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Unfolding the Role of Social Media Platforms in Creative Writing

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Abstract

This qualitative-phenomenological study navigates the perceptions of the students in UM Tagum College. The purpose of this study was to explore and unfold the experiences and perceptions on the role of social media platforms in Creative Writing of Third year BSED-English and AB-English students. This study is gleaned through the theories of Bandura's Social Learning Theory, Atkinson's Socio-cognitive Theory and Bronfenbrenner and Morris' Ecological Theory of Writing and as cited in the study of Cheng (2010) stating that writing is a process of social interaction which is also influenced by the computer and ICT roles in online or social networking environments. There was a total of fourteen students (14) both from BSED-English and AB-English whom seven (7) participated individually in the in-depth interview and another seven (7) for focus-group discussion. As to the participants' perceptions on the role of social media in creative writing, five major themes emerged: serve as a reference, provide easy access to use, serve as an enrichment tool, expose one to unreliable sources of information, and must be used responsibly. Lastly, with regards to the influences of social media exposure in creative writing, five major themes emerged: enriching students' ideas, affecting writer's originality, having poor diction, diminished creativity, and committing plagiarism. The results are deemed significant to students, teachers, administrators and other stakeholders to create and support programs to surpass the changes brought by social media platforms.

Key Words: education, social media, creative writing, qualitative-phenomenological research, thematic analysis

Introduction

As a literary enthusiast, exploring or reading literature, particularly of the Philippines, has been a pastime, and writing has become a hobby. Just like other literature lovers, it becomes an avenue where one activates its literary imagination and places its tangibility through creative writing. Yet in the last few years, the stimulation of one's literary mind into writing has shifted. Instead of reading a literary piece where one creates its imaginative world, it has turned into reading summaries or synopses provided by the different social media platforms. This is what the online world brought and has even changed dramatically due to the phenomenal expansion of social media and their users.

However, the positivity brought by social media has its corresponding disadvantages. This encompasses reduction of face-to-face interaction among people, sleep problems, anxiety and depression, concerns about privacy, fake identity, time consumption and most importantly addiction to social media that interferes with performing daily tasks (Griffiths, 2013).

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In Pakistan, the role of media, especially social media is influencing the student's academics and learning (Qayyum, Mahmood & Rasool, 2015). In the study of Yousaf and Ahmed (2013), it showed that two-third majority of students have difficulty in writing English characterized by misspelling mistakes due to the SMS or mobile technology using habit that is also directly proportional to the excessive use of the SMS. Now it is evident that either texters are prone to ignore spellings, intentionally or reflexively .The accepted credence is that texting has developed as a twenty-first-century trend as a highly idiosyncratic vivid style, full of contractions and out of the ordinary uses of language, used by an immature generation that doesn't worry about standards. There is a broadly voiced apprehension that the practice is nurturing a decline in literacy.

Moreover, in the study of Centro Escolar University Malolos-Bulacan, Philippines, using social media has an effect on a student's academic performance. It was found out that the students forget to do homework, school projects, participation in class recitation and following teacher's instruction while using social media. It was also pointed out that students with lower grades are frequent users of social media while the occasional user tends to concentrate on school work and get satisfactory ratings (Tamayo & Dela Cruz, 2014). Remoto (2017) also added that Filipino millennial writers write not of the very proper English, but of that has been filtered by mass media – printed, seen, broadcast – as well as a language shaped by the internet and social media, by the fragmentation of text language, the world of sound bites, the anime, graphic novels, and cosplays (costume plays). It was also mentioned that celebrities are now supposedly writing books, but in reality, done by their ghost writers.

Here in Tagum City, a need has shown to know how the millennial learners are influenced by social media in creative writing since the usage of social media as a main source of information is prevalent. This was confirmed by a Language Discipline Head of the same academic community wherein she has been teaching Philippine literature subjects for thirty years who said that truly social media platforms have influenced and somewhat developed the imaginative skills of the students yet regarding the proper use of grammar, and its depth of creativity, it still aches to witness that it is still one of the problems nowadays.

Moreover, the studies stated above only saw the effects of social media to its users and academic performances. The results were usually based on activities such as academic writing, homework, school projects, participation in class recitation and following the teacher's instruction.

Impelled with the information at hand, the researcher was thrilled to conduct the study on the role of social media platforms since it has never come across or even read any studies about the role of social media platforms in creative writing herein the Philippines. The researcher wanted to conduct the study to better understand how social media has been positively or negatively affecting the students' creative writing.

Review of Literature

Common Reasons for Use of Social Media

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Undeniably, students use social media platforms nowadays due to social interaction and leisure time but it is also true with creative writing purposes.

In connection with this, Belal (2014) stated that using SNS for teaching purpose is quite helpful, easy and liked by students as the new generation can relate to the phenomena quite easily and readily. In addition, this is a place where teachers can give assignment/activities or open any discussion board for the students where they can share their thoughts which enhance their learning.

Moreover, Al-Rhami and Othman (2013), also stated that students' satisfaction are based on its easy access or simply going over questions along with other students, whether from house or lectures or perhaps in the library; sharing of data and accessibility to the learning society; provision of more understanding from instructors' online communication, and academic achievement in greater education; and provision of sufficient and up-to-date content.

Negative Effects of Using Social Media in Creative Writing

English (2009) as cited in the study of Risto (2014) asserted that students are so accustomed to rapid-fire writing without knowing how to critically think as they write. The immediacy of texting, instant messaging, and social media has caused students to deny the concept of writing as a process. Moreover, students are relentlessly exposed to so many blogs, articles, and opinions of peers and celebrities that it is difficult for students to think.

Additionally, it was pointed out that the internet has changed the style people live in numerous things, but the largest is the impact on how they interact everyday particularly on language and its proper diction. It was found out that to transmit one's emotions and ideas, just like the Facebook users employing the language freely as they comfortable to use rather than the language they use to study on the blackboard, which is full of rules and grammar and syntax. Due to the connection with social networks, people have developed a new structure of texting communication using informal and less correct language like dialect, a lot of abbreviations, acronyms, spelling mistakes, and also emoticons in their daily interaction including writing (Morceau, 2016).

Another problem was also presented in the study of Abbasi & Liu (2013*)* which stated that though social media provides first hand data, but it's pressing problem is the lacking of knowledge to distinguish true information from misinformation and rumors. Some cases that social media users generated can be biased, inaccurate, and subjective because some people use it to spread rumor and misinformation. With the conventional media, source is easily identified or known. However, in the case of social media, the source can be unknown thus no one takes responsibility for the content. In many cases, a username is incomplete or even a fake profile in Twitter or YouTube is the only information as its source. Thus, this is also the same in writing for it does not mean that the available information is accurate for its sources have different subjective perspectives or views when it comes to analysis and interpretations.

On the other hand, Moritz (2016) presented that plagiarism is rampant nowadays as it is easier for students to copy and paste from an online source or another student rather than handwrite a passage from information obtained from a book which is how reports were written prior to technology's introduction in schools. Thus, Williamson, McGregor, Archibald, and Sullivan (2011) as cited in the study of Moritz (2016) found out the reason why students plagiarize through using the information in their own words, because of its availability and also seeing Google answers all their needed information and can literally copy and paste other's work and claim it as their own.

Methodology

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to unfold the role of social media in creative writing experiences of BSED English and AB English college students of a tertiary institution in Tagum City with the aim of understanding the individual's thoughts and behaviors in learning Creative Writing in the midst of social media platforms presence. According to Miles, Huberman, & Saldana (2014), phenomenology allowed the researcher to gain an understanding of the role of social media as if one is living vicariously through the participants serving as the foundation and framework of the study and help finding answers to the proposed research questions. This study focused only on the perceptions of the students regarding on the role of social media in creative writing whom the participants were the students who took the subject of Creative Writing and other literature subjects. Students from third year level of college programs BSED English and AB English for the school year 2018-2019, month of January 2019, were chosen for this study.
Specifically, this research work sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions of students on the role of social media platforms in creative writing?
2. How do social media exposure influence students' creative writing skills?

Data Sources

Qualitative researchers typically gather different forms of data gathering such as interviews (Creswell, 2007). In this study, the data were taken from the participants' experiences and observations, which was obtained through focus group discussion and in-depth interaction with the individuals who have experiences with the phenomenon being studied. The first source of the data was from the in-depth interview, wherein Creswell (2013) stated that in a phenomenological research study, there can be as many as ten individuals. The important point is the description of the individuals who have experienced the phenomenon.

Meanwhile, the second source was from a focus group discussion wherein Adams and Cox (2008) indicated that it is a group interview which does not exceed six or seven participants or at the most eight, and it should also be no smaller than three people. It was also specified that too numerous participants are likely to break off to talk in sub-groups and leave people out of the discussion. However, too small participants are hard to keep the conversation going on and

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enough depth just not to feel intimidated by the situation. It is also easier to have a homogeneous group of people for a focus group as they find it easier to talk to one another.

Data Presentation

The Perceptions of the Students on the Role of Social Media Platforms in Creative Writing

The students who were chosen as the participants shared their experiences and perceptions on the role of social media in Creative Writing. From their honest answers, five (5) themes emerged, namely: (1) serves as a reference; (2) provides easy access to use; (3) serves as an enrichment tool; (4) exposes one to unreliable sources of information; and (5) must be used responsibly.

Table 1
Major Themes and Core Ideas on the Perceptions of Students on the Role of Social Media Platforms in Creative Writing

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Serves as a Reference	● It is used for searching references. ● It answers questions especially with academic purposes. ● It is used for finding the correct words. ● It is used for getting examples of poems. ● It is used as a tool for expression in writing. ● It is used for motivational purposes. ● It is used for getting updates of status. ● One can read many articles. ● One can get ideas from other writers or other perspectives' contributions.
Provides Easy Access of Use	It is used with one click away. It saves time. It lessens the effort of reading books. It is convenient to use.
Serves as an Enrichment Tool	● Ideas are enriched. ● Opinions, and styles are enriched. ● Elaborations enriched ideas.
Exposes One to Unreliable Sources of Information	● Not all social media are reliable. ● Sources should be double-checked. ● First, they should check their sources if it is reliable.
Must be Used Responsibly	● It should be used for academic purposes. ● Usage is good but in moderation. ● It must be remembered that students are interacting with different ideas/opinions from different persons.

Themes and Core Ideas on the Influence of Social Media Exposure with Creative Writing Skills

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The students continued to shared their experiences and perceptions on the influence of social media exposure with Creative Writing skills. Five (5) themes emerged, namely: (1) enriching students' ideas; (2) affecting writer's originality; (3) having poor diction; (4) diminished creativity; and (5) committing plagiarism.

Table 2

Major Themes and Core Ideas on the Influences of Social Media Exposure with Creative Writing Skills

Major Themes	Core Ideas
Enriching Students' Ideas	It enriches how to portray the stories. It gives ideas on how to write. They can apply what they have seen. One can grasp or get some ideas. One can get tips.
Affecting Writer's Originality	● Students write with fourth or half of their ideas. ● Students adopt ways or styles of writing from others. ● One is in the writer's world. ● Students follow and copy the trend.
Having Poor Diction	Students use it because a writer uses it without knowing the function of the word. ● Students copy words and ideas and get the wrong interpretations. ● Students incorrectly use terms.
Diminished Creativity	● It hinders one's creativity. ● The piece is not genuine anymore. ● One integrates from readings.
Committing Plagiarism	● It is due to laziness. ● Students just copy and paste.

Discussions

Serves as a Reference

Nowadays, it is evidently observed that whenever students search for their assignments, projects and research, they use different social media platforms. In this way, they can immediately advance and finish the works to be submitted easily.

In line with this, Sharma (2016) asserted that millennials rely heavily on social media and Google to access and share information, discuss challenges and topics, and receive feedback and advice. Creating a learning environment using the technology and methodologies of informal learning to create an online collaborative learning environment resonates with the millennial generation and should be utilized in course instruction.

Provides Easy Access of Use

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The result of this study indicated that the easy access of use is one of the reasons why students use social media in creative writing. Its availability anywhere and anytime invites the students to undeniably rely on using it.

This is seen in the study of Seo (2013) that one of the advantages in using social media in Creative Writing is saving the students' time because tools offer easy methods to search for information and resources such collaborating, interacting, and working online together while sitting in different places and countries.

Serves as an Enrichment Tool

Technology for academic purposes is considered as the best learning tool wherein students do not only depend on using it for their entertainment purposes, leisure time and as a source of ideas, but also an enrichment tool wherein students in Creative Writing can study and apply their learning with their write-ups.

This can be supported by Vurdien (2013) whom he reported that tools such as blogs helped students put more thoughts into their writing and online tools increased their writing skills, provided them with better planning tools prior to writing.

Exposes One to Unreliable Sources of Information

On the other hand, its positivity also brought alongside the negative effects of using social media in Creative Writing. It also opened about the unreliable sources of information since these are available at social media websites as they become a medium for sharing, exchanging, and creating information among users. Hence, this makes the students unsure of their information.

In line with this, Abbasi & Liu (2013*)* stated that though social media provides first hand data, but it's pressing problem is to distinguish true information from misinformation and rumors. Consequently, information in social media is not necessarily of equal value, and there is a need to assess the credibility of the data before using it for decision making.

Must be Used Responsibly

To end the first research question, this theme emerged that students should be responsible in using social media platforms not to mislead them in their writing activities and refrain from possible risks. My participants also emphasized that their usage should be proper and only in moderation for academic purposes.

In connection with this, Biaculli (2012) cited by Lineman (2016) stated that the excessive use of technology may have an effect on education and the absorption of information. As students are sending and receiving hundreds of messages, browsing pages of information and images,

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simultaneously while learning, they are not absorbing the critical information; actual learning is being mitigated. The educational information, while supposedly more important, is falling through the cracks with these technological distractions. Thus, it does imply a responsible use.

The Influence of Social Media Exposure on Creative Writing Skills

After the relay of the participants' perceptions and response, comes the influence of social media exposure with their creative writing skills. From their views and opinions, five (5) major themes emerged, namely: (1) enriching students' ideas, (2) affecting writer's originality, (3) diminished creativity, (4) having poor diction; and (5) committing plagiarism.

Enriching Students' Ideas

Many of the students use social media platforms because of its information and they also spend time with it due to different kinds of reading materials which only shows that they do not only use social media platforms as a source but as a tool or way of enriching their ideas.

It was revealed that social media enrich the students' ideas as chats or instant messaging can also be used as a way to extend classroom discussion or review. Although these take time for the teachers in terms of reading and monitoring, the benefits to students' learning both for the classroom and for their future business success make the time worthwhile (Kessler, 2010)

Affecting Writer's Originality

Due to the availability of information throughout the social media platforms, it cannot be denied that it has also affected the minds of the students with how they would manage and respond in their creative writing subject applying what has been absorbed or soaked with the technology world particularly on expressing original concepts as a writer.

Sakkir, Rahman & Salija (2016) reported in their study that teachers expressed concerns about the lack of originality in students' writing due to the available sources of information throughout the social media platforms and applications that generate exchange of ideas that make students select over, copy and paste.

Chienda (2017) that the achievements of modern technology have created the loss of originality by the majority of the users. He said that many people have lost the ability to put ideas together for they find easier to post somebody else's material just like simply forwarding by the senders without crosschecking the facts presented in the posts.

Diminished Creativity

After the positive influence of social media platforms in creative writing, it is alarming that after the first negative effect or influence comes another negative which is the shrinking of creativity. As a literary enthusiast and a literature teacher, this worries that the creativity of the students

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nowadays has been limited and hampered due to digital factors for creativity is the main element in creative writing.

Belal (2014) affirmed that the quality of the writing has decreased because of the students' usage of simple sentence in their writing, use of informal words, and short form of words in formal writing, lacks in literary writing and sometimes it is monotonous to read.

Sherman (2010) supported as cited in Risto (2014), due to the incessant exposure to technology, students are exposed to concise writing and are forced to express their thoughts under character constraints just like the communication via Twitter which users have a one hundred forty (140) character limit. This shows that the persistent utilization of technology for communication does not allow nor encourage students to elaborate their thoughts.

Having Poor Diction

Aside from the creativity of the writer, another element also plays an important role. Without the proper use of words or diction, one cannot totally express or convey the meaning of the pieces and might lead to misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the literary works. Thus, it has been observed that social media has been taking roles on how students do in creative writing.

Morceau (2016) pointed out that people transmit one's emotions and ideas, just like the Facebook users employing the language freely as they want, and as they feel comfortable with rather than the language they use to study on the blackboard, which is full of rules and grammar and syntax.

Committing Plagiarism

With this last theme, it has been revealed that some of the participants could not really avoid this due to such instances of laziness and lack of time that result in committing plagiarism. However, if this would not be stopped among the practices of the students' creative writing world, this could be seen as a danger for it might become a mannerism not only in the subject but also a danger to oneself as a writer.

Moritz (2016) presented that plagiarism is rampant nowadays compared to ten (10) years before because of the introduction of technology in the classroom. Teachers found it easier for students to copy and paste from an online source or another student rather than handwrite a passage from information obtained from a book.

Williamson, McGregor, Archibald, and Sullivan (2007) as cited in the study of Moritz (2016) found out that students plagiarize more often from the internet because of its availability and also seeing Google answers all their needed information and can literally copy and paste other's work and claim it as their own.

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Concluding Remarks

Undoubtedly, social media platforms have been playing importantly in the society nowadays and people from all ages use it for different purposes such as for entertainment or academic purposes. However, as it was studied in different perspective of looking into the context of its influence on creative writing, this study may serve the following: an avenue for the tertiary education authorities to improve the existing educational policies, curriculum and strategies, or for possible new formulations towards a more effective delivery of learning in this information age; the academe must see to it that the students need to be educated on the proper selection and usage of platforms considering that they are presented with different information without proper identification and selection which can either improve or hamper their creative writing skills; this may serve for the faculty as an indicator and enlightenment to study different strategies in teaching the subject and to address the present condition on how students respond and value creative writing in its entirety; and the students that in spite of the changes brought by the social media platforms may improve their creative writing skills.

As implications for further researches, the studies will be more comprehensive if the participants are the teachers and the curriculum planners; conducted in parallel studies with CHED for the set parameters and basis upon crafting the instructional guides for this generation; and be replicated to assure more of the validity and reliability of the result. Also, employing another method of study may be added to further validate the data.

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