed that digital communication among students and teachers has become popular during the last decade through various social channels such as e-Mail, SMS, Twitter, Facebook, and recently WhatsApp. It enables the distribution of course materials, announcements, and scholarly articles with unprecedented speed and reach. Today's teachers have to learn to communicate in the language and styles of their students and as educators, we need to be thinking about how to teach legacy and future content in the language of Digital Natives (Prensky, 2001).

It is imperative that tertiary educators incorporate social media as teaching tools as it promotes active learning, fosters collaboration, and broadens access to resources and expert networks. (Baran, 2014) asserts that tertiary educators need to go beyond the tools' potential to explore pedagogical benefits of mlearning within their own content areas. The visual and multimedia capabilities of social media platforms cater to diverse learning styles. Educators can leverage videos, infographics, and live streams to present complex concepts in a more digestible and relatable manner. This not only enhances understanding but also encourages students to express their creativity and critical thinking skills by creating and sharing their own content.

Furthermore, social media facilitates peer-to-peer learning and networking beyond the confines of the classroom. Students can connect with experts, alumni, and peers worldwide, expanding their academic network and exposing them to a multitude of perspectives and opportunities. This global classroom setting prepares undergraduates for the interconnected world they will navigate post-graduation.

However, the integration of social media in academia is not without challenges. Concerns regarding digital literacy, privacy, and the quality of online discourse necessitate a thoughtful and structured approach to its adoption. Educators must guide students in the responsible use of these tools, ensuring that their digital engagement translates into meaningful educational experiences. Social media's role as a digital teaching tool in higher education represents a paradigm shift towards a more dynamic, inclusive, and connected form of learning. Its potential to enhance the educational journey of undergraduates is immense, provided it is harnessed with intention and integrity. As new technology emerges, it is imperative for educational institutions to embrace this digital revolution and integrate social media into their teaching methodologies to enrich the academic experience of their students.

Concept of mLearning

mLearning is an online access to classroom through mobile devices where communication link between the students and online instructor is made possible. mLearning allows collaborative learning among the students-students relationship as well as students-instructors. Bansal and Joshi (2014) referred to mLearning as the provision of education and training involving portable or mobile devices such as smart phones, personal digital assistant (PDA's), palmtops, Ipods, digital cameras, pocket computers and mobile Phones etc. Learning can take any form as far as its objectives are achieved.

Furthermore, mLearning is any sort of learning that happens when the learner takes advantage of the learning opportunities offered by mobile technologies (Gupta & Ghali, 2008). To Aicha (2014), mLearning aims at delivering instruction to students not present in the classroom while Said (2015) saw mLearning as an instruction carried out in an undefined location. It can also be viewed as an extension of classroom in various places where mlearners get connected with their group through mobile devices for educational purposes. There is need to mind the effects of mlearning in teaching digital learners as educational system supports the use of technology in pedagogy thereby enabling learning and improving performance. Both

teachers and learners benefit from using social media as mlearning tools because of its convenience and its ability to facilitate revision and retention.

The Theory of Connectivism

The relationship between social media as teaching tools in tertiary institutions and connectivism theory is quite significant. Connectivism is a learning theory that emphasizes the role of social and technological networks in the learning process. It explains how internet technologies have formed new opportunities for learning and sharing of information across the World Wide Web and among themselves (Siemens & Downes nd). Social media platforms, with their vast networks and ability to facilitate communication and collaboration, align well with the principles of connectivism. Ultimately, the value of this theory is its link to the concept of lifelong learning (Deubel, 2016). Social media provide a space where students can engage with content, collaborate with peers, and create personal learning networks. These platforms support the idea that learning and knowledge are not solely an internal, individualistic activity but also a social process. Prensky (2001) opined that today's teachers have to gain the knowledge of how to communicate in the language and style of their students which does not mean that the importance and good thinking skills will be eliminated. This is making things done faster at the same speed of the students.

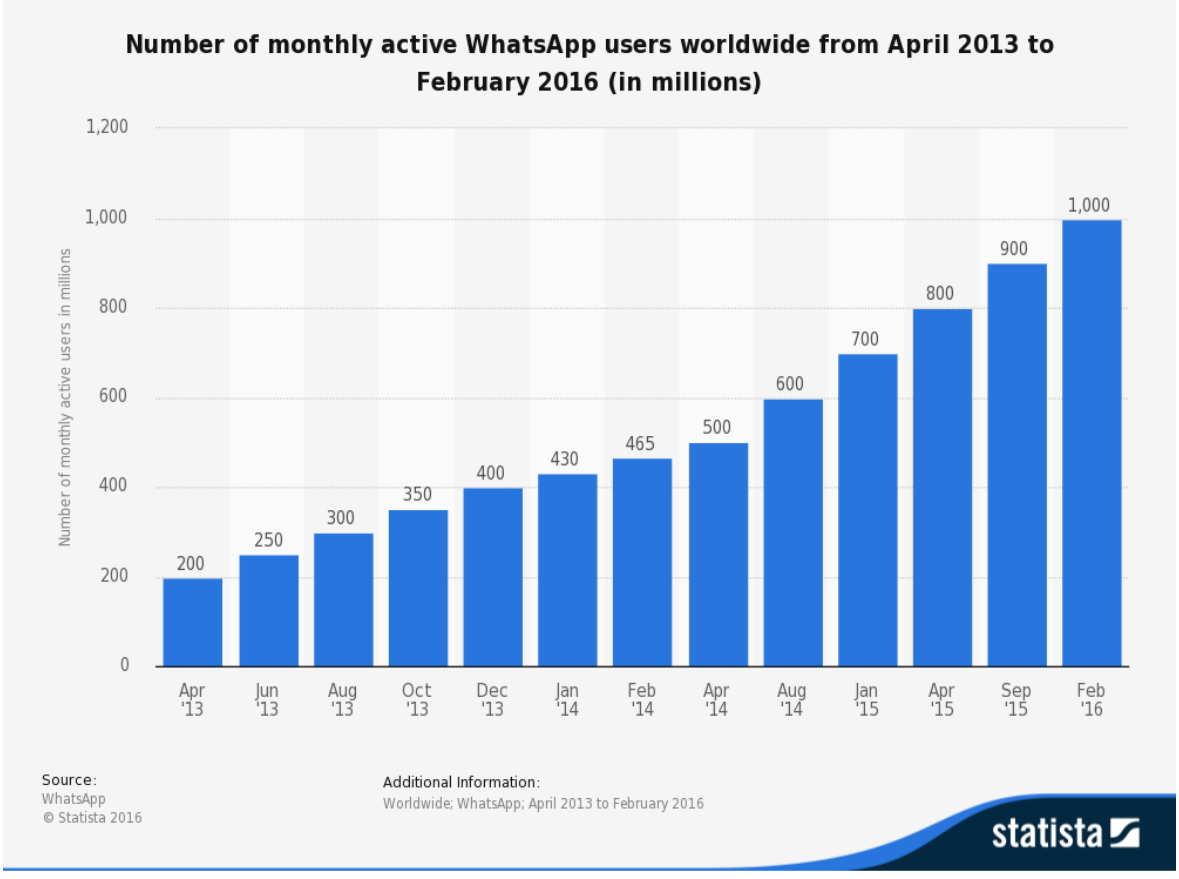
Connectivism is a theory of digital age developed by George Siemens and Stephen Downes (Duke, Harper and Johnston, 2013). Connectivism is often associated with and proposes a perspective similar to Vygotsky's 'zone of proximal development' (ZPD), an idea later transposed into Engeström's Activity theory (Wikipedia nd). Kop (2008) stated that in connectivism, the starting point for learning occurs when knowledge is actuated through the process of a learner connecting to and feeding information into a learning community. The process involved in this can be likened to the three levels of factors that influence online participation which are the technological level, the individual level, and the community level.

Social Media Platforms for Teaching Undergraduates

The following are some of the social media platforms for teaching:

1. **Facebook:** Facebook aids teaching in tertiary institutions by fostering a collaborative learning environment. It allows for the creation of class groups, where students can discuss coursework, share resources, and support each other's learning. According to Stephen (2015), Facebook is the largest social networking website. Professors can post announcements, lecture materials, and additional learning content, bridging the gap between formal and informal learning spaces. The platform's familiarity encourages student engagement and participation, making it a valuable supplement to traditional Learning Management Systems.
2. **Twitter:** Twitter, as a teaching tool, aids learning by enabling concise content sharing, fostering hashtag-driven academic discussions, and promoting real-time interaction between educators and students, thus enhancing the immediacy and relevance of educational exchanges. Bista (2015) in her study on the perspectives of education graduate students of using Twitter as a pedagogical tool for 15 weeks as a required social media activity in class revealed that each course participants reported a positive learning experience of using Twitter. According to Jones (2015), social media technologies such as blogs and Twitter are being used beyond leisure as these technologies have also become platforms for interacting and engaging with learners.
3. **Telegram:** Telegram aids learning by offering secure, fast messaging and file-sharing capabilities. It supports large groups, channels for broadcasting to unlimited audiences, and bots for automating educational tasks, thus streamlining communication and resource distribution in an academic setting.

4. **YouTube**: This is an invaluable resource for tertiary education, offering a vast repository of educational content. It provides a platform for teachers to share lectures, tutorials, and demonstrations, extending the classroom's reach. Brame (2016) asserts that educational videos have become an important part of higher education, providing an important content-delivery tool in many flipped, blended, and online classes. Students benefit from the visual and auditory learning experiences, which can be accessed anytime, enhancing their understanding and retention of complex subjects. The interactive nature of YouTube allows for engagement through comments and discussions thereby promoting a community of learners.
5. **WhatsApp**: Despite the fact that there is a good number of mobile social networks, WhatsApp which connotes "what's up" or "what's new" appears to be having more users, may be as a result of its simplicity and its being user friendly. Bouhnik and Deshen (2014) view WhatsApp as an instant messaging application operational on almost all current smartphone devices. WhatsApp facilitates learning by enabling instant messaging. Its widespread use and mobile accessibility make it a convenient and efficient tool for continuous learning and classroom connectivity. According to Yeboah and Ewur (2014), students prefer to spend more time on WhatsApp than their academic work. This is the more reason educational authorities need to discover ways of satisfying their gratification by incorporating its use in teaching.



Source: Wit. K. D. (2016) https://noscura.nl/2016/06/15/five-reasons-why-you- should-use-whatsapp-in-higher-education/

The fig. 1 above shows that WhatsApp usage is been widely used by all and sundry. It is of no doubt that its use as a teaching and learning tool contributed largely to the above presented data.

6. **LinkedIn:** This significantly contributes to teaching in tertiary institutions by serving as a professional networking platform. It connects students with industry professionals, providing real-world insights and opportunities for mentorship. Educators can leverage LinkedIn to stay updated on industry trends, integrate practical knowledge into their curriculum, and guide students in building a professional online presence. The platform also facilitates alumni engagement, allowing institutions to showcase success stories and create a strong professional community.
7. **Email** is a pivotal tool in tertiary education, facilitating swift communication between faculty and students. It supports the distribution of academic resources, enables the submission of assignments, and allows for timely feedback. Additionally, email serves as a platform for academic discussions, enhancing collaborative learning and making education more accessible and efficient.
8. **Short Message Service (SMS)** technology also known as texting enhances tertiary education by providing a direct channel for educators to disseminate information and reminders, ensuring students stay informed about class schedules, deadlines, and updates. It supports interactive learning through quick quizzes and feedback, encourages engagement outside the classroom, and is instrumental in distance learning programmes, making education more accessible and inclusive for students regardless of their location.

Table 1: Comparison of Common Social Media and Instant Messaging Tools in Education

	E-mail	**SMS**	**Facebook groups**	**Twitter**	**WhatsApp**
Cost	free	payment	free	free	Up to 1$ per year
Accessibility	ability to change text size	ability to change text size	Fixed text size	Fixed text size	ability to change text size
Information about user availability	no information	no information	no information	No information	Full information
Opening a group	possible	possible	easy	not natural	easy
Adding and removing members to a group	Not possible	possible	Requires participant approval	Requires participant approval	easy
Having a fluent conversation as a group	not natural	impossible	easy	not natural	easy
Privacy	relatively high	relatively high	relatively low	relatively low	relatively high
Teachers usage in private life	relatively high	relatively high	relatively low	relatively low	relatively high
Student usage in private life	relatively low	relatively high	relatively high	relatively low	relatively high
Collaborative learning	not natural	not natural	enables	enables	enables
Sharing content	relatively easy	ungainly	relatively easy	relatively easy	relatively easy

Source: Aicha (2014)

It is therefore left for educators to choose which is most convenient for them to achieve their purposes.

Benefits of Incorporating Social Media as Teaching Tools in Tertiary Institutions

Social media as teaching tools in tertiary institutions come with a lot of benefits. Social media prepares students for the digital workplace by enhancing their online communication and

content creation skills, making them more competitive and adaptable in the evolving job market.

Other benefits include:

1. **Enhanced engagement and collaboration**: Social media as teaching tools boost engagement by fostering interactive, collaborative learning environments. They resonate with students' digital habits, encouraging active participation through familiar interfaces. By integrating multimedia content and real-time discussions, these platforms make learning more accessible and appealing, leading to increased involvement and enthusiasm in the educational process.
2. **Communication:** Social media platforms revolutionize communication in education by enabling instant, direct interaction between teachers and students. They facilitate the sharing of ideas and feedback in real-time thereby breaking down traditional barriers to communication. WhatsApp among others can provide a channel through which instructors can achieve faster and more seamless communication with their students (Abaido & El-Messiry, 2016). Such immediacy and openness ensure that learning is continuous, responsive, and highly interactive, significantly enriching the educational experience.
3. **Accessibility**: Social media platforms enhance accessibility in education by allowing students access to learning resources and to engage with course content from any location and at any time. This flexibility supports diverse learning schedules and needs, making education more inclusive for all students, including those with varying abilities or those who may be geographically distant.
4. **Creativity and innovation**: Social media in education sparks creativity and innovation by providing a platform for students to create, share, and critique diverse content. This exposure to a wide array of ideas and the opportunity to present their own work in creative ways fosters original thinking and innovative problem-solving skills.
5. **Digital Literacy**: Social media platforms serve as practical arenas for enhancing digital literacy among students. By navigating these networks for educational purposes, students develop essential skills in digital communication, content evaluation, and online etiquette. This hands-on experience with technology prepares them for the digital demands of the modern workforce and everyday life.
6. **Feedback and assessment**: Social media platforms revolutionize feedback and assessment in education by enabling swift, interactive evaluations. They allow educators to conduct real-time polls, quizzes, and discussions, providing immediate feedback. This dynamic approach not only accelerates the learning cycle but also encourages continuous improvement through a more engaging and participatory assessment process.

Challenges Associated with Social Media as Teaching Tools in Tertiary Institutions

In spite of the numerous benefits associated with incorporating social media as teaching tools in tertiary institutions, Baran (2014) observes a number of challenges reported in relation to mobile technology integration such as ethical issue, lack of support, accessibility and technical limitation, insufficient experience, mobile phones ban in schools, and curriculum adaptations.

Other challenges include:

1. **Distraction and Time Management**: One of the primary concerns is the potential for social media to distract students. The blend of educational and recreational content can lead to procrastination and a decrease in productivity.
2. **Privacy and Professional Boundaries**: The use of social media blurs the lines between public and private life. There is a risk of personal information being exposed or misused.
3. **Digital Divide and Inequality**: Not all students have equal access to technology or the internet. This digital divide can exacerbate existing inequalities, as students without reliable access to social media platforms are at a disadvantage.

4. **Quality of Academic Discourse**: The informal nature of social media communication can impact the quality of academic discourse. There is a risk of discussions becoming superficial or dominated by a few voices.
5. **Cyber bullying and Harassment**: Social media can be a breeding ground for cyberbullying and harassment, which can create a hostile learning environment.
Addressing these challenges requires a thoughtful approach to integrating social media into the curriculum with a focus on creating a supportive and productive educational environment.

Conclusion

Tertiary educators should incorporate social media as teaching tools to modernize the learning experience, aligning with students' digital fluency. Social media provides students with digital competencies that are increasingly demanded in the modern workforce. By navigating these platforms for educational purposes, students hone their skills in digital communication, critical thinking, and online collaboration. For educators, social media provides a wealth of resources and a network of professionals that can be tapped into for enhancing curriculum and pedagogy. It also offers a means to monitor student engagement and gather feedback for continuous improvement. In essence, social media bridges the gap between formal education and the digital world, making learning more relevant, accessible, and engaging for tertiary students. It is an invaluable asset that, when used effectively, can enrich the educational experience and better prepare students for their future careers.

References

Abaido, G. & El-Messiry, H (2016). *Efficiency of WhatsApp as a means of disseminating educational information*. http://www.hk5sa.com/icit/5.2~Dubai-Ghada.pdf

Afolabi, S. S. & Nwaezuoke, S. U. (2017). Effect of social media on students' academic performance in computer science. *Journal of Nigerian Association for Educational Media and Technology*. 21(2). 1, 182-193

Aicha, B. A. (2014). Impact of WhatsApp mobile social learning on the achievement and attitudes of female students as compared with face-to-face learning in the classroom. Retrieved from http://eujournal.org/index.php/esj /article/view/3909/ 3700.

Baran, E. (2014). A review of research on mobile learning in Teacher Education. *Educational Technology and Society*, 19(4), 17-32. http://www.ifets.info/ journals/17_4/2.pdf.

Bansal, T. & Joshi, D (2014). A study of students' experiences of mobile learning. *Global Journal of Human Social Science: A Interdisciplinary*, 14(4). Retrieved from http://socialscience research.org/index. php/GJHSS/article/viewFile/1326/1267.

Bista, K. (2015). Is twitter an effective pedagogical tool in higher education? Perspectives of education graduate students. *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, *15*(2), 83-102.

Bouhnik, D. & Deshen, M. (2014).WhatsApp goes to school: Mobile instant messaging between teachers and students. *Journal of Information Technology Education*: 13, 217-231. Retrieved from http://www.jite.org/documents/Vol13/JITEv13 ResearchP217-231 Bouhnik 0601.pdf. 24/4/2016

Brame, C. J. (2016). Effective educational videos: principles and guidelines for maximizing student learning from video content. *CBE Life Sciences Education*. 15(4): es6. doi: 10.1187/cbe.16-03-0125
https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5132380/

Deubel, P. (2016). The value of connectivism. Retrieved from https://thejournal.com/articles/2006/09/06/the-value-of-connectivism.aspx?sc_ lang=en

Duke, B., Harper, G., & Johnston, M. (2013). Connectivism as a digital age learning theory. *The International HETL Review*, *2013*(Special Issue), 4-13.

Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013). National Policy on Education. Lagos: Federal Ministry of Education.

Ferriman, J. (2013). Growing the use of social media in education. Retrieved from https://www.learndash.com/growing-use-of-social-media-in-education/

Gupta, R. & Ghalib, M. R., (2013). Development of platform independent m-Learning content. *Certified International Journal of Engineering and Innovative Technology (IJEIT) 2*, Issue 12, 145. Retrieved from http://www.ijeit.com/vol%202/ Issue%2012/IJEIT 141220130628. pdf

Ike G. A. & Ihebereme C. (2008). Role and management of information and communication technology to achieve quality assurance. *Journal of Curriculum Organisation of Nigeria.* 15(4)62-85.

Isah, A I, Omoyajowo, B. S & Aladesusi (2017). Secondary school students' perception on th use of social media for learning. *Journal of Nigerian Association for Educational Media and Technology*. 21(2), 2, 269-284

Izyani, B. M & Mohammed, A. E (2016). Students' perception on the use of WhatsApp as a learning tool in ESL classroom. Retrieved from http://jesoc.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Edu-76.pdf. 2/11/16

Jones, A. (2015). How Twitter saved my literature class: A case study with discussion. In C. Wankel, M. Marovich, K. Miller, & J. Stanaityte (Eds.), *Teaching arts and science with the new social media*. (91–105). Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing.

Kop, R. (2008). Connectivism: Learning theory of the future or vestige of the past? Retrieved from http://www.irrodl.org/index.php/ irrodl/article/view/523/1103.

Pack, Y. (2011). A Pedagogical framework for mobile learning: Categorizing educational applications of mobile technologies into four types. *The International Review of research in Open and distributed Learning.* 12(2). http://www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl/article/view/ 791/1699.

Prensky, M. (2001). *Digital natives, digital immigrants.* Retrieved from https://edorigami.wikispaces.com/file/view/PRENSKY+-+DIGITAL+ NATIVES+ AND+ IMMIGRANTS+1.PDF 28/10/16

Sayan, H. (2016). Affecting higher students learning activity by using WhatsApp. *European Journal of Research and Reflection in Educational Sciences. 4(3)* Retrieved from http://www.idpublications.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/ AFFECTING-HIGHER-STUDENTS-LEARNING-ACTIVITY-BY-USING-WHATSAPP-Full-Paper.pdf

Said, F. (2015). The effectiveness of using WhatsApp messenger as one of mobile learning techniques to develop students' writing skills. *Journal of Education and Practice. 6(32),* 115-117 Retrieved from http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ EJ1083503.pdf. www.iiste.org

Siemens, G & Downes S (nd). Learning theory: Connectivism. Retrieved from https://www.learning-theories.com/connectivism-siemens-downes .html

Stephen, M. (2015). What are the advantages and disadvantages of whatsapp. Retrieved from https://www.quora.com/What-are-the-advantages-and-disadvantages-of-WhatsApp.

Wit, K. D. (2016). Five reasons why you should use WhatsApp in higher education. Retrieved from https://noscura.nl/2016/06/15/ five-reasons -why-you-should-use-whatsapp-in-higher-education/

Yeboah, J. & Ewur, G. D. (2014). The impact of WhatsApp messenger usage on students performance in tertiary institutions in Ghana. *Journal of Education and Practice 5(6).* Retrieved from http://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/JEP/article/view/ 11241