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Social media tools and its effect on secondary school students' academic achievement in The Gambia

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Abstract. Since the innovation and widespread usage of the internet in this 21st century, social Media tools have been swiftly embraced by children, teens, youths, adult and old people in the universe. These tools have improved communication in the educational sector by creating unlimited opportunities for academic professionals and students in research thereby enhancing the teaching-learning process. In spite of the efficacy of social media tools in education, there are trepidations on the effect of these tools on student's academic achievement. Findings shows that majority of the students make use of Facebook because majority of them have access to it which will make them addicted and distracted by online activities and thus have a detrimental impact on their academic achievement. To this end, this paper recommends that students should create a balance in lifestyle and academic activities hence, attention should be directed towards research to enhance their knowledge.

Keywords. Social Media Tools, Academic Achievement, The Gambia, Facebook, Internet, Secondary School

1. Introduction

In our society today, the internet has taken a cogent place in the lives of most individuals due to its wide range of acceptability and usability as a means of effective communication both locally and internationally. Singh, (2017) ascertained that the persistent rise in the number of internet users has skyrocketed to about 7.2 billion because of its effectiveness and efficiency as a means of communication at everyone's convenience. The advent of social media has made communication easier between different people at the same time because they do not necessarily need an advanced knowledge of the internet before they can access various social media tools either on the computer or their mobile phone Sudha and Kavitha, (2016). This has become an upgrade of technological advancement as opposed in the olden days when people use letter writing, fax machine, town criers and so on as a medium of communication which takes days, weeks, months and sometimes a couple of years before the message is delivered to the recipient. Thus, social media has improved communication channels, reduce the barriers through the emergence, innovation and advancement in technology that has made it easily become the fastest means of communication from one place

to another willy-nilly of the distance in recent times. The effectiveness and efficiency of the internet has made social media tools to be a reliable means of connection and a bridge of gap in the communication among business owners, private and public workers, non-governmental organisations, religious houses, schools and so on irrespective of their sociocultural background, religion or personality so as to share information, documents, create blogs and communicate via audio or video conversations. In an attempt to stay in touch with families and friends and to also follow the latest news and trends, various social media tools can be used which include: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Snapchat, Whatsapp, Youtube and so on. Social media tools are used for either educational, religious, social, political and recently, most business owners uses it to advertise their businesses through E-Marketing which is done online by posting their items on their status or posting it directly to their timelines as a way of attracting more customers to patronize them. Furthermore, social media tools usage is also becoming more popular in the entertainment industry as it is easier to access movies, music, arts and so on via mobile phones and laptops and also which some youths have been using it to make themselves known to the public through skits, timeline videos and creative posts. Brown, (2010); Schroeder, Minocha and Schneider, (2010) further opines that the driving force behind the embracing and adaptation of social media is because of its universal access, ease, functionality and suppleness of social technologies.

From the foregoing, it is perhaps difficult to imagine a school environment ranging from the basic to the tertiary institutions without the usage of social media tools either by the school management, teaching and non – teaching staffs and also the students due to its popularity as it simplifies easy access among one another. Recently, it has been observed that there is an increase in the usage of social media tools by students as compared to the last decade because most of the students use it to check for updates either for personal or commercial purposes. Furthermore, since the introduction of entrepreneurship into secondary school curriculum which varies from a country to another, most of the students have been able to use it to explore their skills and potentials in an attempt to learn new ideas which has become a veritable tool for making extra income and by empowering them to become self-sufficient which will be beneficial to them in their life time. Some students that have learnt blogging skills have been able to use social media tools to gather information in sports, politics, health and fitness, education and also lifestyle locally or internationally and its been published online. Some students have also resolved to use social media as a source of e-marketing so to advertise and market their parent's products to their colleagues in the school environment and also the general public.

The use of social media platforms by youths has become a mainstay in the general lifestyle of individuals due to its positive effects and its usefulness in the society that both the literate and illiterate have benefitted from however, many researchers have argued that the persistent use of social media tools among students could lead to an addiction which could have a negative effect on students' academic achievement while some believed that the adequate use of these tools will aid to the development of the students and thus make them a better learner because of the direct access to academic materials which can be sourced online at their own convenience.

2. Statement of the problem

The advancement of technology has brought a swift expansion of social media which has had a great effect in the way people interact in the society on a daily basis. Recently, social networking among the youths has become more popular which is rampant among the students as a means of communication, socialization and for educational purposes. Due to the

widespread and usage of social networking sites, researchers in the field of various fields are curious to know whether the grades of students will not be affected by how much time they spend online. Choney, (2010), MehMood & Taswir, (2013), Kist (2008), Jacobsen & Forste, (2011) averred that there is a likely effect that the persistent use of social networking sites through the internet may have an effect on the academic achievement of students" either positively or negatively.

3. Objective of the Study

The objective of the study is to examine the effect of social media tools on students' academic achievement. It also seeks to study the dynamics that could influence the behaviour of students' so as to ascertain whether Facebook has a positive or negative effect on students' academic achievement of secondary school students in the Gambia.

4. Research Questions

- a. Do you know why people use Facebook?
- b. Should Facebook be considered as a veritable tool for learning among secondary school students?
- c. Does Facebook help in curbing bad behaviour among students?
- d. Has Facebook usage improve study habits among students?

5. Theoretical Framework

The theory which is considered the most appropriate for this study is the Uses and Gratification theory and Social Learning theory.

5.1. Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT)

Uses and gratifications theory (UGT) is an approach that focuses on to why and how people actively seek out specific media to satisfy an exact need. This theory differs from other theories that are concerned on what media do to people but rather emphasis on what people do with media. *Katz & Elihu (1959)* postulates that media is an accessible product while the society is the users of the media. Blumler and Katz (1974) further suggest that most social media tools users are inert in nature and as a result, some of the users that have been able to adopt and integrate it to their everyday routine have done it based on their desired goals and objectives so as to achieve gratification. This theory connotes that the use and gratification of social media tools focuses on why and how people use it to satisfy their anticipated needs to its maximum Larose, Mastro and Estin, (2001). This simplifies that an individual has an understanding and contented on what to do with social media applications. From the foregoing, it can be inferred that due to the effectiveness and efficiency of social media, its applications can be used as a gateway for accessing information, newsfeed, communication and entertainment in the internet age. In addition, it shows that there is a distinctive relationship in the use of Facebook and personal gratification as students may prefer to use it for camaraderie, entertainment, relaxation, group chat, information collection and recently, some students have engaged themselves in some online business and E-marketing advertisement to get their products known to their friends and families. The significance of this theory is to address the motives behind the use of Facebook whether it has a direct or indirect effect on academic purpose and to know its cohesion on their academic achievement.

5.2 Social Learning Theory (SLT)

Social learning theory was developed by Bandura, A (1977). He defined social learning theory as a medium whereby people learn from one another through observation, imitation and modelling. Most human behaviour is learned through observation and modelling. He posit that by observing others, an individual forms an idea of how new behaviours are performed and on later occasions, this coded information are transformed which serves as a guide for action (Bandura, 1977). This theory further explains that the human behaviour in terms of continuous reciprocal interaction is between cognitive, behavioural and environmental influences. However, social learning theory tries to create a connection between behaviourist and cognitive learning theories because it shows the relationship between attention, memory and motivation. This theory is applicable to social media tools because it influences the behaviour of the students as they tend to copy what they see on the social media platforms and imitate such trends. Most students make reference to the post of most of the celebrities, especially musicians and footballers that they see on social media and even go as far as making them their role models by imitating, mimicking and memorizing their behaviour and output. This shows that some students“ devote more time to Facebook by browsing the internet and checking the wall, timeline and status of the celebrities as a substitute to the maximum use of the judicious time to their academics.

6. Literature Review

6.1. The Concepts of Social Media and Its Interplay on Education

Various researchers have come up with several definitions of social media. Researchers like Jacka and Scott (2011) summed that there is no solitary standard definition of social media that is being a general phenomenon, its relevance in the society cannot be overemphasized. Social media has been described as a miniature world or a space where people socialize via online platform. It can be accessible either through website or applications that are specially designed to connect people and allow them to share virtual content in real-time. Social media which can also be referred to as Social Networking Sites is an online technology platform that helps individuals to connect and interact with people beyond and abroad so as to build a communication linkage in the society. It is used to build a relationship through communication with young and old and also to listen to music, read books and for multimedia storage amongst others Safko and Brake, (2008) also averred that social media is an activity, practice, and behaviour among communities of people who gather online to share information, knowledge, and opinions using conversational media. Similarly, Drury (2008) further define social media as an online resource which is easily accessible to the public to share contents including: video, photos, images, text, ideas, insight, comedy, opinion, gossip, news. Some of these social media tools include: Yahoo mail, Facebook, YouTube, Whatsapp, Instagram, Google, Zoom, Twitter and so on.

Livingstone and Brake (2010) affirmed in their opinion that social media tools represent a progressive target for researchers and policy makers. It has driven great fervor among educators because of the roles it plays in the learning objective. This assertion is also supported by researchers such as Wheeler, Yeomans and Wheeler, (2008); Rifkin, Longnecker, Leach, Davis and Ortia, (2009) elucidated the advantages of social medial tool uses in the education system which includes enhancing relationship, improving learning motivation, offering personalized learning materials and also developing collaborative abilities which show that social media tools activities have the possibility of enhancing student“s contact and can also be used to improve their participation in the class, particularly where introverted students are involved. Due to the upsurge in the usage of social media tools like instant messaging

applications which includes: Facebook and Whatsapp, a research carried out in 2019 shows that over 7 Billion people in the world use either of these applications to connect people (source; <https://www.wordometers.info>).

This instant messaging applications has boosted communication away from the school environment through creating group chats and access to online links which makes it easier for students" to function in online group learning, with less or no anxiety of the need to raise questions before peers at school. This shows that the advent of social media platforms has enhanced the students" to technological innovations which may have impacted their learning proficiency. Social media tools is not limited to the students alone as it has also benefited researchers in various professions to have quick access to information and materials to enhance their skills and keep up to date in their professional career. Some of the advantage of social media tools in some standard schools is the sending of results by the school management to the parent or guardian of the student to know the academic achievement of their ward which is done weekly, monthly, termly or on a sessional basis.

6.2. The Positive and Negative Impact of Social Media on Students Academic Achievement

Social media tools makes connection easier and faster as it expands our universe. Junco, (2011) averred that this tools has form an integral part of higher education students. Social media impacts students" physically and mentally which boost their academic life to make it effective and efficient in their cause of learning. According to a research carried out by Jain; Verma; Verma and Tiwari (2012), it revealed that some students benefit from chit-chatting with other students, instructors and social relations as a means of connecting with others. This is also supported by Yunus and Salehi (2012), who both argued in the same trend that students learn and improve on their vocabulary, reading and writing skills and correction of their spelling errors through social media usage. In addition, it deepens learning by creating a wider range of options to explore by both the students and instructors which is done at their own convenience on the choice on what methodology is best suited in the teaching-learning process. Some of the options include: online teaching- learning which is becoming more popular and accessible anywhere in the world through internet connection. O'keeffe and Clake-pearson (2011), in their study discovered that students can also share, solve and discuss class activities, assignments and group projects on social media within or outside the school premises. It is further propped by Arquero and Esteban, (2013) and Selwyn, (2007) whose suppositions were that social media has unquestionably created innovative prospects to engage students in secondary education as they are remarkably effective at connecting people thereby expediting the exchange of information.

In spite the positive aspects which shows the importance and effect of social media on students' academic achievement, Davies and Cranston (2008); Okeeffe and Clake-Pearson (2011), highlighted some of the menaces related with social media which include immoral activities such as: identity theft and fake contacts, online sexual harassment, inapt advertising, cyberbullying, sexting, privacy trepidations, social media online addiction, loneliness and depression. These immoral activities make students lose the factual aspect of the natural human communication skills as they spend more time on frivolities which will thus affect them negatively. Some of the adverse impacts of social media have seen various cases in highly sensitive places such as schools, religious houses, and so on whereby students spend too much of their time chit-chatting, watching pornography, addiction to social media platforms which could lead to late night and unhealthy or poor sleep, increased rate of anxiety and depression among youths.

According to Kuppuswamy and Shankar (2010), they opined in their study that social media tools diverts the attention and awareness of the students toward learning whereby most of the students spend most of their precious time online with superfluous chatting. It was observed that the uncultured use of these social media platforms also affects students' use of English and grammar which makes students abbreviate verbal and non-verbal words in their chat rooms and also in the class rooms Obi, Bulus, Adamu, & Sala'at, (2012). Most students' get used to the social media slangs while some are primary accustomed to in such a way that they use it in the day to day communication with their peers due to the rampant usage of unnecessary abbreviation of spellings which could have a detrimental impact on their morals and academic achievement. Further observation shows that some students get too carried away with the usage as they go as far as using such words and it's abbreviation in the classroom activities by constructing sentences like „Be right back as BRB“, „Rolling on the floor laughing as ROFL“, Shaking my head as SMH“, “As soon as possible as ASAP” and so on. There are students' who use those aforementioned words in their examination and this makes their teachers mark them down. Oche and Aminu, (2010) further emphasize that social media tools disrupt students' attention as most of them spend about 24 hours online and some of them extend this abrupt attitude of chit-chatting into the classroom and even in the school library. This summarizes justified evidence that the positive and judicious usage of social media will benefit and make teaching-learning methodology effective and efficient in the students' academic achievement vice versa.

6.3.Factors Affecting Students' Academic Achievement in The Gambia

The level of education literacy in the Gambia has augmented in the last decade due to the impact of the Government to encourage her youths by providing moral and financial support so as to acquire the necessary skills needed to become effective and efficient in the future. Despite the rise in the usage of social media among youths in the Gambia, majority of the secondary students have limited access to social media tools due to the low level in literacy as it is accessible to few students that are from wealthy homes who attends private schools. Some of the students are on sponsors by government and non-governmental organizations which thereby constitutes mainstream of them to attend Government schools where they pay little or no money. A greater percentage of the students are from Region one in the (Banjul and Kanifing Municipal Council).

According to a report by (Accessgambia, 2009), (4.5% females) go to school compared to (1.2% males) which shows that majority of the students are females. This shows that the impact of education cannot be overemphasized as it is the most effective medium to transform the world. It is an investment in knowledge which at the end pays the best interest as it helps to explore human potentials in life. Education is the process of facilitating [learning](#), or the acquisition of [knowledge](#), [skills](#), [values](#), [beliefs](#), and [lifestyles](#). It can either take place formally or informally. Education is a vital asset for human and economic growth and development which is influenced by the society. The provision of quality education will enhance students' academic achievement which is affected by many factors including gender, age, teaching methodology, learners' schooling, parental social economic status, residential area of learners, medium of school policies, tuition trend, peer group and many more. Education methods includes: discussion, teaching, training, storytelling and directed research (Source:<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/education>).

Various scholars have investigated some of the factors that affect student academic achievement in schools. Borde, (1998) averred that students' educational success solely depends on social status of students' parents/guardians in the society. There were further studies

that supported the opinion that the learning outcome of students will be determined by parents' income or social-economic status which could positively affect the evaluation of students' academic achievement as compared to the students' that their families are on low income Considine and Zappala, (2002). Other factors that determine the learning outcome of students include; low literacy level, low retention rate and so on. In addition, there are further opinions that suggest that students with good socio-economic background perform better than those from low socio-economic status and this makes the students to obtain low scores in their studies Eamon (2005). Study also shows that there are some important factors that has an effect on the students' achievement in high school which will also contribute to their learning objectives such as: previous schooling, parents' educational background, family income, self-motivation of students, age of student, learning preference, entry qualification of students and so on Woodfeld and Earl-Novell (2006). Also, the students' learning outcome and academic achievement are strongly affected by the standard and type of educational institutions in which students get their education. Cotton and Savard(2004) in their submission argued that school ownership, provision of facilities and availability of resources in school is an important structural component of the school. For instance, there has been a strong argument that public school students perform better than their counterparts in the private schools but findings shows that those in the private schools perform better due to the better funding, small and manageable sizes, serious ownership, motivated aptitude due to improved staff welfare and access to educational resources such as computers, projectors e.t.c. Private school students' are also motivated to learn and perform better in their academic achievement due to adequate funding and provision of teaching resources and facilities.

According to Considine and Zappala (2002), the learning environment which is varied by teachers' expectations has strong influence on students' academic achievement. The standard of the learning environment of the school a student attends sets the pace and evaluates the students' academic performance. Most of the teachers working in poor schools lacking basic amenities find it demanding to motivate students to learn which often leads to low performance expectations from their students. Harb and ElShaarawi(2006) further explain that students' achievement is influenced by the school in which they study which is also based on the number of facilities the school could offer which is used to determine the quality of the school, which in turn affect the achievement and accomplishment of the students.

From the foregoing, students' prefer to check the latest updates, upload their social lifestyles on status so as to mimic other students' and this makes other students' try to imitate them. Most students suffer from academic setbacks as a result of unnecessary social media preoccupation by spending more time online. The emphasis on the impact of social media on academic excellence is prevalent throughout the world and has encouraged many researchers to share their view on how it can help students' positively by putting their efforts toward learning, scientific research and innovation which will make them be a better student and also prepare them mentally, morally, academically and physically for their future. However, with these advancements a major concern arises in this globalized world where there is huge quest for technological development which makes social networking platforms becoming more popular especially among students. In light of this, the objective of this paper is to determine the effect of social media tool (Facebook) on students' academic achievement in secondary schools that are actively using social media tools in the Gambia.

7. Methodology

The research design for this study is survey. The existing studies will be thoroughly analyzed, as well as survey will be conducted among respondents. Ohaja, (2003) purport survey

as the collection of data through questioning which makes a researcher have an overview vis-à-vis the population of study. The instrument of data collection for the study is questionnaire. The area of study is Kotu Senior Secondary School, Deeper Life School and Nusrat Senior Secondary School, The Gambia. Simple random sampling was used to select the students. The respondents' characteristics presented below in Table 1 shows that the final data collected from the respondents' is (280). This presents the results of the analysis in line with the research question formulated for the study in order to make valid conclusion based on the study.

Table 1.1
Demographic data of the respondents

Characteristics	Frequency (280)	Percentage (100%)
Gender		
Male	121	43.3
Female	159	56.7
Age		
12-13 years	70	25
14 – 15 years	133	47.5
16 – 17 years	63	22.5
Above 18 years	14	5
Class		
Grade 10	100	35.8
Grade 11	135	48.3
Grade 12	45	15.8
Religion		
Christianity	87	30.8
Muslim	193	69.2

The table above presents the distribution of respondents by gender. According to the result of the analysis, 121 (43.30%) of the respondents were male while 159 (56.70%) were female. This shows that majority of the respondents that constitutes the sample size were female. The table also shows the distribution of respondents by age group which according to the result of the analysis, 70 (25.0%) of the respondents were between 12 – 13 years of age, 133 (47.5%) were between 14 – 15 years of age and 63 (22.5%) were between 16 - 17 years of age while 14 (5.0%) were above 18 years of age. This reflects that majority of the respondents that constitute the target population were between 14 – 15 years of age. The table however illustrates the distribution of respondents by class. According to the result of the analysis, 100 (35.8%) of the respondents were Grade 10 students, 135 (48.3%) of the respondents were Grade 11 students while 45 (15.8%) were Grade 12 students. This affirms that the majority of the respondents that constitute the target population were Grade 11 students. The distribution of respondents by religion according to the result of the analysis shows that 87 (30.8%) of the respondents were Christian while 193 (69.2%) were Muslim. This shows that majority of the respondents that constitute the target population were Muslim.

Research Questions

Table 1.2

Do you know the usefulness of Facebook?

Parameter	Frequency (280)	Percentage (100%)
Do you know why people use Facebook?		
Agree	266	95
Disagree	14	5
Do you use Facebook apart from education and socialising purpose?		
Agree	201	71.7
Disagree	79	28.3

Table 1.2 shows that 266 (95%) of the respondents knows the usefulness of Facebook while 14 (5%) of the respondents do not know its usefulness. This also shows that 201 (71.7%) uses Facebook for other purposes apart from educational and social use while 79 (28.3%) uses Facebook for educational and socialising purpose only. This responses shows that majority of the respondents 266 (95%) knows the usefulness of Facebook while majority of the respondents 201 (71.7%) also indicated that they use it for other purposes other than for education and socialising.

Table 1.3

Should Facebook be considered as a veritable tool for learning among secondary school students?

Parameter	Frequency (280)	Percentage (100%)
Do you consider Facebook to be a platform to learn for students?		
Yes	126	45
No	154	55
Do you consider Facebook as a positive assessment to the academic performance of the students in your school?		
Agree	33	11.7
Disagree	247	88.3

Table 1.3 shows that 126 (45%) of the respondents consider Facebook to be a platform to learn for students while 154 (55%) of the respondents does not consider it to be a platform to learn for students. This also shows that 33 (11.7%) of the respondents consider Facebook as a positive assessment to the academic performance of the students in their school while 247 (88.3%) does not consider Facebook as a positive assessment to the academic performance of the students in their school. This responses shows that majority of the respondents 154 (55%) do not consider Facebook as a platform to learn for students while majority of the respondents 247 (88.3%)

does not consider Facebook as a positive assessment to the academic performance of the students in their school.

Table 1.4

Does Facebook help in curbing bad behaviour among students?

Parameter	Frequency (280)	Percentage (100%)
Has Facebook usage encouraged good behaviour among students in other schools?		
Agree	61	21.7
Disagree	219	78.3
Do you think Facebook should be stopped or discouraged among secondary school students?		
Agree	114	40.8
Disagree	166	59.2

Table 1.4 shows that 61 (21.7%) of the respondents agreed that Facebook usage has encouraged good behaviour among students in other schools while 219 (78.3%) disagreed that Facebook usage has encouraged good behaviour among students in other schools. Also, 114 (40.8%) of the respondents thinks Facebook should be stopped or discouraged among secondary school students while 166 (59.2%) of the respondents disagree that Facebook should be stopped or discouraged among secondary school students. This response shows that majority of the respondents 219 (78.3%) disagreed that Facebook usage has encouraged good behaviour among students in other schools while majority of the respondents 166 (59.2%) disagreed that Facebook should be stopped or discouraged among secondary school students.

Table 1.5

Has Facebook usage improve study habits among students?

Parameter	Frequency (280)	Percentage (100%)
Has Facebook usage encouraged study habits among your friends in your schools?		
Agree	131	46.7
Disagree	149	53.3
Has Facebook usage encouraged study habits among your friends in other schools?		
Agree	84	30
Disagree	196	70

Table 1.5 shows that 131 (46.7%) of the respondents agreed that Facebook usage has encouraged study habits among their friends in their school while 149 (53.3%) of the respondents disagreed that Facebook usage has encouraged study habits among their friends in their school. This also shows that 84 (30%) of the respondents agreed that Facebook usage has encouraged study habits among their friends in other schools while 196 (70%) of the respondents disagreed that Facebook usage has encouraged study habits of students in other schools. This response shows that majority of the respondents 149 (53.3%) disagreed that Facebook usage has encouraged study habits among their friends in their school while majority of the respondents 196 (70%) disagreed that Facebook usage has encouraged study habits of students in other schools.

8. Summary of the findings

The findings of this study showed that:

1. Majority of the students knows the usefulness of Facebook and also use it for other purposes other than for educational and socialisation purposes.
2. Majority of the students disagreed that Facebook be considered as a veritable tool for learning among secondary school students because it is not considered to be a platform for learning among the students.
3. The use of Facebook has not encouraged good behaviour among the students because most of the students spend their time on entertainment by imitating some of the bad attitude and this makes them get carried away by what they see online.
4. The use of Facebook has not improved the study habits among students because majority of them spend more time surfing the internet for socialising purpose rather than for academic purpose.

9. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has demonstrated that the students make use of Facebook because majority of them have access to it. It also reflects that most of the students use it for other purposes and not only for academic purpose. Findings also shows that majority of the students imitate what they see online which could have a negative effect on their behaviour because there is tendency for them to be addicted and distracted by online activities which will thus have a detrimental impact on their academic achievement. Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations were made;

- a. Social networking sites should be expanded and the students should be limited to “guest mode” on their mobile phone so as to monitor their activities online in bid to enhance their academic activities.
- b. The students should create a balance between chit-chatting and academic activities as more attention should be directed to research to enhance their knowledge.
- c. There should be a decrease in the number of time spent by students when surfing the internet.
- d. There should be an awareness platform to orient the students against addiction to social networking sites and as a result, students must be motivated to concentrate more on reliable learning sites that will add value to their education and get them ready for the future task ahead of them.

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