



## NEW MEDIA ALPHA-NUMERIC WRITING AND STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE IN SCHOOL ESSAYS

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### Abstract

This study examines the effects of alpha-numeric writing through new media on students' performance in school essays, considering both positive and negative impacts. The primary data for this investigation comprise observations and essays from selected students at Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, and the College of Health Technology, Ngbo. Additionally, secondary data sourced from library and internet resources are utilized. The study employs a mixed-method approach, integrating content analysis and qualitative interpretative tools. The analysis reveals that many students unconsciously incorporate new media symbols, figures, and words (alpha-numeric) into their essays, leading to decreased performance due to errors associated with this writing system. Consequently, they lose marks for such blemishes, which adversely affects their academic performance. In conclusion, alpha-numeric writing is identified as a negative aspect of new media that impacts students' performance in essays and overall academics. The study advocates for continuous sensitization and guidance of students by teachers and parents as a solution.

**Keywords:** New media, Alpha-numeric writing, Performance, Essays

### Introduction

Alpha-numeric writing, an emerging new media writing system, involves the combination of alphabet letters, symbols, figures, words, and even special characters. The usage of this evolved writing system has significant adverse effects on the formal writing of many students, particularly in their composition of formal essays during exams and other academic tasks. As Abati (2015) asserts, this writing system notably impacts students' performance in school essays. This study delves into the implications of employing new media alpha-numeric writing in students' formal essays and other compositions for pedagogical purposes within the school environment.

Currently, the challenges posed by new media alpha-numeric writing to students are overlooked, as existing studies predominantly focus on the broader impact of new media on students' academic performance. Numerous studies examine the influence of new media, especially social media, on students' overall academic performance and their performance in formal compositions. However, none specifically address the implicating effects of new media alpha-numeric writing on students' performance in school essays. This study aims to bridge this research gap. Even studies (e.g., Onwe et al., 2021; Eze & Ogbaga, 2019; Klimova & Pikhart, 2019; Omeje, 2018; Belal,

2014; Baron, 2010; Crystal, 2008) that explore the negative aspects of students' use of new media and its features fail to specifically examine the implications of this new writing system that has evolved alongside new media.

Given this context, it is imperative to shift focus from the conventional scholarly approach in this area to the chosen aim, objectives, and scope of this study. The primary focus is on new media-evolved alpha-numeric writing. The aim is to establish and dissect the implicating effects of this writing system on students' performance in school essays. The objectives include describing alpha-numeric writing with empirical examples drawn from the studied essays, explaining how students' essay performance is affected by this writing system, and determining the extent to which it adversely affects their performance.

### **New Media, a Conceptual Analysis**

The concept of new media is affirmed to be used ubiquitously in various ways (Friedman & Friedman, 2008, p. 3). This observation highlights that media is a polysemous concept or a register used in several formal enterprise fields. In many cases, rather than conceptualizing new media, many individuals resort to mentioning its constituents and categories. New media has been described as the combination of words with visuals and cartoons for symbolic communication, learning, teaching, and entertainment (Ravi, 2012; Wiest & Eltantawy, 2015). The phrase "new media" is used to refer to technology-based and -driven means of communication among individuals and groups, both near and far (Nwode, 2022). It is a plural phrase, although some individuals consider or use it in the singular form. This writer argues that the term "media" is plural, so the phrase ought not to be used in the singular but rather in the plural sense. Friedman and Friedman (2008) state that the use of the word "new" media suggests newness or change from old media to a new one. Considering the context and nature of the so-called new media, these scholars posit that it

would have been more appropriate to call them "networked media" rather than "new media." Reacting to that, Nwode (2022) notes that although the new media nomenclature is appropriate, if it were otherwise, it ought to have been christened "digitalized mass media." This is because they combine print and electronic media, all means of mass communication, and then computerize or digitalize them (Nwode, 2022). As such, they are not new, as the name suggests. Secondly, the other extant media before their emergence remain "mass media," not "old media." Therefore, it would have been more appropriate to call them "digitalized mass media."

What is truly new is the evolved communication technology involving the internet, websites, computers, and computerized devices. These advancements have transformed various aspects of society, including mass media, journalism, public relations, interpersonal and intergroup communication, norms and values, social interactions, as well as love, dating, and sexuality. Moreover, they have revolutionized education, teaching and learning methods, culture and cultural identity, administration, politics, democracy, leadership, international diplomacy, para/military and security services, business, trade, commerce, job and labour operations and relations, as well as health and medical services and relations, among others. Old media such as newspapers, magazines, radio, and television served as communication delivery systems. However, they were relatively independent, static, and rooted in history. The emergence of new media has influenced and transformed these traditional forms of media. This is evident in the fact that all newspaper, magazine, television, and radio outlets now have their own websites and online versions of their content (Nwode, 2022). According to Nwode (2022), all forms of electronic and technical means of computer-based and -generated communication between and among individuals, groups, and nations, beyond television, radio, newspapers, and magazines, collectively constitute new media. These new media have both positive and

negative effects and influences on traditional media, various societal systems, and society at large. The evolution of new media has led to the "death" of old media, as they compensate for the shortcomings of traditional media and increasingly replace them (Nwode, 2022).

These new media are characterized by and dependent on new media technologies, often referred to as Web 2.0, which encompass a wide variety of web-related communication technologies. These include blogs, wikis, online social networking platforms, virtual worlds, and other forms of social media (Friedman & Friedman, 2008, p. 1). Essentially, new media encompass internet and computer technology-based means and gadgets for communication, transcending the boundaries of traditional media. The internet plays a central role in defining new media (Ravi, 2012; Wiest & Eltantawy, 2015). New media involve internet usage, websites, computer multimedia, computer games, CD-ROMs, DVDs, and virtual reality (Nwode, 2022). According to Joseph (2009, p. 551), the internet, as a new mass medium, constitutes a "worldwide system of computer networks," enabling users with access to any computer to send and receive information directly to users at the other end of the communication web. Consequently, the internet serves various functions for users, including sending and receiving electronic mail, transferring files, chatting, surfing, and remotely accessing computers to retrieve files and programs. There exist several categories of new media, including blogs (e.g., Blogger.com; technorati.com), social networking or social media (e.g., Myspace.com; facebook.com; friendster.com), social bookmarking (e.g., del.icio.us), Wikis (e.g., Wikipedia.com), P2P file-sharing (e.g., Bittorrent.com), video clips, mash-ups (e.g., YouTube.com; Google video), and virtual worlds (e.g., SecondLife.com; webkinz.com) (Friedman & Friedman, 2008, p. 3). The technologies associated with new media comprise the internet, multimedia, portals, mobile phones, gaming, and animation, among others (Craig, 1998).

### **Students' Performance and New Media: The Imperative**

Students' performance refers to the overall outcome of their academic achievement, derived from tests and examinations administered to them and systematically graded (Nwode, 2022). It is also commonly referred to as academic performance. The concept of academic performance is considered amorphous, as it encompasses various factors such as attaining a professional degree and students' moral development (York et al., 2015). Academic performance is recognized as a major characteristic (Rono et al., 2014) and one of the primary goals of education (Narad & Abdullah, 2016). Kumar et al. (2021) describe academic performance as the knowledge acquired by students, which teachers assess by marking and scoring students based on grades/marks allocated to each question to determine overall results obtained during the teaching-learning process, particularly in the classroom. The above explanation sheds light on the idea of students' performance in school essays. Students are assigned essays as classwork, tests, and examinations. After writing their answers (essays), teachers mark and score them based on their achievements during the writing process. Similar to how schools expect and assess students' performance based on their grades in tests and examinations, parents and guardians also anticipate their children to perform well and achieve high grades among their peers and classmates. School essays are integral to assessments in tests and examinations. York et al. (2015) describe academic performance as the outcome of learning, demonstrating the progress students have made from their engagement in learning activities before tests or examinations. According to Sharm (2012), academic performance measures a student's ability to demonstrate what they have learned or acquired, constituting their academic achievement.

Emphasizing the importance of students' academic performance, Osiki (2001) asserts that academic performance holds significant value for anyone concerned about education.

Students' academic performance is not only important to them but also to their institutions, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders, as well as society at large. This assertion is supported by Narad and Abdullah (2016), who note that a school's success is contingent upon its students' academic performance. Consequently, schools prioritize ensuring that their students perform well or commendably. Schools renowned for their academically successful students are esteemed for their academic excellence and often recommended by parents, experts, etc., to other members of society seeking institutions known for academic excellence (Nwode, 2022). The new media hold a significant place in the academic performance of tertiary students, evidenced by their impact on students in various aspects. New media play a crucial role in enhancing users' relationships and socialization, while also inducing change and sometimes eliciting reactions from users. This impact emanates from various types of new media, with social media standing out as the foremost influencer. New technologies have deeply penetrated the lives of young people, particularly students, who constitute a significant portion of the global youth population. They are avid users of new media, particularly social media platforms. Many young people are so immersed in these new media that they may not be fully aware of their adverse effects. For them, the internet, cell phones, Blackberries, iPods, iPads, and other digital tools are essential for daily living. Given the innovation brought forth by new media and their widespread impact on users, it can be argued that they continuously exert significant influence on various aspects of users' lives.

### **School Essays and Why Students Use Alpha-Numeric Writing in Them**

Having become accustomed to the informal writing style prevalent on social media and other emerging writing systems, many students tend to adopt informal language in their formal written compositions. This deviation from formal language norms often leads to poor performance and failure in language examinations and tests. This informal writing occurs both consciously and unconsciously,

though more frequently the latter. However, language examiners (teachers) typically do not consider these factors when assessing students' scripts. Consequently, when applying the language marking scheme for compositions, which usually evaluates content, expression, and mechanical accuracy (COEMA), students lose marks allocated for mechanical accuracy (MA), affecting their expression score points. For example, in external examinations like the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE), if errors persist after deducting marks for MA, the remaining errors affect the Expression (E) score points.

Essays are compositions involving continuous writing and are a mandatory component of language examinations and tests. The term "composition" refers to various forms of writing in the school setting, including essays, speeches, letters, debates, and more. The rationale behind this compulsory task is to cultivate, develop, and demonstrate mastery of language skills in students. Composition, or written composition, is also known as academic writing. As described by Valdes (2019), academic writing encompasses any formal written work produced in an educational context for academic purposes, such as assessment, self-assessment of writing skills, communication, report writing, and career development in creative and critical writing, among others. Academic writing is regarded as a specific form of representation used by professionals to meet the intellectual demands of their disciplines (Brodhacker, 2016). This type of writing is commonly utilized by teachers and students for teaching and learning, research, arguments, complaints, communication, letters, and examinations and tests. Khadijah (2020) defines written composition or academic writing, in the context of this study, as any piece of writing produced for educational purposes, adhering to the core requirements of the student's field of education. She outlines four characteristics of academic writing: evidence-based arguments, precise word choice, logical organization, and an impersonal tone. Additionally, she discusses the components of academic writing, which

include a formal tone, precision in subject matter, appropriate registers and diction, and a third-person point of view.

Academic writing differs significantly from informal writing and shares similarities with other forms of formal writing, such as creative, critical, technical, and scholarly writing. Johnson (2016) emphasizes that academic writing is creative and distinct in form and function from informal writing. Valdes (2019) identifies characteristics of academic writing, including clarity, logical structure, structural consistency (e.g., introduction, body, and conclusion), evidential arguments, and an impersonal tone. It is worth noting that Khadijah's (2020) four identified characteristics of academic writing align with those identified by Valdes (2019) and numerous other scholars. Michael (2018) expands on this by identifying ten characteristics of academic writing: complexity, formality, objectivity, explicitness, precision, hedging, responsibility, accuracy, organization, and planning. These characteristics collectively contribute to the unique nature of academic writing and distinguish it from informal writing.

In Mytekah's (2013) part, there are eight characteristics of academic writing: formality, objectivity, complexity, precision, accuracy, explicitness, responsibility, and hedging. These features align extensively with those mentioned by Valdes (2019), with only two additional characteristics identified by Valdes (2019), as mentioned earlier. According to Nwode (2022), written composition encompasses all forms of creative writing exercises in the teaching-learning process, facilitating technical communication. This includes essays, letters, and reports of various types. In language examinations and sometimes tests, students are required to engage in continuous writing, distinct from text messaging and chatting typically done on new media platforms. Written composition, as a crucial aspect of language, holds significant importance in language education. As such, applied linguists pay particular attention to educational issues related to new media and language education, focusing

on students' performance in written composition.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Grice's (1967) Theory of Conversational Implicature (TCI) is adopted for this study due to its relevance in explaining the implications of using new media writing styles in formal essays. Students often use new media for gratification, yet they may unconsciously face the consequences of excessive use, including poor performance, outright failure, knowledge inhibition, incompetence, performance errors, addiction to new media, and reliance on alpha-numeric writing and other features of emergent new media language. Grice introduced his Theory of Conversational Implicature in 1967, marking the first serious attempt to clarify the difference between literal expression in a sentence and the implied meaning conveyed by utterances of the same words. Since its publication, Grice's theory has faced criticism and prompted reevaluation, becoming a classic in the sub-discipline of linguistics known as pragmatics. Grice's framework is notable for its intuitive appeal in characterizing various types of utterances, as noted by Haberland and Mey (2001). The theory aims to elucidate the distinction between literal expression and implied meaning, with the combined significance of what is said and what is implied termed the 'total signification of an utterance' (Grice, 1978). Originally derived from the Latin verb 'plicare,' meaning 'to fold,' the term 'imply' suggests folding something into something else, requiring unfolding for understanding. Hence, what is 'implied' is metaphorically 'folded in' and must be unpacked for comprehension.

Ironically, Grice (1975), who coined the term 'implicature' in his theory of speaker's meaning to account for aspects of meaning not directly related to the truth condition of the uttered sentence, fails to explicitly define implicature. Instead, he offers examples and a definition solely focused on conversational implicature, the aspect that intrigued him most. This oversight creates conceptual problems for readers introduced to implicature, marking the beginning of Grice's shortcomings. He neglects

the etymology of the concept, provides no substantial definition, and concentrates solely on conversational implicature, ignoring other types.

Furthermore, considering communication involves both speaker and listener, Grice should have adopted a two-sided approach to understanding communicative meaning. He overlooked the speaker's influence, paralinguistic features, and factors affecting speech transfer interference in his theorization of the speaker's meaning through implicature. The issue of misinterpretation by the listener or audience is left unaddressed in the theory. Despite these shortcomings, Grice's theory remains groundbreaking, providing insights into fundamental questions like how our cognitive system associates a sentence or utterance with its observed implicature, and the rules or principles involved in deriving or computing implicatures. Understanding implicatures is crucial for comprehending how statements communicate more than what they explicitly assert. As a result, contemporary theories of implicature, both Neo-Gricean and Post-Gricean, have largely departed from Grice's original account. However, Grice's classic account remains foundational to the fields of semantics and pragmatics. The key assumption of Grice's Theory of Conversational Implicature (TCI) is that in rational, cooperative conversation, people adhere to the principle of cooperation. Grice's influence on subsequent theorists, leading to the emergence of Neo-Gricean and Post-Gricean theories, underscores the enduring impact and relevance of his work. Despite its flaws, TCI continues to be influential and justifiable.

### **Review of Empirical Studies**

Here, a few closely related empirical studies on the subject matter are presented, highlighting their findings. Many scholars have affirmed the benefits of new media (Baron, 2010; Ahmed & Qazi, 2011; Connolly, 2011; Zwart, Lindsay, Henderson & Phillips, 2011; Iloene et al., 2013; Omeje, 2018), with the highest benefits seemingly derived from social media. One of the benefits of new media is that they offer

avenues for appreciable social interaction on the internet among teachers and students, friends, families, business partners, organizations, states, agencies, etc. These media promote interactions among teachers and students, serving as teaching and learning aids and supplements. They have eased journalism and eliminated the traditional bottlenecks of mass media. Access to a wide range of information has become possible with new media, enabling users to easily gain access to information at any time. News now takes no time to be produced and disseminated across the globe, with all events easily publicized online, especially on social media.

Having noted the above, it is imperative to review some related studies. Omeje (2018, p. 12) confirms that in writing different kinds of compositions, both secondary and tertiary students resort to using short forms, abbreviations, coinages, wrong spellings, and slangy expressions, which are characteristics of new media language. Omeje (2018, p. 28) notes that special abbreviations or acronyms are used for saving time and convenience, including: 'b4/B4 (before), 2day (today), lol/LOL (laughing out loud), oic/OIC (Oh I see), TTYL (talk to you later), AMA (ask me anything), TDB (till daybreak), FYI (for your information), IDC (I don't care).' Examples of some other forms include 'u' (you), 'i' (I), 'r' (are), 'thx' (thanks), 'pls' (please), 'tmr' (tomorrow), etc. (Omeje, 2018, p. 28). These and many others characterize the writing used on new media, especially social media. However, using these words and coinages in formal writing implies risking failure. Therefore, the foregoing examples illustrate how new media negatively impacts the written composition of students, as seen in the students under study.

Abati's (2015) study laments that the writing system used by young people on Twitter and WhatsApp is creeping into conventional or formal writing. Abati (2015) regrets that the new writing, which came with the new media, largely accounts for the emergence of new crops of young Nigerians who cannot write

compositions well because they are used to the writing system they use on social media and other SNSs. Consequently, they cannot punctuate properly, differentiate between commas, colons, semicolons, and full stops, and construct sentences correctly. Put simply, they are not familiar with grammatical concord and mechanical accuracy and cannot observe syntactic, lexical, and semantic rules. Besides, they mix up pronouns, verbs, adverbs, and adjectives (Abati, 2015).

Human language, just like other facets of human existence, has undergone tremendous change. This is evident in the communication of users on new media platforms. Numerous factors are responsible for the changes noticeable in students' language on and beyond the new media sources of impact on them, as in their written composition. One of the major factors is the quest for easy and minimized efforts in writing. On the part of the users, notably in the written form of the language, and the rapid technological advancement, students have resorted to or simply got so attuned to the use of the same language used for communication on cell phones and related gadgets. Agwuocha's (2019) study investigates the inappropriate use of language in social media, ascertaining the reactions the language use evokes, and identifying possible outcomes of some of the discourses on national integration. The analysis reveals the misuse of language by Facebook users whose speeches were analyzed. Their utterances are found to be characterized by hate speeches. The analysis also shows the predominant use of utterances that could be termed hate speeches, which cause more harm than good to the nation. This is because the language used in the reactionary Facebook posts shows anger, resentment, disillusionment, acrimony, pride, prejudice, insult, and derogatory and defamatory terms, among others. Agwuocha's (2019) study concludes that if care is not taken and lasting solutions are not proffered, the way issues are raised, discussed, and handled on social media sites may someday transform into missiles, with which avoidable wars may arise among the Nigerian people. By implication, Facebook

comments exert negative impacts on various audiences. The impacts include emotional, psychological, and language use effects on those who consume these particular new media contents.

Hasan (2016) makes a critical analysis of computer-mediated discourse, with specific reference to orthography or the written forms and associated linguistic patterns. He asserts that although there is a divergent view on computer-mediated communication as an emerging discourse having distinctive linguistic features, the main substance that cannot be ignored is the fact that computer-mediated communication has distinct linguistic features that are gradually transferred or used beyond the context of computers and mobile phones. Besides, Hasan (2016) emphasizes that the continuously emerging trend of using language through computer-mediated communication, which has been indiscriminately gaining momentum, signifies the future dominance of the new discourse with its distinctive linguistic features. He concludes that the result of the emerging linguistic forms is that the conventionally-based standard orthography of many languages is also affected by the trending orthography. That is what happens to English orthography in students' essays, as they use the alpha-numeric writing system currently with English orthography. Ezea et al. (2013) study examines the use of social media among students of selected universities in South-Eastern Nigeria. Their study demonstrates that social media are advanced modern interactive communication channels, through which people connect, and share ideas and experiences, pictures, messages, and information of common interest. The study also informs that what distinguishes social media from conventional means of communication is their interactive nature, which allows the audience to participate in it from any part of the world they reside in. The findings of the study reveal that students make use of social media for purposes of getting entertainment, and education/information, and they make use of social media to discuss national issues, engage in cyber-crimes, and expose themselves to

pornography. The study concludes that the use of social media is a growing trend among Nigerian university students and other young Nigerians in general, as in virtually all parts of the globe.

Gurman (2015) holds that the relationships students have outside the classroom are characterized by a lot of contempt and issues of misbehaviour or gross misconduct. This includes sexual laxity, immorality, profanity, disrespectfulness, loss or diversion of interest in/from academics, disposition of hatred and discrimination against one another without teachers and/or school administrators knowing, and the possibility of things going wrong in various regards. By implication, Gurman (2015) emphasizes the implications of students' strained or extreme use of new media, up to the point of letting them be at the detriment of their academics. Moon (2011) proves that social media hurt students in several regards, particularly in their performance in writing. The study specifically shows that the more students use Facebook, the more their academic performance is adversely affected. That is, as they get more engrossed in Facebook, their academic performance keeps depreciating and deteriorating. This is because they abandon their studies for Facebook.

### **Methodology**

The qualitative method was employed in sourcing data. Besides, the survey design, which allows for systematic eliciting of information from a purposive sample by a researcher, is employed. The purposive sampling technique was employed. The content area of the study is Applied Linguistics, while the geographical area of study is Ebonyi State in South-Eastern Nigeria. Sixty (60) students, whose essays are studies, constitute the purposive population of the study. In each of the two schools, thirty (30) essays were obtained by selecting ten (10) essays each from 100–300 levels students of Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki (EBSU) and Ebonyi State School of Health, Ngbo (EBSOSH herein). That is, at the

College of Health, students in Junior and Senior Community Health Extension Workers (J-CHEW and S-CHEW) (i.e. National Diploma I & II and Higher National Diploma I) programmes were involved in the study. In the same vein, students of 100-300 levels were randomly selected at the university for the same purpose. The data analysis involves using content analysis and other non/statistical tools. Essays of thirty (30) students in each of the two tertiary institutions in Ebonyi state constitute the primary data. These are the data used for empirical analysis. Library and internet materials are the sources of secondary data.

### **Data Presentation and Analysis**

The field-based primary data are presented and analysed here. The focus here is solely on the typical cases (examples) of alpha-numeric writing in the sixty (60) essays (see Table 1). Table 1 reveals the parameters with which the written essay of each respondent was marked. The essay was marked over 100%, under Content, Organisation, Expression and Mechanical Accuracy (COEMA). While 20 marks each were allotted to Content, Organisation, and Mechanical Accuracy, 40 marks were allotted to Expression. What to consider in allotting marks under each of the components of COEMA was highlighted. The maximum scoring point for each of the five main aspects of the question is 4 or 5 over 5. The minimum scoring point is 1 (1/5). From Table 2, it is understood that of the 30 respondents at Ebonyi State University (EBSU), 9 respondents, being the highest in number, scored 'F'. These were those who failed the essay test administered to them. Those who had an 'E' come next, with 6. The third set of performers scored a 'D', having 5. Four (4) responses each were realised for 'C' and 'B' grades. The 'A' grade had only 2 respondents. The results show the extent to which students perform poorly, as they lose marks to alpha-numeric writing and other blemishes in their school essays.



**Table 1: Marking parameters and core requisitions**

<b>Marking Parameters</b>	Content	Organisation	Expression	Mechanical Accuracy	Total
<b>Marks</b>	20 marks	20 marks	40 marks	20 marks	100%
<b>What to Consider</b>	Full, or at least average, coverage of each of the five aspects/demands of the essay question that make up the Content	The requisitions here in awarding marks include due arrangement of paragraphs, appropriate use of connectives, fully developed paragraphs, coverage of the five main aspects of the question, which constitute the content of the essay	Correct sentences, appropriate language use, meaningfulness, contextual meaning, right use of abbreviations/acronyms, consistent use of American English or British English, avoiding colloquialism or quoting just a few used colloquial expressions, etc.	Correct spelling, capitalisation and syllabification, errors of omission and commission, faulty/wrong punctuation, use of informal language features/elements, tense errors, mismatch of tenses, etc.	

Source: Researcher’s Fieldwork, 2022

**Table 2: EBSU overall score sheet for the 30 respondents**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Score range</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>
A	70 – 72	2
B	60 – 69	4
C	50 – 59	4
D	45 – 49	5
E	40 – 44	6
F	0 – 39	9
Total	100	30

Source: Researcher’s Fieldwork, 2022

As shown in Table 3, ‘A’, ‘B’ and ‘C’ had three respondents each. Six (6) of the respondents scored a ‘D’. Eight (8) of them had an ‘E’. Lastly, seven (7) had an ‘F’. Again, the performance is low, as most of them had lost some marks to alpha-numeric writing. That is, borne not for losing good marks to this writing system and other blemishes, most of them would not have had ‘D’, ‘E’ and ‘F’. As shown

in Table 4, in the 60 essays, the respondents all indicated unanimously that it is inappropriate or unacceptable to use combined figures-symbols-words in essays and other formal compositions. The implication is that the combination leads to poor performance for some and failure for others. That is because using alpha-numeric writing leads to a loss of marks.

**Table 3: Ebonyi State School of Health, Ngbo (EBSOSH hereafter) overall score sheet for the 30 respondents**

Grade	Score range	No. of Respondents
A	70–72	3
B	60–69	3
C	50–59	3
D	45–49	6
E	40–44	8
F	0–39	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>30</b>

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork, 2022

**Table 4: Alphanumeric writing is unacceptable or inappropriate for use in school essays**

Variables	Agreed	Disagreed	Indifferent	Total
EBSOSH	30	-	-	30
EBSU	30	-	-	30

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork, 2022

**Table 5: Indication/confirmation of students' combination of figures-symbols-words**

Variables	Resp.	Perc.
Strongly Agreed (SA)	38	63.4
Agreed (A)	13	21.6
Strongly Disagreed (SD)	-	-
Disagreed (D)	9	15
Total	60	100%

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork, 2022

**Table 6: When used in school essays, students lose marks to alpha-numeric writing**

Variables	Resp.	Perc.
SA	50	83.3
A	10	16.7
SD	-	-
D	-	-
Total	60	100%

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork, 2022

**Table 7: Alpha-numeric writing exhibits informal writing and language features and violation of language rules**

Variables	Resp.	Perc.
SA	60	100
A	-	-
SD	-	-
D	-	-
Total	60	100%

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork, 2022

The responses in above Table 5 are those from respondents in the two schools. They are combined and divided accordingly. Only 9 of 15% of respondents disagreed with the confirmation assertion made to indicate that alpha-numeric writing has a negative effect on students, particularly in writing. The disagreement is inconsequential because 38 of 63.4% strongly agreed, while 13 of 21.6% of respondents confirmed the combination of symbols, figures and words by students in their essays and other compositions. Affected by it, many student users of the new media perform poorly and/or fail woefully in their essays and other formal compositions. That is because they use the features of this emergent writing style along with other features of new media language. They are not supposed to use it and/or any other features of new media language in formal compositions.

The respondents confirmed (Table 6) in their essays that when the alpha-numeric writing system is used in formal essays as well as other school compositions, students lose marks for the usage because they are penalised for using it. At each scoring point, where the examiner finds the elements of this informal writing system and those of other features of new media language, at least half a mark is deducted. In the end, the deducted marks are calculated and subtracted from the overall marks earned by a student. The confirmation of the foregoing reality is obtained from 50 of 83.3% of respondents, who strongly agreed, and supported by 10 of 16.7%, who agreed, though not strongly to the assertion.

Alpha-numeric writing (Table 7) is affirmed to be an informal writing system, which ought not to be used in formal writing. This implies that sound students, who are not overwhelmed by new media and their features, do not use this writing in their essays and other formal compositions. As such, they perform well or better than their contemporaries engaged in reckless use of new media. As an informal writing system, it exhibits informal writing and language features and violates language rules. In other words, using this writing system

implies violating rules of language as regards its usage in a formal context. Also, it is an informal feature of the language, which also doubles as an informal writing system. These realities are upheld by the responses in above Table 7, in which all the respondents (60 of 100%) agreed strongly to the above-expressed thought.

### **Discussion**

As the findings above reveal, it is clear that the implication of students' strained use of new media manifests in their transfer of the internalized new media writing style to their formal writing. This implication is further evidenced by their failure, which follows their usage of a new media writing style in formal essays. Implicature covers several ways in which unsaid information can be conveyed. Fraser (1980) has described implicature as a word derived from 'imply,' with its cognate noun being implication. These media continuously exert great influence on various activities in contemporary society. The influence 'raises serious worries' (Omeje, 2018, p. 9) and presents an unfinished task to stakeholders in the education sector. According to Omeje (2018, p. 9), the situation raises 'concern about the popularity, dominance, and influence of social media on the academic performance of students, both at higher and secondary education levels.' Stressing the influence of new media on students' performance, Omeje (2018, p. 9) states that "the influence is most evident in their use of the English language and their performance in English language examinations."

This point made by Omeje underscores the imperative of this study, which concerns itself with investigating the matters arising from the impact of new media alpha-numeric writing. Communication in the contemporary era involves the digitalization of signals and content that possess different dimensions of multimedia and interactivity. Hence, new media can refer to all those means of communication and representations of knowledge that are comprehensive and technologically driven in nature (Nwode, 2022). These new means of communication include mobile phones, digital

television, games, and the Internet, with their digital usages being possible with access to and use of the internet. The new media may be regarded as a mediator of communication and has over time introduced the novelty of incorporating new technological dimensions by combining interpersonal communication with that of the mass media on the same platform (Ezekoka & Anum, 2016; Nelson Company, 2015; Osahenye, 2012; Dewing, 2010). They induce organizational changes and new forms of time management and seek a synthesis of textual and visual information and knowledge materials, inclusive of rhetoric.

It should be noted that textual and visual information and knowledge involve written composition. As such, these combined media (the new media) are rapidly generating new audiences and promoting social reconstruction tools. They enable interactivity among users and also inform and induce changes. The centrality of the activities of new media is communication. Communication is described as the process of sharing information, ideas, feelings, emotions, etc. (Nwankwegu & Nwode, 2012). Communication is the exchange of information, feelings, etc., between a speaker and a listener, as Ndimele (1999) has affirmed in his definition and analysis of communication. The new media discourse is one aspect of communication that permits the use of writing and some non-verbal cues represented with certain characters and symbols invented to meet such purposes. Thus, the essence of the media, both new and traditional, is communication. Communication, Ndimele (1999) notes, is a social transaction that involves getting one's ideas across to others, and in the process, expressing oneself in such a way that the listener or the recipient of the piece(s) of information can understand what is expressed or communicated.

All forms of media have feedback systems in place. New media, in particular, excel in involving the audience through interactivity. This heightened interactivity is considered one of the most evolved feedback systems. Additionally, new media utilize narrative

writing styles and multimedia, distinguishing them from traditional media forms. Newspapers and magazines belong to print media, while news, entertainment, and sports channels are products of electronic media. Websites represent the primary product of new media, requiring access via a computer with Internet Explorer. Social media, being internet-based platforms, serve as a liberal means of interaction and learning, particularly favoured by students over other new media forms. Consequently, students often adopt the writing styles prevalent on social media when composing school essays. Siemens (2004) argues that learning through new media, especially social media, enhances understanding and engagement. The emergence of a new language, characterized by alpha-numeric writing systems, accompanies the popularity of real-time communication mediums such as instant messaging, email, and social media chats. This new language arose from the need to save time and money, leading to the adoption of abbreviated messages and informal writing styles.

With the advent of GSM, cell phones, and other handheld devices, a new variety of English emerged, distinct in both situation and context. This new linguistic landscape continues to evolve with emerging communication trends. In spoken conversations, politeness and formality are often essential, but SMS language allows for direct and concise messaging without the need for extensive preambles. The character and space limits inherent in SMS communication encourage users to stay on topic and within desired timeframes, contributing to efficient communication practices. More so, SMS provides individuals with control over their conversations, allowing recipients to carefully consider message content before crafting concise replies. Unlike conversations where hasty responses are common, SMS enables recipients to respond thoughtfully, potentially yielding different outcomes than verbal exchanges. Additionally, SMS content can easily be shared and used as evidence, unlike voice or video calls which are more challenging to record and retain. While voice or

video call evidence requires a rigorous and often expensive process, SMS messages serve as dynamic communication strategies that occur naturally in practical contexts, despite not always conforming to traditional lexical or grammatical rules. Despite potential deficiencies in linguistic and grammatical accuracy, SMS communication remains coherent and acceptable within its contextual framework.

These days, the focus of media consumption has shifted to the Internet, which is accessible almost everywhere and at all times. Devices such as phones, iPods, and laptops are constantly connected to the internet, diminishing the influence of traditional socialization agents like parents. New media represent a significant shift in communication practices, with individuals and cultures transitioning from traditional media to computer-mediated forms of production, distribution, and communication. Contemporary youths, particularly students, have become deeply immersed in the use of new media, often to their detriment. New media platforms, especially social media, have attracted millions of users worldwide, with many spending significant amounts of time engaging with these platforms regularly (Daluba & Maxwell, 2013; Omeje, 2018). Omeje (2018) emphasizes the wide-ranging applications of platforms like Wikis, video streaming, and social networks, labelling them as phenomena of the 21st century. According to Rosen (2011), individuals belonging to the 'I Generation,' born between 1990 and 1999, spend an average of 20 hours per day on social media, indicating the pervasive influence of these platforms, especially among young students who use them for interaction, socialization, and entertainment.

### Conclusion

On the whole, the amalgamation of figures, symbols, and words constitutes alpha-numeric writing, a common practice among student users of new media, as evidenced by those examined in this study. The research demonstrates that alpha-numeric writing

significantly impacts students, particularly in their performance in formal compositions such as essays. Language teachers deduct marks for each instance where students utilize informal writing symbols or conventions during essay marking. Examples include '2' for 'two', '4' for 'for', 'der(e)' for 'there', 'dere4' for 'therefore', 'd' or 'de' for 'the', among others. This practice, along with abbreviations and elements of computer-mediated communication, leads to poor performance in exams, with students often attributing their low grades to the examiner rather than recognizing the impact of their writing style.

In addition to alpha-numeric writing, essays also exhibit other features of new media emergent language, including emojis, hashtags, abbreviations, acronyms, transcoding, toponyms (place names), anthroponyms (personal names), diaglossia, colloquialism, coinages, and mixed language varieties, vocabularies, and registers. However, certain features like computer-mediated language, automation, and Photoshop are absent from these essays due to their manual composition process. Consequently, students who employ new media language tend to blame examiners for perceived unfair grading when they receive poor marks. Therefore, it is evident that students' subpar performance in essays is influenced by alpha-numeric writing and other linguistic blemishes characteristic of new media language. To address this negative trend, teachers and parents must consistently educate and guide students on the responsible use of new media, emphasizing moderation in their online activities.

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