

The Influence of Social Media Social Support on the Flourishing Homosexual Identity: A Case Study of the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer (LGBTQ) Community in Accra-Ghana

Peter Worlanyo Abomah*, Reginald Francis Agbley

Department of Social Sciences, Methodist University College Ghana, Dansoman Accra, Ghana

Abstract

The aim of the study was to explore the influence of social media and social support on the flourishing homosexual identity in Accra, Ghana. The objectives were to determine the extent to which social support influence's homosexual identity, the correlation between homosexual identity and flourishing levels among homosexuals, to ascertain the extent to which media, emotional, and social support predicts how homosexuals flourish, and finally to as certain how differences in the level of education predict how homosexuals flourish in Accra, Ghana. A case study design was employed. The population for this study was associates of the homosexual Community in Accra-Ghana. Using a purposive sampling technique, 142 homosexual respondents answered a standard questionnaire. Berlin Social Support scale (BSSS), Diener Flourishing scale Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Identity Scale were used on demographics, social support, flourishing, and lesbian, gay, bisexual identity. Data was analysed using simple linear regression, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient, and one-way analysis of variance. Results obtained indicated that social support does not predict homosexual identity among homosexuals in Accra. As an individual homosexual identity increases so does the level with which the individual flourishes. Thirdly, social media emotional, and social support was found to be a predictor of flourishing among homosexuals in Accra. Finally, the results also indicated that differences in the level of education do not predict how homosexuals flourish in Accra. The conclusion indicates that study has shown that differences in the level of education among homosexuals do not influence the extent to which homosexuals flourish.

Keywords: *Flourishing, Identity, Social Support, Social Media.*

Introduction

Social support is the physically present and responsive relief provided by an individual's relations, peers, working colleagues, and close acquaintances [1]. Social support is available in many form, including instrumental, social support, informational social support, and emotional, social support [2]. Emotional, social support is characterized with the act of expressing how you care about other people by expressing how you trust and respect them, being empathic with them, and loving others

[2]. Social support has been known to have occurred physically within peers and family relations [1] until the emergence of the internet, which led to the advent of social media social support or online social support [3]. Social media social support is the perception and actuality that an individual derives through social media, examples being Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, and many more, that he or she is wanted, has helped existing from others, and that he is part of a helpful societal system [3]. Besides physical

Received: 31.03.2022

Accepted: 24.05.2022

Published on: 30.05.2022

***Corresponding Author:** pabomah@mucg.edu.gh

interactions, computer-based social support has become and becoming more assessable from the internet [3]. The study of [4] explored the issue of social support that is internet-based. Social support is considered within four main areas: “concrete support”, “informational support”, “emotional support,” and “companionship support” [4]. Research to support the fact that social support offers central paybacks to our bodily and expressive well-being [1].

Irrespective of the aforementioned traditional sources of social support, a new form of social support that has recently emerged is social media social support. This new form of social support came with the advent of social media, especially among the youth. Social media social support emanates from the usage of social media, which is not a key component of people’s lives. Social media is defined as the gathering of virtual communication networks devoted to community-based participation, collaboration, and resource-sharing [5]. This social media hence is a computer-aided technology that helps the formation and allocation of data, concepts, and occupational interests through computer-generated groups and systems [5]. Particular noticeable forms of social media are Facebook, Twitter, Google+, Wikipedia, LinkedIn, Reddit, and Pinterest.

Social media, while a recent computer network technologies phenomenon in facilitating multipoint customized communication, is yet to prove an indispensable tool for galvanizing any social group [6]. These interactive web-based platforms are exclusively independent content generated [7]. The nature of the applications is open source derived, making content easily customizable by groups [7]. The rise of platforms or computer-mediated communication structures came of age when groups such as Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, Transgender, and Queer (LBGTQ) were in desperate need for a virtual device where they can independently generate their own content

and share vital information [8]. It is against this backdrop that LBGTQ, such as in Accra, Ghana, emerged as a community [8]. In one such seminal content article of July 2015, Patrick Ayumu argued on the subject “Is homosexuality alien or not in Africa”, concluding that the continent of Africa is replete with ancient historical evidence of homosexual practice [8].

According to [9] anxiety and depression levels among HIV-positive gay men, little is known about factors associated with positive mental health. Such knowledge can be useful for optimizing well-being support programs for HIV-positive gay men, from such reports as national surveys in countries like Australia, the United States, and the United Kingdom (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007; Literature disclosed that conditions associated with mood are suggestively higher within gays compared with their heterosexual counterparts in both male and female. These differences are large because of the effect of social disgrace [10]. For instance, everyday encounters of judgment and bias, denial by friends, including some families, and emotional state of shame are all causes of the stigma that are central to substantial strain within sections of gay men, culminating in undesirable repercussions that act against their psychological well-being [11].

However, the movement for gays, lesbians, and bisexuals became popular during the 1990s in the western world, part of the reason being that they had a solid infrastructural base for their culture, politics, society, educational systems, and skilled organizations put up by campaigners in the previous year’s [12]. All through the 1980s, there was the coming together of certified groups, business employee individuals, and university students’ associations, including faculties and staff who identified themselves as homosexuals, rallied together to give themselves social support and also put up a united force in the fight to win state and city executive support to ban work

hostility, provision of health care and employee welfare for home partners [13].

In addition to this is the insertion of sexual angle in college and university assenting action procedures and integration of gay and lesbian educations into the prospectuses of the universities and colleges [13]. As many experts admit that the political engagement in the places of work has been serious about catalyzing the progress and triumph of this movement for the gays, lesbians, and bisexuals, research are commonly inaudible about its influence on individual activists' lives [13]. It does not come as a baffle that lesbian women and gay men, like members of other potentially hidden and devalued groups in Ghana and other parts of the world, will only reveal their sexual identity to selected people [14]. Most homosexuals, especially those in Ghana rather, use social media as a medium to get themselves connected to other homosexuals so as to communicate, offer, receive and seek social support.

The study is predicated on the conclusion that the absence of social media social support will have led to the demise of the LGBTQ people in Accra. The research will examine how layered multi-media platforms coalesced to form a network of connectivity among the various subsets of the homosexual community in Accra. The research will further show how the varying groups have used different social media platforms to rally and insulate themselves from public attacks. This investigation examines the relationship between social media and social support on the flourishing homosexual identity in Accra.

Though the criminal code in Ghana is not explicitly saying that homosexuality is unlawful, historical, unlawful cases have indicated that sodomy and precisely male to male sex is "unusual canal knowledge" and as such a crime under section 104 of the Ghanaian Criminal Code. This has led to the arrest and imprisonment of those who were caught in the act and led gay sex merely underground but has

not stopped it in the intended ways [15]. As a highly religious country, Ghana has not reformed its old laws governing homosexuality. According to the CIA World Facebook, more than half of the Ghanaian population, which is Christian, and the less than half who are either Muslim or of indigenous belief see homosexuality as a taboo to be detested and do not encourage it in any way. The Homosexual community in Accra is a vibrant cosmopolitan community producing some of the best intellectuals, skilled professionals, and social change advocates. The community is relatively small in numbers as compared to the city's total population (Amnesty International, 2013). In general, the homosexual community has been maligned by the Christian right, the government, and the public, causing them to become insular, secretive, and sociologically conflicted. This community has developed a significant all-be-it subterranean network of hybrid families, bonding, and groupings. While there seems to be a unified, strong community of homosexuals in Accra on the surface, there is substantial evidence that the community is suffering immensely from public marginalization. Without a substantial drive towards protecting this group, the lesbian women, gay men, bisexual individuals, transgender, and the queer (LGBTQ) group in Accra, Ghana seems to be in danger of being criminalized, making it possible for the law to deny their national and human rights as citizens and residents of Accra Ghana. Given greater human rights protection and if accorded legal rights, most of these people will come out of hiding [15]. On the matter of health and infection, the homosexual community would use social media openly and freely to ensure that people with HIV or STIs are able to get help. Social media has become one of the most effective ways for the LGBTQ community to organize themselves, disseminate vital information and educate their community on important events that affect them. The influence of social media and social support cannot be

overstated. The study provides an in-depth understanding of how social media communication network influences the community in Accra. The outcome will help demonstrate the power, import, and usefulness of media communication. Further, it helps the broader society in learning what makes this marginalized society so resilient [15]. Homosexuality has carried the stigma and strong sentiments of shame, guilt, and fear [15, 8]. The ensuing maligning of homosexuals of all stripes has caused inhumane treatment and harsh discrimination against Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Transgender, and Queer persons [8]. The global history of homosexuality conveys a psychosomatic syndrome. It demonstrates a primordial ambiguity within societies that publicly abhors a socio-cultural practice – Homosexuality; but privately have practiced, harboured, or have experienced such behaviours [8]. In addition, psychology and psychiatry-based theories and models have been used as a vehicle for propagating false medical reasons for marginalizing homosexuals and the practice thereof. In the age of wireless digital communication, members of the LGBTQ community are using social media as a means by which they receive social support and as a tool to advance their cause. Homosexuality is not so much of a popular subject in Ghana, and limited studies are done in this area. The research gap exists in this research area, which ought to be filled hence the influence of social media social support on the flourishing homosexual identity among the lesbian gay's bisexuals, transgender, and queer group in Accra-Ghana. The objectives include determining the extent to which social media support influence homosexual identity, to determine correlation between homosexual identity and flourishing levels among homosexuals, to ascertain the extent to which social media emotional support predicts how homosexuals flourish and to ascertain how differences in levels of education predict homosexuals flourish.

One theoretical basis for the current work is anchored on the uses and gratifications theory propounded by [19], which examined the factors that motivated television viewers to follow the 1964 election held in the United Kingdom [16]; [17]. This theory initially was presented to explore the fulfillments which entice and keep patrons hooked to varieties of media and content which are pleasing their social and mental wants. The key ideas of the uses and gratifications theory comprised the original reasons for making use of media, the uses of the media, and their outcomes [1]. This theory anticipated that audiences vigorously required different types of bulk media to please their requirements and selected choices according to the information they encountered, read, and picked up [19]. The following hypotheses were tested social support will predict homosexual identity, a positive relationship will exist between homosexual identity and flourishing levels, social media emotional support will predict how homosexuals flourish, and differences in levels of education will predict how homosexuals flourish. The following hypotheses were tested. Hypothesis One: social media social support will predict homosexual identity. Hypotheses Two: A positive relationship will exist between homosexual identity and flourishing levels. Social media and emotional social support will predict how homosexuals flourish. Hypotheses Four: Differences in the level of education will predict how homosexuals flourish.

Methods

In this study, the flourishing LGBTQ + using social support through social media was examined. The social support scale and the flourishing were administered using social media. The population for the study was associates of the homosexual Community in Accra-Ghana. A case study was used as the design for the study. Using purposive sampling and following with a snowball sampling technique, 142 homosexual respondents

answered a questionnaire. Berlin social support scale (BSSS) [22] was modified into the social media support scale, flourishing scale by [23], and Identity scale (LGBIS) by [24] on demographics, social support, flourishing, and lesbian, gay, bisexual identity. The researcher used three months to collect data. A snowball sampling technique was therefore used to get more respondents for the study. The target selected for the study was made up of one hundred and forty-two (142) respondents. Berlin Social support Scale BSSS) yielded psychometric properties of Crombach alpha for the 8-items perceived social support Schwarzer & Schulz, 2000). according to [25]. Lesbian,

Gay, and Bisexual Identity Scale LGBIS) was used. The psychometric in Difficult process ($\alpha = .81$, Concealment motivation ($\alpha = .77$) and (7) Identity superiority ($\alpha = .77$ [26] terms of internal strength indexes (1) Identity displeasure ($\alpha = .88$) (2) Identity doubt ($\alpha = .91$) (3) Stigma thoughtfulness ($\alpha = .76$) (4) Identity uniqueness ($\alpha = .79$) (5) The Crombach alpha for the 8-item perceived social support is 0.83; the 11-item general score received has a Crombach alpha of 0.83. Descriptive and inferential statistical tests were employed for the analysis. The various tests used to analyze the various research questions are listed as follows.

Results and Discussion

Table 1. Representation of Respondents' Sex, Age Range, Marital Status, and Employment Status

Groups	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)
Sex		
Male	119	83.8
Female	23	16.2
Age Range		
Below – 20yrs	4	2.8
20 – 29yrs	115	81.0
30 – 39yrs	21	14.8
40 – 49yrs	2	1.4
Marital Status		
Single	130	91.5
Married	12	8.5
Employed?		
Yes	104	73.2
No	38	26.8
Total	142	100

Table 1 shows that 83.8% of the sample were males, while 16.2% were females. As regards respondents' age, it was shown that 2.8% of respondents were less than 20 years, 81% were between 20 to 29 years, 14.8% were between 30 to 39 years, and 1.4% were between

40 to 49 years. It is further revealed that 91.5% of respondents were single, while 8.5% were married. Table 1 also revealed that 73.2% of respondents were employed while 26.8% were unemployed.

Table 2. Representation of Respondents' Level of Education, Identity, and Family Awareness of Homosexuality Standing

Groups	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)
Education Level		
Informal education	3	2.1
Middle School Level	16	11.3
Secondary Level	29	20.4
Tertiary Level	91	64.1
Other	3	2.1
Identity		
Gay	53	37.3
Lesbian	17	12.0
Bisexual	63	44.4
Transgender	2	1.4
Queer	7	4.9
Family Awareness Homosexuality Status		
Yes	48	33.8
No	88	62.0
I Don't Know	6	4.2
Total	142	100

Table 3. Simple Linear Regression Test Result whether Social Media Social Support Predict Homosexual Identity

Predictors	β	R	R ²	p
Emotional Support	-.002	-	-	.988
Instrumental Support	-.082	-	-	.513
Need for Support	.302	-	-	.008
Support Seeking	-.078	-	-	.448
	-	.029	.057	-

Hypothesis One

Social media social support will predict homosexual identity Results are highlighted in Table 3.

Table 3 indicates that the standard multiple regression analysis tested whether social media social support can significantly predict respondents' homosexual identity. Results of the regression showed that the social support explains 3% variance ($R^2 = .057$, $F(2,134) = 2.027$, $p = .094$). It was found that emotional support ($\beta = -.002$, $p = .988$), instrumental

support ($\beta = .513$, $p = n.s.$), need for support ($\beta = .302$, $p = n.s.$) while support seeking ($\beta = -.078$, $p = n.s.$) did not predict homosexual identity. This implies that, social support does not predict homosexual identity among homosexuals in Accra. Hypothesis one is rejected.

Hypotheses Two

A positive relationship will exist between homosexual identity and flourishing levels. The result is highlighted in Table 4.

Table 4. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient Test Results on the Relationship between Homosexual Identity and how Homosexuals Flourish

Variables	M	SD	r	p
Homosexual Identity	30.77	5.98	-	-
Flourishing	45.16	11.31	-	-
Total	-	-	.155	.066

In Table 4, the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient test was used to assess the relationship between homosexual identity and how homosexuals flourish. Results ($r = .155$, $p = .n.s.$) reveal that a positive relationship exists between homosexual identity and how homosexuals flourish. Thus, as an individual homosexual identity increases, so

does the level with which the individual flourishes. Hypothesis two is accepted.

Hypotheses Three

Social media and emotional, and social support will predict how homosexuals flourish. The result is highlighted in Table 5.

Table 5. Simple Linear Regression Test Result whether Social Media Social Support Predict how Homosexuals Flourish

Predictors	β	R	R^2	p
Emotional Support	1.006	-	-	.024
Instrumental Support	.200	-	-	.623
Need for Support	.081	-	-	.854
Support Seeking	.147	-	-	.554
	-	.098	.124	-

In Table 5, the standard multiple regression analysis was used to test if social media social support significantly predicted how homosexuals flourish. Results of the regression showed that the social support explains 93% variance ($R^2 = .124$, $F(4,135) = 4.773$, $p < .001$). It was found that emotional support ($\beta = 1.006$, $p = .024$) predict homosexual flourishing. However, instrumental support ($\beta = .200$, $p = n.s.$), need for support ($\beta = .081$, $p =$

$n.s.$) and support seeking ($\beta = .147$, $p = n.s.$) did not predict homosexual flourishing. This implies that social media and emotional social support predict the flourishing of homosexuals in Accra. Hypothesis three is accepted.

Hypotheses Four

Differences in the level of education will predict how homosexuals flourish. The result is presented in Table 6.

Table 6. One-Way Analysis of Variance Test Result on whether Level of Education Predicts how Homosexuals Flourish

Groups	M	SD	DF	F P
Between Groups	629.080	4	-	-
Within Groups	17394.194	137	-	-
Total	18023.275	141	-	-

Table 6 presents the One-Way Analysis of Variance test used to assess if the level of education can predict how homosexuals flourish. Results ($F(2,137) = 1.239$, $p = n.s.$)

show that differences in the level of education does not predict how homosexuals flourish in Accra. Hypothesis four is rejected.

Social media social support will predict homosexual identity. This was achieved using a Simple Linear Regression test. A positive relationship will exist between homosexual identity and flourishing levels. This hypothesis was analyzed by the Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient test. Social media and emotional, social support will predict how homosexuals flourish. This was analyzed with the Simple Linear Regression test. Differences in education will predict how homosexuals flourish. This was achieved using a one-way analysis of the variance test.

Summary of Results

Social support does not predict homosexual identity among homosexuals in Accra. Secondly, a positive relationship was found between homosexual identity and how homosexuals flourish in Accra. Thus, as an individual homosexual identity increases, so does the level with which the individual flourishes. Results indicated that even though instrumental support, need for support, and support seeking did not predict homosexual flourishing, social media emotional, and social support predict flourishing among homosexuals in Accra. Finally, differences in the level of education were found not to determine how homosexuals flourish in Accra. The foremost hypothesis was stated thus "social media social support will predict homosexual identity." Results revealed that emotional support, instrumental support, need for support, and support seeking does not predict homosexual identity. This finding is unique because of the general belief that levels of social support that is offered to members of any marginalized group influence them to openly identify themselves with that group. Nevertheless, the finding has shown that levels of emotional, instrumental, and support-seeking behaviours does not influence the level with which homosexuals take pride in their homosexual identity. The findings of the study is supported by [13], who argued that homosexuals in Ghana

face so much stigma and discrimination to the extent that it is almost impossible to perceive the possibility of anything (e.g., social support) enhancing their identity [13]. Hence, no amount of social support will enhance homosexual identity. The above finding contradicts that of [8], who argued that the advent and usage of various computerized social media platforms and the social support received from these internet technological mediums have a major influence on how individuals identify themselves as homosexuals [8]. The second hypothesis stated that "a positive relationship will exist between homosexual identity and flourishing levels." After data analysis, results revealed that a positive relationship exists between homosexual identity and how homosexuals flourish. The finding of this study contradicts that of [9], who argued that homosexuals' identity is one of the factors that increase psychological distress levels among gay and lesbians. This is so because homosexuals have higher levels of anxiety, and depression, among others. These conditions go a long way to undermine how gays and lesbians flourish in society [9]. [9]'s findings is supported by that of the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2007), [10] whose studies which were done in Australia, the United States of America, and the United Kingdom respectively, states that as compared to heterosexuals, individuals who identify themselves as homosexuals have negative physical and psychological health conditions that undermine their flourishing levels. Thus, homosexual identity does not enhance how homosexuals flourish [10]. Meanwhile, [9]'s findings have shown that no significant difference exists between flourishing levels among homosexuals and non-homosexuals [9].

The third hypothesis stated that 'social media emotional, social support will predict how homosexuals flourish.' Results of the regression indicated that emotional support predicts homosexual flourishing levels. Irrespective of the fact that Azabre and Fordjour Human

Rights Watch (2018) have stated that because of the discrimination, homophobia, and social stigma expressed against homosexuals in Ghana, homosexuals are not flourishing but rather perishing. It should be noted that flourishing has to do with most aspects of positive mental health [20]. It is, therefore, not surprising that social media social support has an influence on how homosexuals flourish. According to [21]'s finding support that of the above studies by arguing that unlike in the past, the world has entered an era where most individuals who identify themselves as transgender are flourishing, especially in developed countries such as the US, due to the levels of support they receive [21]. In addition, one of the major predictors of overall life fulfillment of retired persons in Ghana and globally is social support.

The fourth hypothesis stated that "differences in the level of education will predict how homosexuals flourish." After data analysis, results showed that differences in the level of education do not predict how homosexuals flourish in Accra. This finding is unique because previous studies have shown that as levels of education increases so does the levels with which individuals flourish. But the finding was discovered among heterosexuals in Western Countries.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The current study observed the influence of social media social support on the flourishing and homosexual identity within homosexuals (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer) in Accra. Findings revealed that emotional support, instrumental support, need for support, and support seeking does not predict homosexual identity. This shows that social support does not predict homosexual identity among homosexuals in Accra. Furthermore, a positive relationship was found between homosexual identity and how homosexuals flourish in Accra. An increase in homosexual identity enhances the level with

which individual flourishes. Results further showed that emotional, social support from social media enhances flourishing levels among homosexuals. Finally, differences in the level of education did not predict how homosexuals flourish. Based on the findings, it is concluded that, even though social media social support does not influence the pride homosexuals have in their identity, emotional, and social support received from social media has a major influence on the extent to which homosexuals flourish in Ghana. This study has shown that differences in the level of education among homosexuals do not influence the extent to which homosexuals flourish.

Acknowledgement

The contribution of respondents in providing data for the study is acknowledged. The researcher acknowledges all sources cited in the study.

Conflict of Interest

The recommendation is that future studies should use a larger sample size than the one used in this study. This is important because a larger sample size will be more representative of the targeted population and will also go a long way to enhance how the findings of the study can be generalized. Future studies are also encouraged to target homosexuals from different regions across the country to compare their levels of homosexual identity, social media, social support, and flourishing level. This will help to determine the type of region, differences in culture, and proximity to the national capital (i.e., Accra) predicts levels of homosexual identity, flourishing and social media social support. In the future, studies should also consider doing a comparison between homosexuals, bisexuals, and heterosexuals to determine whether differences exist between their levels of identity, social media, social support, and flourishing. This will help to determine if the dynamics of sexual identity or orientation predict levels of social

support and flourishing. It is again recommended that homosexuals in Ghana should seek more emotional social support from social media. This is important because doing

so will enhance the extent to which they flourish as individuals. In the research disclosure was required.

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