



THE USES OF SOCIAL NETWORKS AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES AMONG CAMEROONIAN STUDENTS

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Abstract:

This study aims to understand the attraction of Cameroonian students to social networks during the teaching-learning process and to report on their uses and consequences in the process of their training and their lives in general. To achieve this objective, an online survey through Google Forms was conducted in two phases with 297 students enrolled in Cameroonian universities and colleges from October to December 2021. The results show that WhatsApp, Google, Facebook, YouTube, Telegram, etc., are used, among other things, for information, communication, entertainment, research, sharing and/or reading lessons, and teaching at a distance. Despite the loss of concentration, time, laziness and addictions that they can cause, they facilitate the research process, the deepening and discovery of the lessons, the open-mindedness and punctuality. Self-discipline, organisational skills, awareness and the adoption of responsible behaviour are strategies in order to curb the adverse effects of their use. The study, therefore, concludes that the growing popularity of these media among students is explained by the advantages and ease of use they offer.

Keywords: uses, social networks, consequences, Cameroonian students

1. Introduction

In 2004, Seban noted that the media world had undergone major transformations over the previous ten decades due to technological development and the internet. It is in this context that social networks have experienced a boom thanks to the advent of Web 2.0 (Duplin, 2010). Prior to the advent of the Web 2.0 era, the term 'social network' referred mainly to a group of people with a shared affinity or interest. Referred to by the term's social software, social interaction technology or, more generally, social media (Hilkka Rapeli, 2016), nowadays it refers, in the field of technology, to a service that allows various people to come together to create an exchange on a particular topic or not. Like other modern media, social networks are ubiquitous in the various spaces of social life

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and are transforming the way people live regardless of their age, culture and living conditions (Ungureanu, 1994; Seban, 2004; Wakeu, 2021).

With the advent of smartphones, the use of social networks has been revised and is increasingly focused on phones. They are increasingly popular among young people, who present themselves as the biggest consumers (Hilkka Rapeli, 2016). Indeed, there is increasing talk of the Ditouzu generation, a Chinese term for Generation Z or 'head down generation', to mean those who are constantly hooked to their phones regardless of location or activities; those who have their heads down all the time; those who walk without looking up from their screens, in order to check social networks, get information, share photos, play games, etc. (Pastezeur, 2019).

According to the annual study of Hootsuite and We Are Social, which presents the various statistics on web and social network usage in the world in 2021, it is shown that out of the 7.83 billion people on the planet, 4.66 billion are internet users (59.5%), 4.32 billion are mobile internet users and 4.2 billion are active social network users (53.6%). It also shows that these figures are increasing in relation to the year 2020. This means that the internet and social media have steadily increased over the years among the general population and young people in particular. Thus, [Statista Research Department](#) (2021), underlined that in 2018, the penetration rate of social networks among the French population was 44.1% distributed as follows according to age groups: 93% 18 and 24 years old, 82% for 25 and 39 years old and 59% for 40 and 59 years old. In Cameroon, the Hootsuite and We are Social report entitled Digital 2020 - Cameroon underlines that out of 26.21 million inhabitants, there are 7.87 million internet users, i.e. 30% of the population. Of these, 3.7 million are active users of social networks and make greater use of smartphones.

The above statistics reflect the fact that the use of social networks is constantly increasing, especially among young people. Overuse of media is not without consequences for users in general and for learners in particular. While most studies that have looked at social networks and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in education systems have focused, among other things, on the use of the Internet by university students (Vayre, Croity-Belz and Dupuy, 2009), their use in language learning (Loiseau, Potolia and Zourou, 2011; Pinte, 2010), the issues of their pedagogical integration (Ben Rebah, and Dabove, 2017), or the risks and resources of ICT use among students (Haddouk, Zebdi, Mörch, Lignier and Fouques, 2019), it has been observed that little or no studies are particularly interested in the uses made by learners of social networks during the learning-to-learn process, and even less in the consequences of their use among learners. Indeed, our teaching practice has shown us that over the years, students abuse their mobile phones during the teaching-learning process and even outside it. This raises the following questions: How can we understand this growing attraction to social networks during training? Which social networks are used by Cameroonian students? What uses do they make of them during the teaching-learning process and outside it? What are the consequences for their lives in general and for their educational process in particular?

2. Literature review

2.1 Young people, social networks and their typology

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have invaded the daily lives of people since their advent to such an extent that it is tempting to say that today's illiterate are the one who do not know how to use them. Among these modern tools, social networks occupy a predominant place among young people, especially those born in the era of digital technologies (Haddouk, Zebdi, Mörch, Lignier and Fouques, 2019). This situation prevails in several continents. In Europe, for example, 93% of young people aged 16 to 24 and 82% of young people aged 25 to 34 use social networks in Finland; at least 52% of the French population uses at least one social network. Among them, about 90% of young people aged 18-24 and almost 80% of young people aged 12-17 use these services (Hilkka Rapeli, 2009). In Africa in general and in Cameroon in particular, Web 2.0 technology, the mobile boom, the Smartphone in this case, and the mobile Internet have led to an exponential development of social networks as well as the multiplicity of platforms and the diversity of uses (Batchou, Assongmo Necdem and Ebongue, 2022). Thus, the 'Digital 2020 Cameroon' report states that in 2020, there were 7.8 million Cameroonian internet users and that Facebook was the most used social network in Cameroon, with 3.5 million users; followed by Instagram, with 390,000 users; LinkedIn had 640,000 people and Twitter 110,000. As for YouTube, it records an average of 35,000 unique users per month. Among these Cameroonian internet users, Chedjou Kamdem, pointed out that in 2022, there were 4.55 million active users on social networks, with 58.4% men and 41.6% women.

According to Kaplan and Haenlain (2010), Web 2.0 forms the ideological and technological basis of social networks. As a tool that facilitates communication and information dissemination (Hilkka Rapeli, 2016), they are described as asynchronous in that they give users the opportunity to react to the sender's message after the fact. In other words, there is no obligation for users to be on the network at the same time as to communicate (Kear, 2011).

For Hilkka Rapeli (2016, pp.12-15), social networks can be classified into eight different categories, namely:

- Social interaction networks such as Facebook, which facilitate social interaction through private chats or public communication through posts that are broadcast to other users;
- Blogs, which are personal sites where updates are in chronological order;
- Microblogs, such as Twitter, which allows the dissemination of short texts and offers the possibility to comment on them;
- Wikis, such as Wikipedia, which allow users to create a collection of texts. Here, users can combine texts, images, Internet links, videos and sounds. They can be completely open to all or restricted to certain users;
- Social bookmarks, such as Digg, which are applications that allow users to make lists of their favourite links, share them with other users and comment on them;

- Broadcasting services, such as YouTube, Instagram or Flickr, which make it possible to broadcast one's own creations, such as videos or images;
- Sites created for teaching and education, such as Wikispaces or NING, which make it possible to create social networks for students and teachers;
- Sites and applications that facilitate instant communication, such as WhatsApp and Snapchat, which make it possible for users to communicate privately with each other, publishing their own comments, photos or videos to other users.

2.2 Social networks and their use in the teaching-learning process

Several studies report on the massive use of social networks in educational spheres. For example, Martin showed in 2016 that Twitter can be used as a virtual textbook in which micromessages are posted to remind the subject of a lesson and through which learners can interact on the micromessage by posting messages themselves. Soodeh's (2020) study found that Iranian students have "positive behavioural intention" towards the use of Instagram for educational purposes and that it is used as a collaborative learning device for French writing skills; in the same perspective, Juuti's (2021) work pointed out that this social network "helps increase confidence in language proficiency and supports motivation" of Swedish and Finnish high school students. Messaibi's (2017) work showed that social networks are effective in motivating students at the University of Biskra in Algeria to learn French as a foreign language, and Gambacorta's (2020) work emphasised that they restore a taste for reading among secondary school students in Wallonia.

It follows that networks and social media offer many possibilities for teaching and learning today. For they are used to understand and deepen the teachings received through the search for resources related to the teaching of text and video, as a collaborative platform and mutual aid between students for the understanding of a course or for a collective project (Kassi Hollo and Koné, 2022). Moreover, they allow the expansion of pedagogical practices, and exchanges between students and teachers outside the classroom (Charnet, 2018). Finally, they allow the sharing and socialisation of learning in relation to the members of the educational community, to interact with peers, to make links between subjects and to transfer the contributions of the experience of others; to integrate documents and pedagogical tasks into real situations of communication or exchange between learners or classes (Tomé, 2011).

2.3 Theoretical insertion: The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

Developed in 1989 by Davis, the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is based on Fishbein and Ajzen's Theory of Reasoned Action (1975). It is considered the dominant model of acceptability and adoption of Information and Communication Technologies - ICT (Hsiao & Yang, 2011). Therefore, it seeks to find out the reasons why a person accepts or refuses to use ICT. It therefore postulates that this acceptance is underpinned by variables such as perceived usefulness (UP), perceived ease of use (FUP) and Attitudes (A) which in turn will induce behavioural intentions to use (IC) (Davis, 1986). PU refers to the degree to which a person believes that using a technological tool can increase his

or her performance in a task or activity, while FUP is the degree to which the person believes that using a technological tool requires little effort.

In addition to the initial variables, Davis & Venkatesh (1996) believe that other external variables such as system design characteristics, training received, self-efficacy in computer use, user involvement in system design and the nature of the system implementation process would influence users' acceptance of ICT use.

2.4 Objectives

Based on the Technology Acceptance Model, the present study postulates that the growing attraction of students to social networks and their uses during training is explained by their perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. Thus, the aim of this study is to explain students' attraction to social networks and to report on their uses and consequences both in the process of their training and in their lives in general.

Specifically, this study aims to:

- Explain the enthusiasm of Cameroonian students for the use of social networks in general and during teaching-learning in particular;
- Identify the different social networks used by Cameroonian students;
- Present the uses that Cameroonian students make of social networks;
- Identify the different consequences (positive and negative) of students' use of social networks;
- Highlight the strategies proposed to curb the negative effects of these media uses.

3. Material and Methods

3.1 Participants

This exploratory study was conducted among Cameroonian students during the months of November and December 2021. The inclusion criteria for participation in the study were as follows: to be a Cameroonian student and to be enrolled in a Cameroonian public or private university or college during the academic year 2021-2022. A sample of 297 students (162 males and 135 females) was selected using a simple random sampling technique. The most representative age groups are 20-25 (46%) and 25-30 (20%) respectively. They come from public (54%), private (43%) and university (3%) institutions. They are representative of all levels of academic institutions (from Bachelor to Doctorate). However, students at Licence 1, Master 2, Master 1, Licence 2 and Licence 3 levels are the most representative with 26%, 18%, 17%, 15% and 14% respectively.

3.2 Collection instruments and survey process

The study was carried out in two stages. A first survey took place between 20 September and 22 October 2021. This allowed for the collection of data which was used for our presentation at the colloquium on information and media literacy of 27-29 October 2021 in Yaoundé. The objective of this survey was to identify the social media most used by students, the purpose and frequency of their use both in general life and in the teaching-

learning process, the consequences of use and strategies to counter the negative aspects of the media.

The data collected during this phase made it possible to reformulate the questionnaire for the second phase of the survey. Thus, the respondents were asked to give their opinion on the social networks identified, the purpose and frequency of their use, the consequences (positive and negative) of their use in general and in the teaching-learning process, and the strategies implemented to curb the negative effects of their use. Finally, they were asked to provide some information about their socio-demographic characteristics (gender, age, university, etc.)

The revised questionnaire was made available online through the Google Forms application. The link generated by this application was both distributed to students through their class reps and to colleagues in the various academic institutions to hand out to their learners. The survey in this phase took place in November and December 2021. Once the data was collected, it was processed and analysed using Excell 2011 software.

4. Results

4.1 The use of social networks by students in Cameroon

4.1.1 The most used social networks by students in Cameroon

Figure 1 shows the social networks and/or applications used mainly by the participants in this research. It shows that WhatsApp, Google, Facebook, YouTube, Telegram, and Messenger are the social networks most used by the respondents, followed by Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok. Twitter, LinkedIn, Wattpad, Moore, Zoom, Vidmate and Videader are the least used.

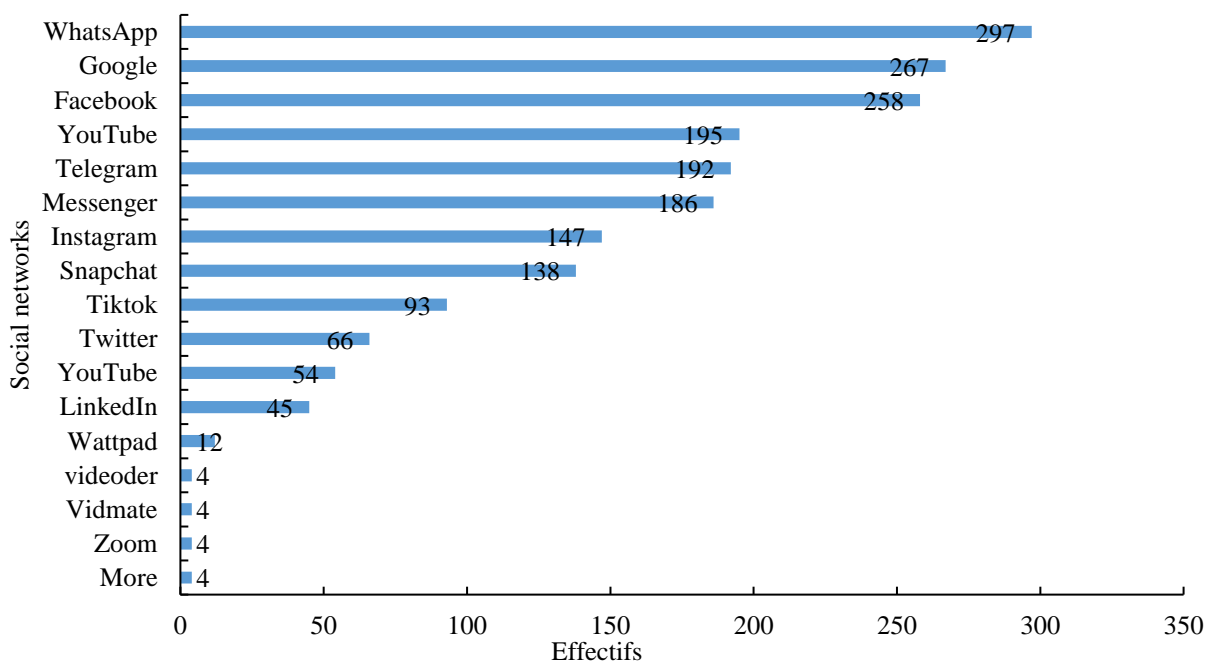


Figure 1: Social networks in order of use

4.1.2 Students' use of social networks in general

Figure 2 shows the students' use of each social network. The main functions are information (news, features), communication, research (people, documents, etc.), study (courses, lectures, etc.), entertainment, meeting (with friends, new people, etc.) and professional activities (online sales, searching for opportunities, etc.).

The figure also shows that each network is multifunctional. Although each network has its main function, most of them play the functions mentioned above to varying degrees. Only the least mentioned networks (Snapchat, Moore, Zoom...) play one or two roles. Overall, we can also see that entertainment, communication and information are, respectively the most used functions, followed by dating, research, study and professional activities. Google, YouTube, WhatsApp, Telegram and Facebook are used more for learning purposes.

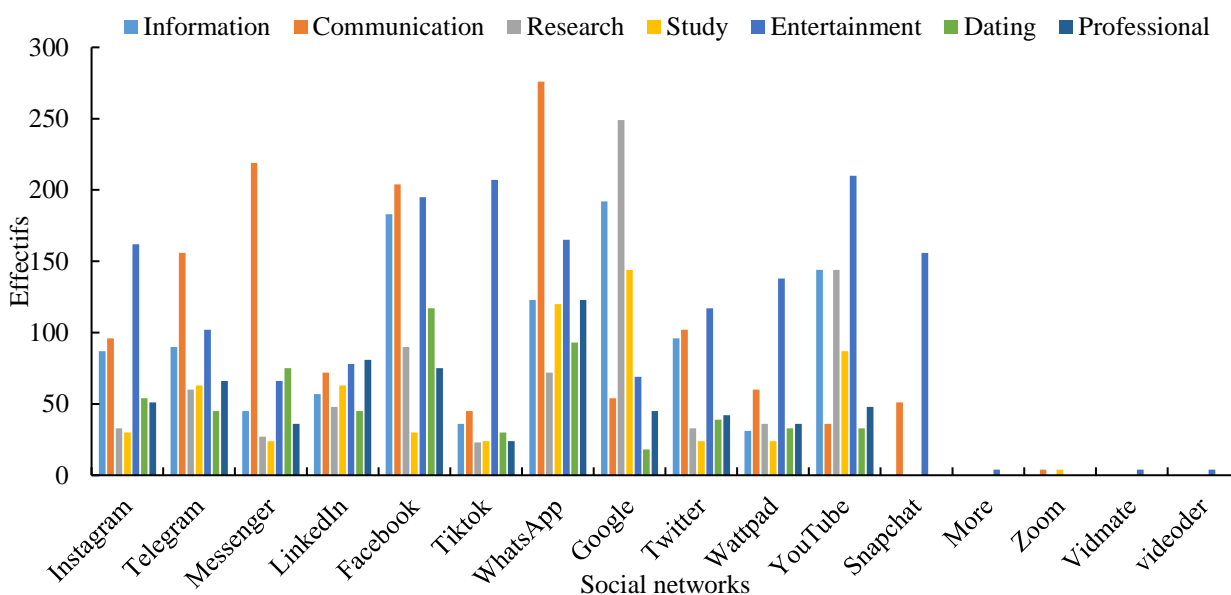


Figure 2: Students' use of social networks

4.1.3 Time and frequency of daily use of social networks by students

Figure 3 shows the time and daily frequency of students' use of social networks. It can be seen that these patterns are constantly increasing. The majority are connected to social networks very often for more than 5 hours. Few people use them often for less than an hour and rarely between 1 and 2 hours. The use of social networks is, therefore, an important part of learners' daily lives.

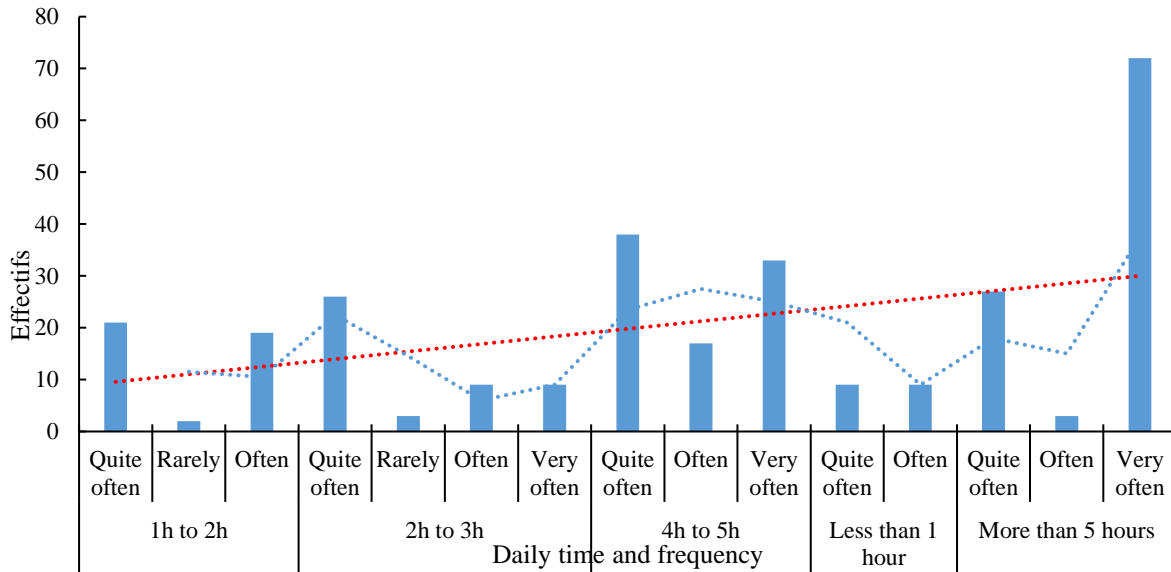
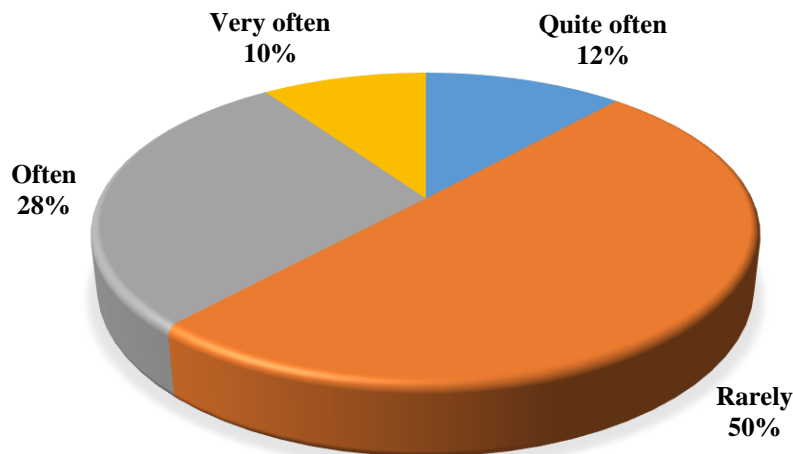


Figure 3: Daily time and frequency of use of social networks by students

4.1.4 Use and frequency of use of social networks in the teaching-learning process

Figure 4 reports on the frequency and use of social networks during the teaching-learning process. It shows that the majority of students have already used social networks during teaching. Only a few claim not to use it. Although the figure shows at first sight that the proportion of those who use it rarely does so, it should be noted that the association of those who use it often, quite often and very often is higher. Moreover, the linear law shows that the tendency to use these media is constantly increasing, from those who do not use them to those who use them very often. Moreover, the moving average curve shows that the majority of those who use them are between fairly often and often.

Figure 4: Use and frequency of use of social networks during lessons



4.1.5 Reasons for using social networks during the teaching-learning process

Figure 5 reports on the reasons for students' use of social networks during the teaching-learning process. Three main reasons emerge in order of importance: study and further

learning (searching for information and/or answers to a question, reading/sharing lectures), information and communication (discussion, sending/responding to mail) and entertainment (breaking the boredom). It can, therefore, be concluded that students' motivations for using social networks during the teaching-learning process range from the desire to break the boredom when teaching is boring to concerns about the lesson.

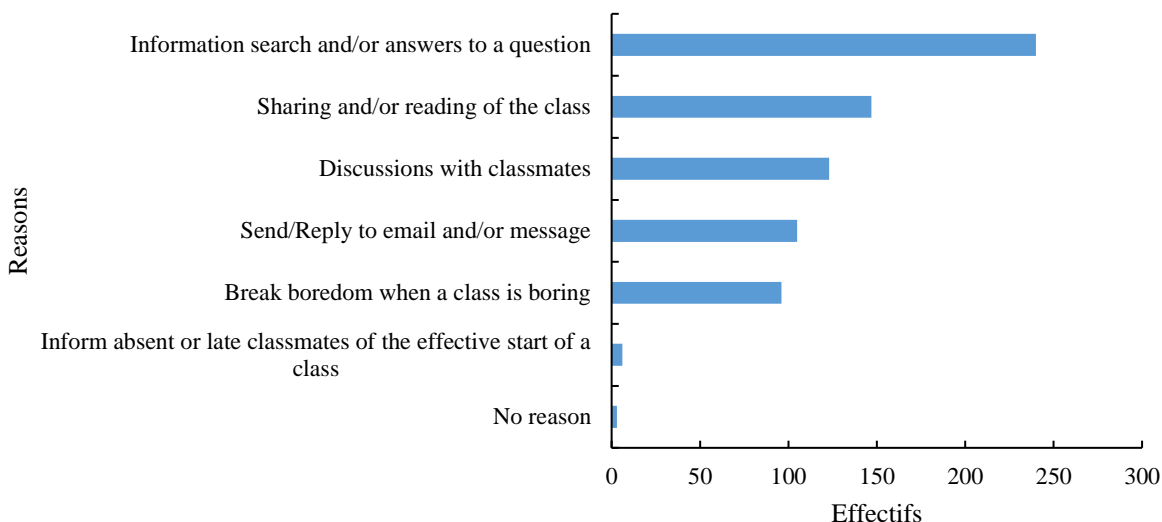


Figure 5: Reasons for using social networks during the course

4.1.6 Reasons for not using social networks during the teaching-learning process

Figure 6 reports on the reasons for not using social networks during the course. The main reasons mentioned by learners who do not use them are found in the lack of concentration and distraction, addiction problems and lack of ethics. The other reasons are respectively the development of laziness, the waste of time and the forgetfulness they can cause.

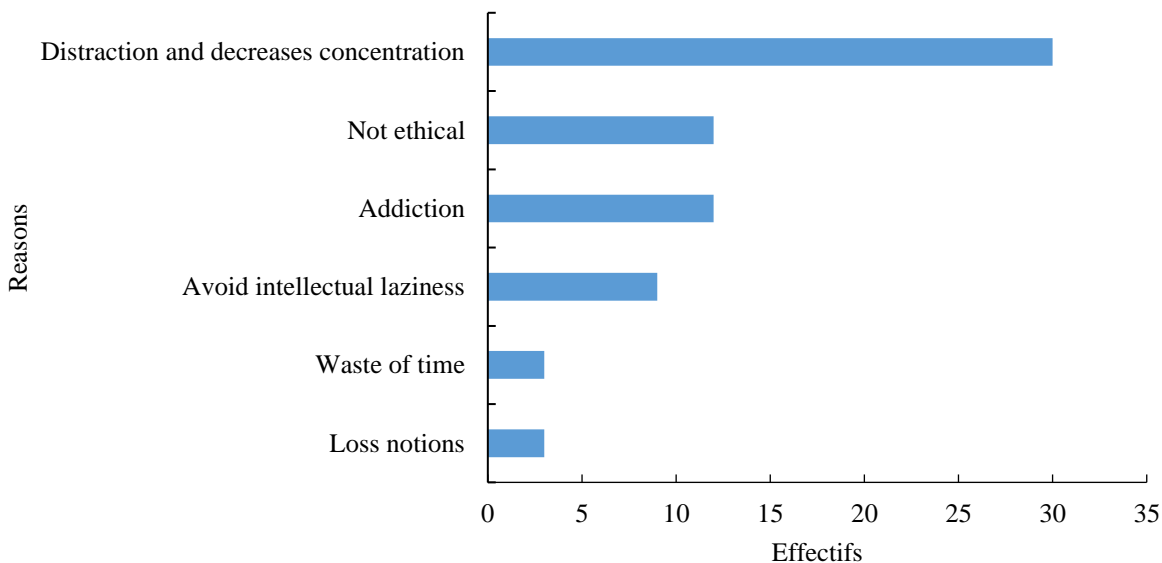


Figure 6: Reasons for refusing to use social networks during the course

4.2 The consequences of the use of social networks by students in Cameroon

4.2.1 Positive effects of using social networks in general

Figure 7 shows the positive effects of using social networks in general. They can be classified according to their importance in four main categories: the ease of communicating (instantaneity, diversity, etc.), of getting information (news, opportunities, etc.) and of doing research (documents, people, etc.); the ease of entertaining oneself (stress management, fun, etc.); of better training (study, education, creativity, etc.); and the ease of having specific opportunities (jobs, business, encounters, connections, savings, etc.).

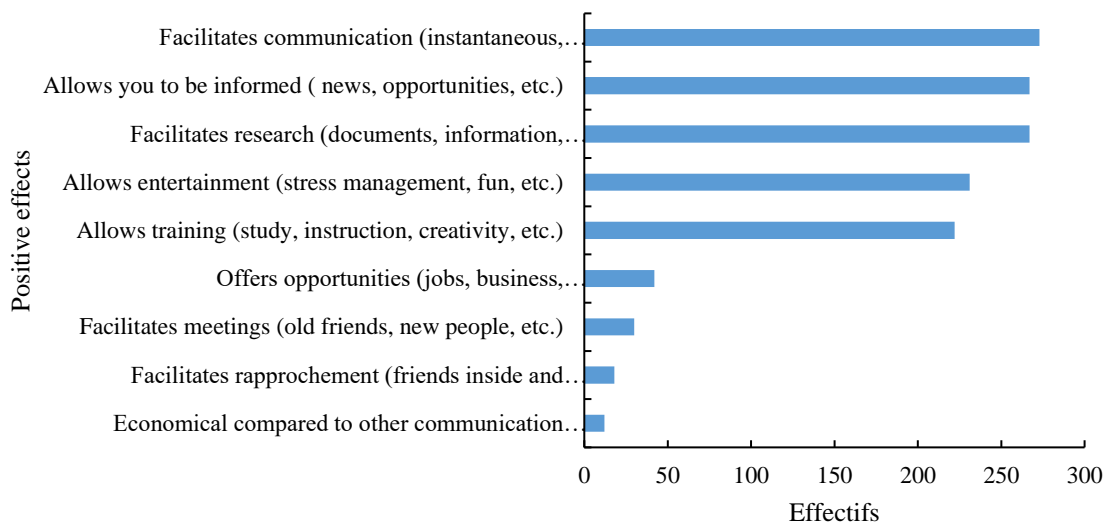


Figure 7: Positive effects of using social networks

4.2.2 Negative effects of using social networks in general

Figure 8 shows the negative consequences of using social networks in general. As mentioned by most of the respondents, these tools mainly promote cybercrime (defamation, piracy, fake news, trafficking, scams, etc.) and numerous losses (time, money, concentration, etc.), cause addictions to these tools and develop laziness. They are also the source of the corruption of morals (pornography, bad encounters, promotion of ease, etc.). Other disadvantages are the lack of censorship of content, health problems (headaches, insomnia, eye pain, etc.), exposure of private life to the general public and a virtual lifestyle.

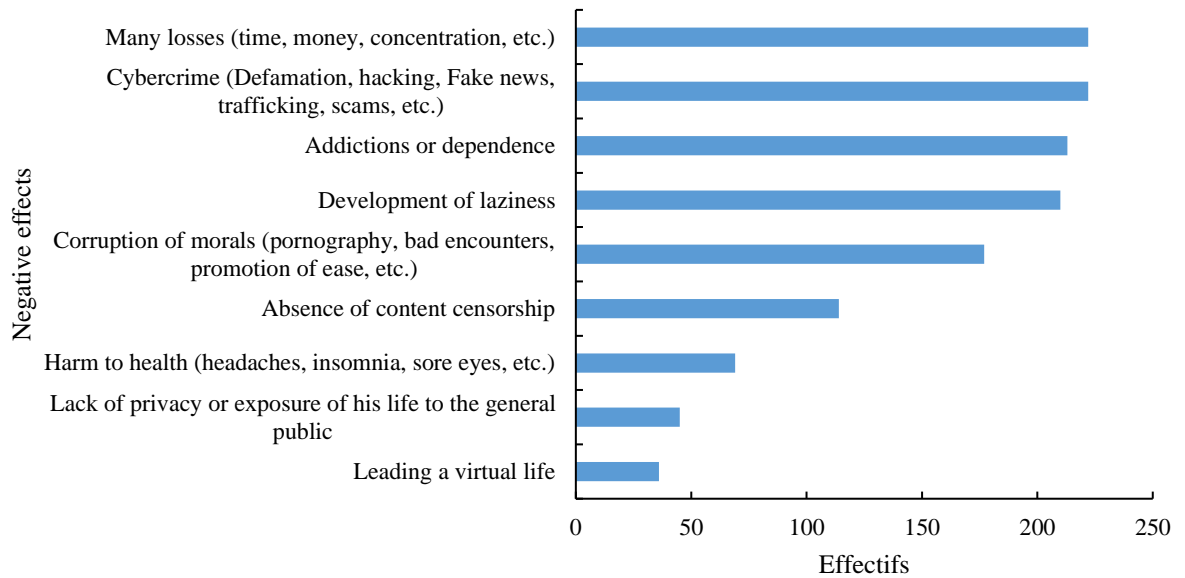


Figure 8: Negative effects of using social networks

4.3 The benefits of using social networks during the course

Figure 9 shows the advantages of using social networks during lessons according to our respondents. It mainly shows that they facilitate the research process (documents, information about lessons, etc.), studies (deepening of concepts, discovery of unspoken ideas, supports, exercises, etc.) and lessons (at a distance, comprehension); they also develop critical thinking, open-mindedness and cultivate punctuality in the case of online courses. Finally, they allow students to be informed (other people's opinions, current events, to be cultured, etc.) and to be entertained in case of a boring course.

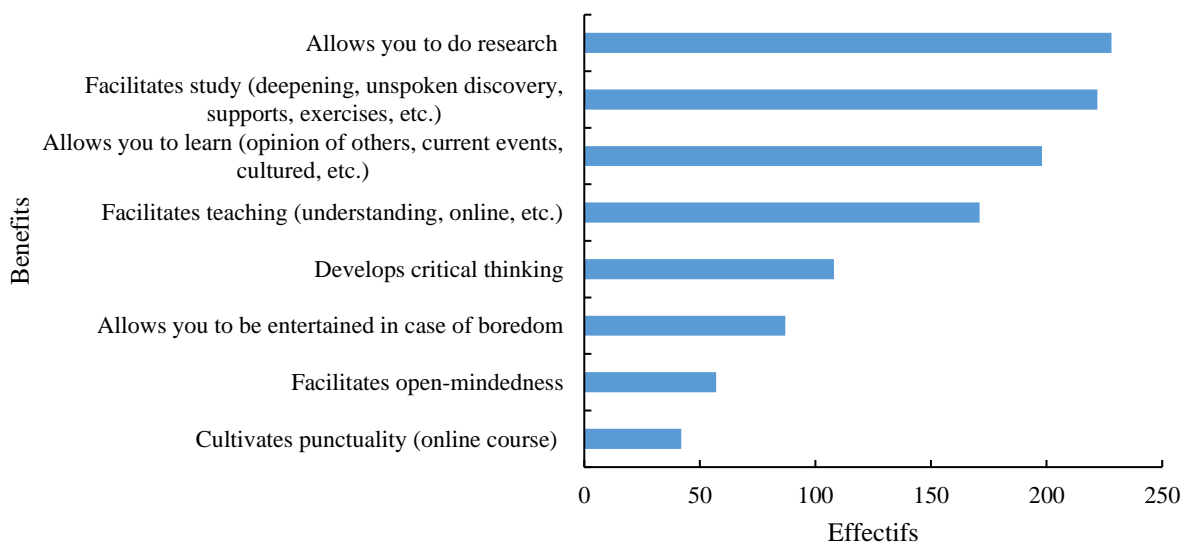


Figure 9: Benefits of using social networks during the course

4.4 The disadvantages of using social networks during the course

The figure shows 10 the disadvantages of using social networks during the course. The main reasons for this are a decrease in concentration, the development of laziness and

distraction. In addition, there are difficulties in understanding the course and in learning, superficial processing of information related to the course, academic failures and dependence on these media.

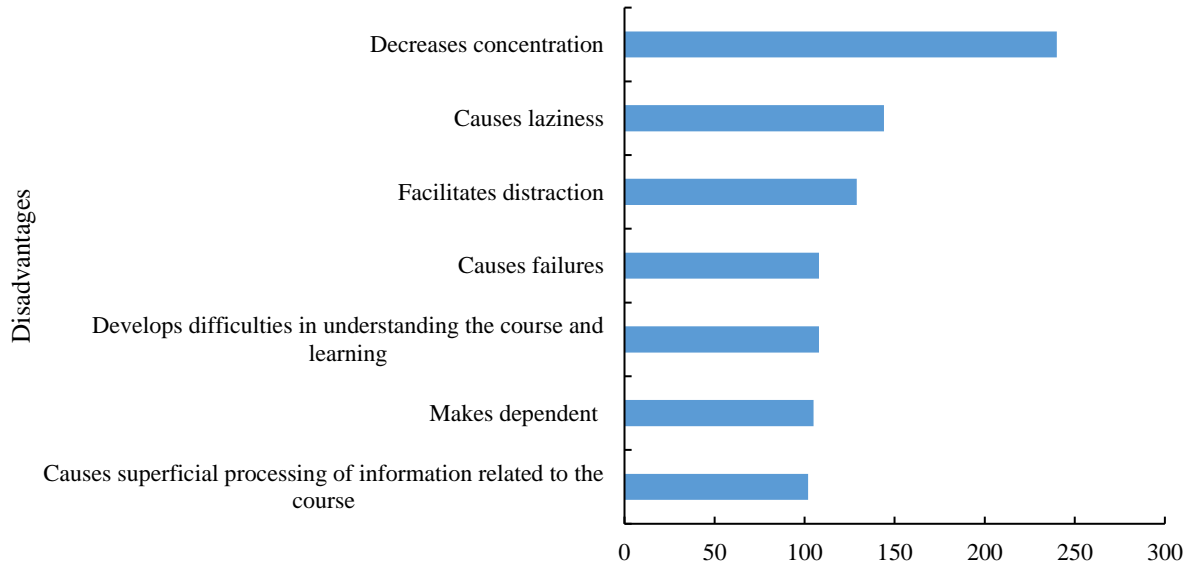


Figure 10: Disadvantages of using social networks during the course

4.5 Strategies for dealing with the harms of social networks

Figure 11 shows the different strategies mentioned by the participants in this research to curb the perverse effects of social networks. Self-discipline and organisational skills, efforts to control time, discrimination of what information to put online, keeping busy with useful things and adopting responsible behaviours are the main strategies to be implemented to counter the perverse effects of social networks. Furthermore, governments, parents and members of civil society must raise awareness of the harmful effects of social networks and make people aware of them. People should also avoid putting everything online, envying, imitating others and following the wrong companies. Other strategies include securing accounts and shared information, developing critical thinking and discernment, dismantling fake profiles, contacting only known people, enforcing social networking rules and playing sports.

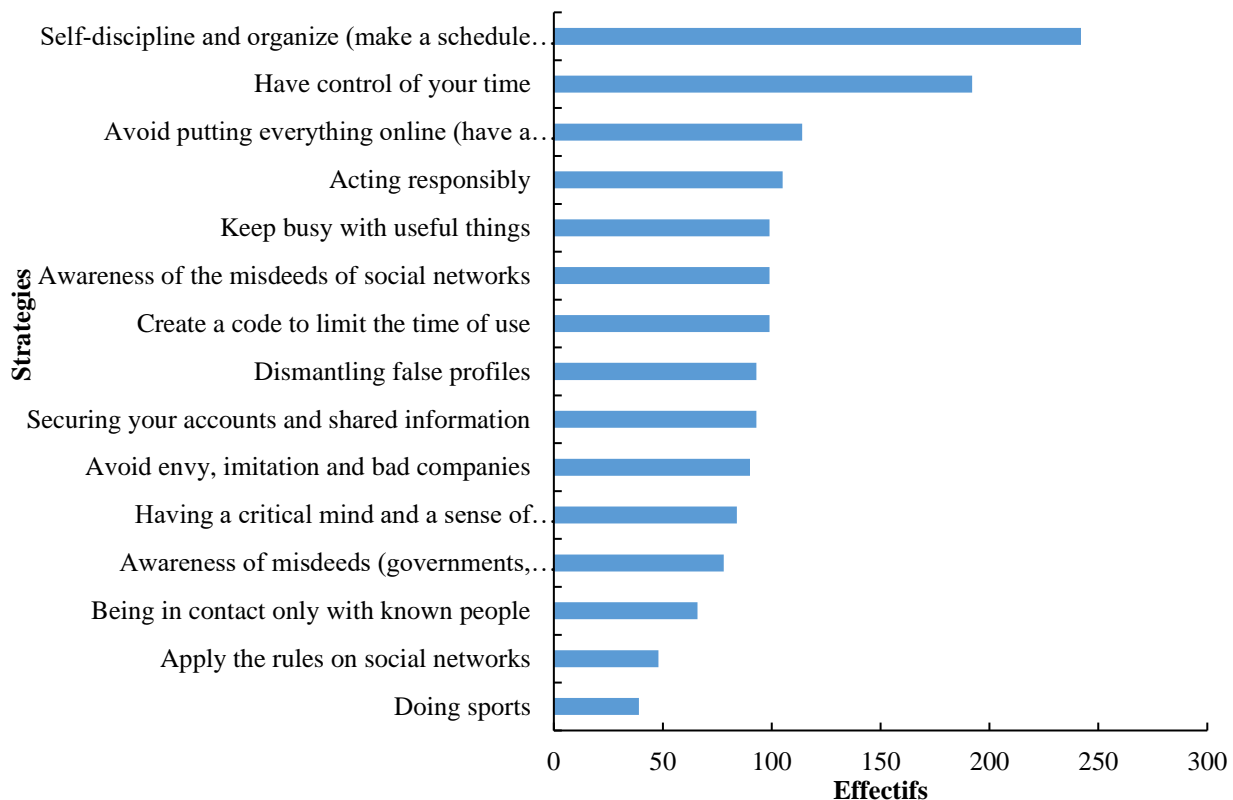


Figure 11: Strategies for confronting the harms of social networks

5. Discussion

The results of this study show that the increasing popularity of social networks among students in general and during the teaching-learning process in particular can be understood not only in terms of the benefits they offer to users, but also in terms of the ease of use and the design features of the system as suggested by the Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1986; Davis and Venkatesh, 1996). Indeed, the fact that most social networks are now concentrated in smartphones would not only make them easier to use, but also make them more accessible at all times. This reflects the perception of their ease of use. Moreover, their multi-functionality would allow users to easily achieve their different goals in life in general and in studies in particular. This accounts for their perceived usefulness. These results are in partial agreement with those of Manon (2007) who showed that only perceived usefulness determined the intention to use virtual reality in clinical practice. This can perhaps be explained by the fact that our results have not been explicitly tested statistically.

Apart from Google, which is a research engine and is widely used by students in the teaching-learning process to conduct research, WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, Telegram and Messenger are, respectively, the most used social networks among those mentioned by students. These results are similar to those of the [Statista Research Department](#) (2021), which ranks Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook Messenger as the five most popular social networks in October 2021. The slight differences between these rankings reflect the dynamics of social network use.

The various social networks used by students are multifunctional. They are generally used by students for information, communication, research and study, entertainment, socialising and professional activities. These results are in line with those of Raffin (2021), who shows that Generation Z mainly uses social networks for entertainment, information, work and other reasons such as sharing their life, participating in debates, etc.

With particular reference to the teaching-learning process, the participants in this study use social networks for research (documents, information, etc.), sharing and/or reading lessons, entertainment and communication. These results are in line with those of Hilikka Rapeli (2016) who shows that French and Finnish students use conventional social networks such as Wikipedia, WhatsApp and YouTube for learning.

Several positive and negative effects of the use of social networks were revealed both in the general setting and in the teaching-learning process by the participants in this research. In general, social networks facilitate access to information, communication, research, study, entertainment, access to certain opportunities, etc. The negative effects include cybercrime, addiction to these tools, corruption of morals, damage to health, numerous losses, exposure of private life to the general public and a virtual lifestyle. These different consequences are similar to those mentioned by several authors in the context of the use of modern media and social networks ([Cormier, 2016](#); [Diaz, 2011](#); [Ngiese, 2020](#); [Raffin, 2021](#); [Wakeu, 2021](#)).

With particular regard to the consequences of social networking on the teaching-learning process, the results of this study mention, among other things, ease in academic research with these tools, deepening of lessons and discovery of new concepts, working together, open-mindedness, development of critical thinking and punctuality. The study also mentions negative consequences such as lack of concentration and distraction, the development of laziness, superficial processing of information and academic failure. These findings are in line with those of Ben Rebah and Dabove (2017), Hilikka Rapeli (2016) and Pinte (2010).

Regarding the strategies mentioned to counter the negative effects of using social networks. This study highlights practices such as self-discipline, organisational skills, time management, discrimination of information to be posted online, escape from idleness and the adoption of responsible behaviour. Raising awareness of the harms of social networking and enforcement of cybercrime laws. These strategies echo some of [Ngiese's](#) (2020) proposals.

6. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explain the attraction of Cameroonian students to social networks during the teaching-learning process and to report on their uses and consequences on the process of their education and their lives in general. To achieve this, we conducted an exploratory study of 297 students enrolled in Cameroonian universities and colleges from October to December 2021. The data collected and analysed showed that several social networks (WhatsApp, Google, Facebook, YouTube, Telegram,

Messenger, etc.) are frequently used by students to inform themselves, communicate, entertain themselves, carry out professional activities as well as do research, share and/or read lessons, discuss with classmates and carry out distance learning. Although some learners believe that it is not necessary to use social networks during training because they are a source of de-concentration and distraction, a waste of time, laziness, addictions, etc., those who do use them believe that their use is advantageous insofar as it facilitates the process of research, allows for the deepening and discovery of the unspoken aspects of the lessons, develops critical thinking, facilitates openness and helps cultivate punctuality. Thus, in order to face the negative effects related to the use of these media, the use of strategies such as self-discipline, a sense of organisation, mastery of time, discrimination of the information to be put online, escape from idleness, awareness of the perverse effects of their use and the adoption of a responsible behaviour must be integrated.

Moreover, media and information literacy should be everyone's business. The responsible use of social networks could make a substantial contribution to improving training. Indeed, we can take advantage of this infatuation of Generation Z with social networks to integrate them more into the educational process in order to improve their performance.

Since this study is only interested in the uses and consequences that Cameroonian students make of social networks, another study on teachers' perception of the use of social networks in the teaching-learning process and the modalities of their efficient integration in the pedagogical process could be the subject of future research.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

About the Author(s)

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