



UNIVERSITY OF MEDIA, ARTS AND COMMUNICATION (UniMAC)

INSTITUTE OF JOURNALISM

**CHATGPT IN THE CLASSROOM: AN INVESTIGATION AMONG
MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION STUDENTS IN GHANA**

PATIENCE DZIGBORDI AUGUSTT

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

NOVEMBER 2025

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BY

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(MAPRM24057)

**DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE INSTITUTE OF
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AWARD OF MASTER OF ARTS IN PUBLIC RELATIONS WITH
MARKETING**

NOVEMBER 2025


DECLARATIONS

Student Declaration

I hereby declare that this dissertation is my original work and has not been submitted for the award of a degree in any other university. All sources of information used have been duly acknowledged through proper referencing. I take full responsibility for any errors or omissions contained herein.

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Supervisor's Declaration

This dissertation has been prepared and presented under my supervision according to the guidelines for supervision and formatting of dissertations laid down by the University of Media, Arts and Communication – Institute of Journalism.

Supervisor's Name: Dr Noel Nutsugah

Signature: 

Date: 4/12/2025

DEDICATION

This work is lovingly dedicated to my grandmother, whose strength, prayers, and unwavering belief in me have been a constant source of inspiration. Your love and sacrifices have shaped who I am today. This is for you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First and foremost, I give all glory and thanks to God for granting me the strength, wisdom, and perseverance to complete this academic journey. I am deeply grateful to my husband for his constant encouragement, patience, and support throughout this process. Special appreciation goes to my supervisor, Dr. Noel Nutsugah for his invaluable guidance, constructive feedback, and mentorship that helped shape this research. Your support has been instrumental every step of the way.

ABSTRACT

This study investigates how undergraduate media and communication students in Ghana adopt and use generative artificial intelligence (AI), with a particular focus on ChatGPT, in their academic work. Drawing on the interpretivist paradigm and a qualitative case study design, the research purposively selected 15 students from three universities, the University of Media, Arts and Communication (UniMAC), the University of Professional Studies, Accra (UPSA), and the African University College of Communications and Business (AUCB). Data were collected through three focus group discussions, each consisting of five participants, and analysed thematically through open, axial, and selective coding. The findings reveal that students adopt ChatGPT in three main ways. As an academic support tool for clarifying concepts and structuring assignments, as a means of enhancing efficiency and convenience in research and writing, and as a platform for creative exploration. Motivations for adoption include improving academic performance and building digital competence for future professional relevance. However, students face challenges relating to the accuracy and reliability of ChatGPT outputs, ethical concerns such as plagiarism, and uncertainty due to the absence of institutional guidelines. The study concludes that while students integrate ChatGPT cautiously, they perceive it as both an enabler of learning and a potential risk when used without critical engagement. The research contributes to scholarship by providing African-centred, discipline-specific insights into generative AI adoption, highlighting the need for clear institutional policies and curriculum interventions. It recommends responsible integration of AI into higher education to strengthen digital literacy, academic integrity, and professional preparedness in media and communication education.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATIONS	II
DEDICATION	III
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	IV
ABSTRACT	V
TABLE OF CONTENTS	VI
LIST OF TABLES	VIII
CHAPTER ONE	1
INTRODUCTION	1
1.0 Chapter Introduction	1
1.1 Background of the Study	1
1.2 Problem Statement	3
1.3 Research Objectives & Questions	3
1.3.1 Research Objectives	3
1.3.2 Research Questions	4
1.4 Scope of the Study	4
1.5 Significance of the Study	5
1.6 Organisation of the Study	5
1.7 Chapter Summary	5
CHAPTER TWO	7
LITERATURE REVIEW	7
2.0 Chapter Introduction	7
2.1 Definition of Key Terms	7
2.1.1 Artificial Intelligence (AI)	7
2.1.2 Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen-AI)	8
2.1.3 Media and Communication Studies	8
2.2 Review of Related Literature	9
2.3 Theoretical Framework	17
2.3.1 Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT)	17
2.3.2 Relevance of Theory	20
2.4 Chapter Summary	21
CHAPTER THREE	22
METHODOLOGY	22

3.0 Chapter Introduction	22
3.1 Research Paradigm.....	22
3.2 Philosophical Assumptions.....	22
3.3 Research Approach.....	23
3.4 Research Design	23
3.5 Sampling Strategy.....	24
3.6 Data Collection Technique	24
3.7 Data Collection Process	25
3.8 Ethical Considerations	25
3.9 Authenticity and Trustworthiness.....	26
3.10 Data Analysis Techniques	26
3.11 Chapter Summary	27
CHAPTER FOUR.....	28
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS.....	28
4.0 Chapter Introduction	28
4.1 Preliminary Descriptions.....	28
4.3 Findings.....	29
4.3.1 Adoption and Integration of Generative AI	29
4.3.2 Motivation for Generative AI Usage	33
4.3.3 Challenges for Generative AI Usage.....	36
4.4 Discussions of Findings.....	41
4.4.1 Empirical Discussions	41
4.4.2 Theoretical Discussions.....	45
4.5 Chapter Summary	49
CHAPTER FIVE	51
CONCLUSION	51
5.0 Chapter Introduction	51
5.1 Summary of Findings	51
5.2 Conclusions.....	52
5.3 Limitations.....	53
5.4 Recommendations	54
5.5 Chapter Summary	54
REFERENCES.....	55
APPENDIX.....	59

LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1: Demographic Description of Participants.....	28
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Chapter Introduction

This chapter introduces the study, outlining its background, problem statement, aim, objectives and significance. It situates the investigation within the context of media and communication education in Ghana, highlighting the emergence of generative artificial intelligence and the need to explore how undergraduate students adopt and use ChatGPT in academic work.

1.1 Background of the Study

Media and communication education in Ghana has a long history of adapting to changes in technology, from the early dominance of print and broadcast training to the inclusion of digital communication skills in more recent decades (Boateng & Tindi, 2022). Institutions such as the University of Media, Arts and Communication (formerly the Ghana Institute of Journalism) pioneered professional media training by emphasising traditional forms of journalism and public relations (Diedong & Tuurosong, 2018). Over time, the emergence of digital technologies, particularly the internet and social media, has reshaped media education and practice, requiring universities to embed digital literacy and multimedia competencies into their curricula (Boateng & Tindi, 2022). This shift reflects global patterns in media education, where technological innovation has consistently altered the ways students are trained and how they approach professional practice (Pavlik, 2023).

Within Ghanaian tertiary institutions, students have progressively embraced digital technologies as part of their academic work and personal expression (Mytsyk et al., 2025). From the early 2000s, when access to online databases and basic computing became central to research and assignments, to the 2010s, when social media platforms became spaces for both communication practice and knowledge sharing, students' adoption of technology has mirrored wider social transformations (Manu et al., 2024). Mobile phones and online platforms are now integral to learning environments, enabling collaborative projects and alternative modes of knowledge creation (Agbaglo & Bonsu, 2022). Despite these developments, the pace at which educational institutions formally integrate new technologies into teaching has often lagged behind students' own informal practices, highlighting a gap between institutional policy and student-led innovation.

The introduction of generative artificial intelligence, particularly tools such as ChatGPT, represents the latest stage in this evolving landscape (Pavlik, 2023). Unlike earlier technologies, which primarily facilitated access to information or communication, generative AI actively produces text, ideas, and creative content that can directly influence academic practices (Zhou et al., 2024). For media and communication students in Ghana, this raises critical questions about how AI is being adopted to support coursework and research, as well as its implications for originality and ethics. Examining adoption across communication-centred universities provides timely evidence into how students in this field are negotiating the opportunities and challenges posed by generative AI in their academic journeys.

1.2 Problem Statement

The integration of generative artificial intelligence (AI) in higher education has sparked significant scholarly debate on adoption, pedagogical implications and policy direction. Existing studies (Budhathoki et al., 2024; Shahi & Chaudhary, 2025) have largely focused on adoption intentions and institutional factors using quantitative approaches, while others (Costa & Murphy, 2025) have examined theoretical concerns about intellectual agency. Empirical investigations (Liu & Yushchik, 2024) also demonstrate AI's potential to improve learning outcomes, and policy-focused research (Salha et al., 2025) highlights challenges of awareness and governance. However, these studies are either situated outside Africa, discipline-general or theoretical in orientation, overlooking the lived experiences of students in specific academic contexts. Little is known about how media and communication students in Ghana adopt and use generative AI for academic work, or how this shapes their learning practices and professional preparation. This gap necessitates a qualitative inquiry into their usage, motivations for usage and challenges faced thereof.

1.3 Research Objectives & Questions

1.3.1 Research Objectives

The aim of this study is to investigate how undergraduate media and communication students in Ghana adopt and use generative artificial intelligence tools. To achieve this, the following objectives have been developed.

1. To explore how undergraduate media and communication students in Ghanaian universities adopt and integrate generative AI tools into their academic work.

2. To examine the motivations influencing undergraduate media and communication students' use of generative AI in learning and research.
3. To assess the challenges undergraduate media and communication students face in using generative AI in learning and research.

1.3.2 Research Questions

1. How do undergraduate media and communication students in Ghanaian universities adopt and integrate generative AI tools into their academic work?
2. What are the motivations influencing undergraduate media and communication students' use of generative AI in learning and research?
3. What are the challenges undergraduate media and communication students face in using generative AI in learning and research?

1.4 Scope of the Study

The scope of this study is limited to examining the adoption and use of generative AI among undergraduate media and communication students in Ghana. It focuses on three selected universities with established media and communication programmes. The universities are the University of Media, Arts and Communication (UniMAC), the University of Professional Studies, Accra (UPSA), and the African University of Communications and Business (AUCB). The study is restricted to academic use within the classroom context and does not extend to postgraduate students or professional practitioners outside the selected institutions.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is significant as it provides scholarly evidence on how generative AI tools are shaping media and communication education in Ghana. By focusing on undergraduate students, the research highlights emerging practices, opportunities and challenges in academic adoption, contributing to debates on digital literacy, academic integrity and future workforce preparedness. The findings will inform curriculum development, guiding universities on how to integrate AI responsibly into teaching and learning. Additionally, the study adds to limited African-centred scholarship on AI in higher education, offering perspectives that can influence policy and pedagogy in communication-related fields.

1.6 Organisation of the Study

This study is organised into five chapters. Chapter one introduces the study by outlining the background, problem statement, objectives, research questions, scope and significance. Chapter two presents a review of relevant literature by highlighting theoretical perspectives and empirical studies on technology adoption, AI in education, and media and communication training. Chapter three details the methodology, including research approach and design, data collection and analysis procedures. Chapter four reports and discusses the findings and links them to existing literature and theoretical frameworks. Chapter five provides the summary, conclusions, limitations and recommendations.

1.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the rationale and objectives of the study, highlighting the importance of examining ChatGPT adoption among Ghanaian media and communication students. It outlined

the scope, significance, and guiding research questions, setting the foundation for the subsequent review of related literature and theoretical perspectives.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Chapter Introduction

This chapter reviews existing scholarship on artificial intelligence in education, with a focus on generative AI adoption, motivations, challenges, and policy frameworks. It critically analyses empirical and theoretical studies to situate the present research, highlighting contextual and methodological gaps that justify exploring Ghanaian media and communication students' experiences with ChatGPT.

2.1 Definition of Key Terms

2.1.1 Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Artificial Intelligence refers to the simulation of human intelligence processes by machines, particularly computer systems, to perform tasks that typically require human cognition (Russel & Norvig, 2021). These processes include learning from data, reasoning, problem-solving, perception and natural language understanding (Russel & Norvig, 2021). AI systems can be designed to operate autonomously or with human input, and they adapt their performance based on experience or new information (Russel & Norvig, 2021). The field encompasses a wide range of applications, from expert systems and robotics to speech recognition and data analytics (Russel & Norvig, 2021). AI continues to evolve as a transformative force across industries, education, healthcare, communication and governance, shaping contemporary human-technology interactions.

2.1.2 Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen-AI)

Generative Artificial Intelligence is a subset of AI technologies that create new content, such as text, images, audio or video, by learning patterns from large datasets (Alto, 2025). Unlike traditional AI, which primarily classifies, predicts, or analyses data, generative AI produces original outputs that mimic human creativity and expression (Whitaker, 2025). Popular models, such as ChatGPT, Jasper, Gemini and DeepSeek, use advanced machine learning techniques, particularly deep learning and natural language processing, to generate contextually relevant responses or media (Alto, 2025). Gen-AI is increasingly applied in education, business, communication and the creative industries, raising both opportunities for innovation and concerns regarding ethics, originality and authenticity in digital production (Whitaker, 2025).

2.1.3 Media and Communication Studies

Media and Communication Studies is an academic field that explores how information is produced, transmitted and consumed through various media channels, and how these processes shape culture, society and human interaction (Frechette & Williams, 2018). It draws on interdisciplinary perspectives, including sociology, psychology, linguistics, political science and cultural studies (Frechette & Williams, 2018). The discipline examines traditional media such as print, radio and television, alongside digital and interactive platforms like social media and artificial intelligence-driven communication systems (Frechette & Williams, 2018). Areas of focus include journalism, public relations, advertising, film, popular culture and digital media (Frechette & Williams, 2018). Media and Communication Studies equips students with analytical and practical skills to critically engage with evolving communication landscapes.

2.2 Review of Related Literature

The rapid rise of generative artificial intelligence, particularly ChatGPT, has stimulated growing academic inquiry into its adoption, pedagogical implications and policy frameworks in higher education. For instance, Budhathoki et al.'s (2024) study addresses the problem of limited empirical evidence on students' intention to adopt ChatGPT in higher education despite the rapid rise of generative AI since its public release in 2022. The central purpose of their study was to investigate the determinants of ChatGPT adoption using the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), with the addition of anxiety as a construct. Employing a quantitative design, the researchers administered surveys to students in two higher education contexts, the UK (n=239) and Nepal (n=226). The study applied structural equation modelling to test adoption predictors. The findings revealed that performance expectancy, effort expectancy and social influence significantly influenced adoption intention across both contexts, while the role of anxiety varied between the two countries. This cross-national study highlights cultural and contextual differences in students' reception of generative AI. However, it leaves a gap by overlooking students' lived experiences and perspectives, particularly in African contexts where technological adoption patterns may differ. My study addresses this gap by qualitatively exploring the adoption and use of generative AI among undergraduate media and communication students in Ghana, focusing on their motivations and challenges.

Shahi and Chaudhary (2025), on the other hand, looked into how institutional and contextual factors shape IT adoption in higher education institutions (HEIs), particularly in settings where resistance to technological change remains a challenge. The aim of their study was to examine the roles of facilitating conditions, attitudes and intentions in influencing IT usage behaviour. Using a descriptive and cross-sectional quantitative approach, the researchers surveyed 544

respondents in Nepalese HEIs through systematically administered questionnaires measuring ten variables. The findings reveal that resistance to change, performance and effort expectancy, social influence, and mimetic pressures significantly shaped attitudes, while mimetic and coercive pressures further influenced adoption intentions. Additionally, facilitating conditions were found to be critical predictors of IT system usage behaviour, highlighting the importance of institutional support. Although the study provides evidence on technology integration in Nepal, it is limited by its quantitative orientation and neglect of students' lived experiences. Moreover, it does not examine emerging tools such as generative AI within media and communication education. My study addresses this gap by qualitatively exploring how Ghanaian media and communication students adopt generative AI, thereby offering context-specific proof on technology adoption in African higher education.

Costa and Murphy (2025) explicated how generative AI (Gen-AI) potentially reshapes intellectual engagement in educational contexts, particularly concerning the role of thinking as a central human capacity. The purpose of the study was to interrogate the implications of Gen-AI for intellectual development, drawing on Hannah Arendt's concern with "thoughtlessness" and Freire's critical pedagogy. Using a conceptual and theoretical approach rather than empirical data, the authors argue that Gen-AI risks diminishing students' agency in thinking and learning by outsourcing core intellectual tasks. They emphasise that fostering a culture of intellectual responsibility and honesty is vital if educational institutions are to preserve critical thought in the face of technological innovation. While this work contributes to normative and philosophical debates about AI in education, it leaves a gap in terms of how students themselves perceive and navigate this tension in practice. My study addresses this gap by empirically examining the experiences of Ghanaian media and communication students.

Liu and Yushchik (2024) also interrogate how artificial intelligence can be meaningfully applied to enhance teaching and learning outcomes in higher education. Their focus was to investigate the effectiveness of AI-enhanced, personalised learning in improving students' knowledge levels across different subject areas. Employing an experimental methodology, 279 students were grouped by personality types and exposed to AI-integrated learning, with pre- and post-tests conducted for evaluation. The findings revealed significant improvements in the experimental group, with higher scores across English, computer science, economics, and anatomy compared to the control group. Both students and instructors reported high satisfaction, particularly regarding convenience and instructional effectiveness, although student engagement received lower ratings due to AI's dominant monitoring role. While this study demonstrates the potential of AI to elevate academic performance, it remains largely focused on general subject areas and quantitative outcomes, neglecting discipline-specific contexts and students' qualitative experiences. My study fills this gap by qualitatively exploring generative AI adoption among media and communication students in Ghana.

Salha et al. (2025) examined the problem of limited awareness and policy direction regarding the integration of Artificial Intelligence in Education (AIED). The focus of the study was to examine AIED policy formation, challenges and potentials, using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Data were collected from 181 participants across educational levels through surveys, content analysis and focus groups. The findings revealed low awareness of AI in education, teachers' fear of using AI, and varying perceptions of AIED, with many expressing uncertainty about its implications. The study contributed a policy framework to guide equitable, ethical and effective adoption of AI in educational contexts. While significant in its exploration of governance and institutional preparedness, it does not address how students themselves adopt AI tools for academic purposes, particularly in higher education and within

specific disciplines. My study addresses this gap by focusing on undergraduate media and communication students in Ghana.

Chaamwe's (2025) study responds to the growing presence of generative AI in university learning environments by examining students' awareness, adoption and the factors that shape their use of these tools. Grounded in the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), the study focuses on students at Copperbelt University and uses an online questionnaire to collect data from 285 respondents across different levels of study, which were then analysed using SPSS. The findings show high levels of awareness (88 percent) and adoption (82 percent) of generative AI in learning, with over half of the students reporting frequent use. In line with TAM, Expected Benefits, Perceived Usefulness, Attitude Toward Technology and Behavioural Intention all significantly influenced adoption, suggesting that students view generative AI as a helpful and efficient aid for academic work. The study also calls for universities to promote a culture of innovation while developing ethical guidelines to regulate responsible use and support equitable access. However, Chaamwe's work is limited to a single institution, adopts a purely quantitative design and does not differentiate between disciplinary contexts or specific generative AI tools such as ChatGPT. It also does not probe students' actual practices, strategies or dilemmas when integrating generative AI into their coursework. My study extends this line of inquiry by qualitatively investigating how undergraduate media and communication students in three Ghanaian universities adopt and use ChatGPT in their classroom and assessment-related activities, with particular attention to their motivations, patterns of use and ethical concerns.

Sergeeva et al. (2025) examine the adoption of generative artificial intelligence in higher education by applying the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology 2 (UTAUT2) to students at Pyatigorsk State University. Using a quantitative design and structural equation modelling, the study identifies habit as the strongest predictor of students' use of GAI, followed by performance expectancy, with hedonic motivation, social influence and price value also exerting significant positive effects on behavioural intention. An unexpected finding is the negative relationship between facilitating conditions and intention to use, which suggests that institutional support structures may be inadequate, misaligned with student needs or perceived as restrictive. The study reports no significant gender differences in adoption factors and concludes with recommendations for universities to cultivate habitual use, communicate concrete benefits, make GAI tools more engaging, harness peer influence and improve support systems. While this work contributes to understanding GAI adoption drivers, it is limited by its cross-sectional design, reliance on self-reported data and focus on a single Russian university context. It also treats GAI as a broad category rather than examining specific tools such as ChatGPT and does not explore disciplinary variations or the qualitative dimensions of students' engagement with these systems. My study builds on these insights by qualitatively investigating how undergraduate media and communication students in three Ghanaian universities adopt and incorporate ChatGPT into their academic practices, paying attention to habitual use, institutional support, peer influence and the contextual factors that shape their motivations, ethical concerns and learning behaviours.

Aldreabi et al. (2025) examine the determinants of higher education students' willingness to adopt generative AI by extending the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology 2 (UTAUT2) with constructs specific to GenAI. Using a randomly selected sample of 374 students and structural equation modelling, the study analyses how different factors shape

intention to use GenAI tools. The findings indicate that students are more likely to adopt GenAI when they perceive it as a supplemental learning resource and when effort expectancy is high, suggesting that ease of use and a supportive, add-on role in learning are central to acceptance. Perceived costs exert a negative influence on adoption intentions, underscoring the role of financial barriers in constraining access, while information accuracy and hedonic motivation do not significantly predict intention. The authors argue that e-learning practitioners should align GenAI integration with learning objectives, reduce cost barriers and foster critical engagement to build digital literacy. However, the study is limited by its cross-sectional design, reliance on self-reported data and a narrow focus on intention rather than actual use, within a single educational context. It also does not attend to disciplinary differences or the specific affordances of tools like ChatGPT. My study responds to these gaps by qualitatively exploring how undergraduate media and communication students in three Ghanaian universities position ChatGPT within their learning as either a supplemental aid or a central tool, how cost and access shape its use in a lower-middle-income context, and how students negotiate accuracy, critical engagement and academic integrity in their day-to-day practices.

Schefer-Wenzl et al. (2024) investigate how generative AI tools are being integrated into higher education by focusing on computer science students at the University of Applied Sciences Campus Vienna. Using a survey design, the study examines the extent and nature of students' use of tools such as ChatGPT, as well as their perceptions of benefits and risks. The findings indicate high levels of acceptance and frequent use of generative AI for programming tasks, exam preparation and obtaining simplified explanations of complex concepts. At the same time, students express concern about the accuracy of AI-generated content and its possible effects on their critical thinking, signalling ambivalence about reliance on these tools. The authors argue for clear institutional guidelines and ethical frameworks to govern AI use in

teaching and learning and position their work as informing educators and policymakers seeking to integrate AI into computer science curricula. However, the study is limited by its single-institution, discipline-specific focus, its reliance on self-reported survey data and its setting in a well-resourced European context. It does not explore how students in non-technical fields such as media and communication integrate ChatGPT into writing, research and creative tasks, nor does it probe the qualitative dimensions of their ethical dilemmas or learning strategies. My study addresses these gaps by using interviews with undergraduate media and communication students in three Ghanaian universities to examine how they incorporate ChatGPT into their academic work, how they negotiate issues of accuracy, critical thinking and originality and how institutional policies and disciplinary expectations shape their everyday adoption of generative AI.

Asag et al. (2024) investigate students' intention to use generative AI in a Bangladeshi engineering university, focusing on how social influences and cognitive evaluations shape adoption. Drawing on the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), the study analyses pilot survey data to examine how constructs such as social influence, student image, job relevance and perceived usefulness affect behavioural intention. Using a quantitative approach, the authors find that all four factors significantly predict intention to use generative AI tools such as ChatGPT, Google Gemini and Bing Copilot, highlighting the importance of perceived academic and career relevance, as well as the reputational value attached to AI use among peers. The study also reports that male and female students share similar attitudes towards generative AI, while local and international students differ in perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use and result demonstrability, suggesting that cultural and experiential factors shape how benefits are interpreted. Although this work offers useful insights into social and cognitive determinants of adoption, it is based on pilot data from a

single engineering institution, concentrates on intention rather than actual practices and treats generative AI as a broad category rather than examining specific academic tasks or disciplinary requirements. My study builds on these findings by qualitatively exploring how social influence, perceived usefulness and job or career relevance operate among undergraduate media and communication students in three Ghanaian universities, and by investigating in depth how they integrate ChatGPT into writing, research and creative coursework, as well as how they navigate peer norms, institutional expectations and ethical concerns in their everyday use of generative AI.

Finally, Chen et al. (2024) examine how university students use and interact with generative AI tools in their academic work, with a specific focus on generative AI literacy. Using a survey-based design in a four-year public university in the south-eastern United States, the study analyses responses from 218 students who reported having used generative AI tools. The authors conceptualise literacy across four dimensions: utilisation, interaction, evaluation of output and ethics. The findings indicate that most respondents use generative AI primarily to generate ideas for papers, projects and assignments, and to refine or extend their own ideas rather than to replace them. Despite this relatively active use, students report a critical stance towards AI outputs, especially in their interactions with ChatGPT, suggesting that uncritical dependency is not the dominant pattern. A key insight is students' expressed need for explicit guidance at course and institutional levels, including clear statements in syllabi and university policies on the ethical and appropriate use of generative AI. Chen et al. position their study against a body of literature that has largely reflected educators' viewpoints and argue that their work adds empirical evidence from students' perspectives on actual use. However, the study is confined to a single U.S. institution and relies on self-reported survey data, which limits insight into disciplinary differences and the nuanced ways students navigate ethics and assessment

expectations. My study extends this line of inquiry by qualitatively exploring generative AI literacy among undergraduate media and communication students in three Ghanaian universities, focusing on how they use ChatGPT for idea generation, writing and research, how they critically appraise its outputs, and how they respond to the presence or absence of explicit institutional guidance in a lower-middle-income African context.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

2.3.1 Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT)

The Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), proposed by Venkatesh et al. (2003), is a comprehensive model that explains users' behavioural intention to adopt and use new technologies. It consolidates elements from eight earlier models of technology adoption, including the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Venkatesh & Zhang, 2010). UTAUT identifies four key determinants of technology acceptance (Venkatesh et al., 2016). First, performance expectancy is the degree to which users believe the technology will help them achieve gains in performance. Second, effort expectancy is the ease of use associated with the technology. Third, social influence is the extent to which users perceive that important others expect them to use the technology. Lastly, facilitating conditions is the organisational and technical infrastructure that supports use. These factors influence behavioural intention, which in turn shapes actual technology use (Venkatesh et al., 2016). The model also acknowledges moderating variables such as gender, age, experience and voluntariness of use, which can alter the strength of relationships between determinants and behavioural intention (Venkatesh et al., 2016). A key assumption of UTAUT is that individuals' decisions to adopt technology are not merely individual choices but are shaped by both perceived usefulness and external influences (Venkatesh et al., 2016). Thus,

the theory provides a robust framework for understanding adoption behaviour across different contexts.

Subsequent cross-cultural work has shown that the explanatory power and relative salience of the key determinants of technology acceptance may vary between contexts such as the United States and China, reinforcing the need to interpret UTAUT in relation to specific cultural and institutional environments (Venkatesh & Zhang, 2010). Since its introduction, UTAUT has generated an extensive body of empirical applications and theoretical refinements. A major extension is UTAUT2, which adapts the original framework to consumer and voluntary use contexts by adding hedonic motivation, price value and habit as predictors of behavioural intention and technology use. UTAUT2 has been shown to increase the variance explained in behavioural intention compared with the original model, particularly in non-organisational settings. Systematic reviews confirm that UTAUT and UTAUT2 have become among the most widely used models in technology acceptance research across domains such as mobile services, health technologies and educational platforms. Williams et al. (2015) show that UTAUT is frequently selected because it integrates key predictors from earlier models and offers relatively high explanatory power across diverse technologies and populations. Tamilmani et al. (2021) further demonstrate that UTAUT2 has been extensively extended with additional constructs such as trust, highlighting both the model's flexibility and the risk of conceptual proliferation if extensions are not theoretically justified.

Within higher education, UTAUT has become a dominant framework for examining students' adoption of digital learning tools, learning management systems and online platforms. Xue et al. (2024) systematically review 162 UTAUT-based studies in higher education and report that

performance expectancy typically exerts the strongest influence on behavioural intention, while the importance of effort expectancy, social influence and facilitating conditions varies by technology type and regional context. The review also notes a concentration of studies in Asia and North America and a reliance on cross-sectional survey designs and structural equation modelling, which limits insight into the lived experiences and meaning-making processes underlying students' technology use. In parallel, UTAUT2 has been applied to explain adoption of e-learning systems, with findings that performance expectancy, hedonic motivation, habit and trust can be strong predictors of intention, whereas price value and facilitating conditions may show context-specific effects. El-Masri and Tarhini (2017), for example, find that performance expectancy, hedonic motivation, habit and trust significantly predict university students' intention to use e-learning systems in Qatar and the United States, while price value is not significant.

Evidence from African higher education suggests that UTAUT is also useful for understanding technology adoption in resource-constrained environments. Yakubu and Dasuki (2019) employ UTAUT to examine adoption of an e-learning platform among Nigerian university students and report that performance expectancy and effort expectancy significantly influence behavioural intention, while facilitating conditions and behavioural intention predict actual use. Their study argues that UTAUT is preferable to simpler models such as TAM in African contexts because it captures both individual perceptions and infrastructural constraints that shape adoption. However, like most UTAUT applications, it uses a quantitative survey design, which provides limited insight into how students interpret these constructs in everyday academic practice.

Against this backdrop, the present study adopts UTAUT as the guiding theoretical framework for investigating generative AI adoption among media and communication students in Ghana. Performance expectancy is operationalised as students' perceptions of how tools such as ChatGPT improve academic tasks including idea generation, drafting, editing and comprehension of complex concepts. Effort expectancy relates to the perceived ease with which students can learn to use and integrate generative AI into existing study routines. Social influence is interpreted through peer norms, lecturer expectations and institutional signals concerning the legitimacy or riskiness of AI-supported work, which are particularly salient given ongoing debates about academic integrity. Facilitating conditions encompass access to devices, reliable internet connectivity, institutional policies and assessment practices that either enable or constrain meaningful AI use. In line with UTAUT, these constructs provide a structured lens for analysing students' narratives about why, when and how they adopt generative AI in their coursework. At the same time, by applying UTAUT qualitatively, the study responds to calls in the higher education literature to complement predictive modelling with in-depth exploration of contextual meanings, thereby extending understanding of technology adoption beyond numerical indicators and into the lived experiences of Ghanaian media and communication students.

2.3.2 Relevance of Theory

UTAUT is highly relevant to this study as it provides a tested framework for analysing how students adopt generative AI tools. By examining performance expectancy and effort expectancy, the model helps explain why students perceive generative AI as beneficial or convenient for academic tasks. Social influence is particularly important in university contexts, where peer and instructor attitudes shape adoption. Facilitating conditions also highlight the

role of access to technology and institutional support. Applying UTAUT allows this study to systematically investigate the behavioural, social and infrastructural factors influencing Ghanaian media and communication students' engagement with generative AI.

2.4 Chapter Summary

The literature review identified key insights on technology adoption, pedagogical implications, and governance of AI in education, while revealing gaps in African contexts and discipline-specific perspectives. These gaps underscore the need for this study, which qualitatively examines ChatGPT adoption among Ghanaian media and communication students.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Chapter Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological framework guiding the study. It explains the interpretivist paradigm, qualitative approach, and case study design involving UniMAC, UPSA and AUCB. It further details the purposive sampling strategy, focus group discussions as the data collection method, and thematic analysis as the data interpretation technique.

3.1 Research Paradigm

The study is grounded in the interpretivist or social constructionist paradigm, which posits that reality is socially constructed through interactions, meanings and experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Unlike positivism, which seeks objective truths, interpretivism emphasises understanding how individuals make sense of phenomena within their specific contexts (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). This paradigm is appropriate for the present study as it allows for an in-depth exploration of how undergraduate media and communication students in Ghana adopt and experience generative AI. By privileging students' subjective perspectives, the approach provides insights into their motivations, challenges and meaning-making processes, which cannot be captured through purely quantitative or positivist frameworks.

3.2 Philosophical Assumptions

The interpretivist paradigm rests on four key philosophical assumptions. Ontology assumes multiple realities shaped by individuals' subjective experiences, meaning each student's

encounter with generative AI is unique (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Epistemology views knowledge as co-constructed between researcher and participants, requiring dialogue to uncover meanings behind students' adoption of generative AI (Creswell & Poth, 2024). Methodology emphasises qualitative and context-specific inquiry, here employing case studies and interviews to capture students' perspectives in depth (Creswell & Báez, 2021). Axiology recognises the researcher's values as integral to the process, acknowledging reflexivity in interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2024).

3.3 Research Approach

A research approach provides the logical guide to an inquiry (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). This study adopts a qualitative approach, which seeks to explore and interpret meanings, experiences and perspectives rather than measure variables or test hypotheses (Creswell & Báez, 2021). Qualitative research is particularly suited to investigating complex social phenomena, as it prioritises depth, context and participants' subjective realities (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). In this study, the qualitative approach enables an in-depth exploration of how undergraduate media and communication students in Ghana adopt and experience generative AI tools. It is the right approach as it uncovers motivations, challenges and meaning-making processes that cannot be quantified or generalised statistically.

3.4 Research Design

A research design provides the structured framework that guides how a study is conducted (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). This study adopts a case study design, which allows for the in-depth investigation of a phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin, 2017). Case studies focus

on specific settings or groups (Yin, 2017). The selected cases are the University of Media, Arts and Communication (UniMAC), the University of Professional Studies, Accra (UPSA), and the African University College of Communications and Business (AUCB). This design is appropriate as it enables a detailed exploration of how students in different institutions, public and private, adopt and experience generative AI within their academic work.

3.5 Sampling Strategy

This study employs purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling strategy where participants are deliberately selected based on specific characteristics relevant to the research objectives (Thompson, 2012). Purposive sampling enables the researcher to focus on individuals who can provide rich, detailed, and meaningful insights into the phenomenon under investigation (Thompson, 2012). In this study, undergraduate media and communication students from UniMAC, UPSA, and AUCB are purposively selected because they represent the population most engaged with media education. This strategy is appropriate as it ensures the inclusion of participants with direct experiences and perspectives central to understanding generative AI adoption.

3.6 Data Collection Technique

This study uses focus group discussions (FGDs) as the primary data collection technique. FGDs are structured group interviews that bring together participants with shared characteristics to discuss a specific topic, allowing the researcher to capture diverse perspectives through collective interaction (Creswell & Báez, 2021). They are particularly important for exploring social meanings, group dynamics and shared experiences (Creswell & Báez, 2021). In this

study, FGDs with undergraduate media and communication students from UniMAC, UPSA, and AUCB provide a platform for participants to discuss their motivations, adoption practices and challenges with generative AI.

3.7 Data Collection Process

The data collection process began with the purposive selection of participants, ensuring they were undergraduate students enrolled in media and communication programmes at UniMAC, UPSA and AUCB. These students were identified as most relevant to the study's focus on generative AI adoption in communication education. Once identified, participants were contacted through their student leaders, who facilitated introductions and helped with scheduling. Clear information about the study's objectives, procedures and ethical assurances was provided before participation, and informed consent was obtained. Three focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted, one in each institution, with five participants per group, creating a manageable setting for dynamic interaction and detailed discussion. Each session lasted approximately one hour and was moderated by the researcher, who facilitated conversation around adoption practices, motivations and challenges with generative AI. The discussions were audio-recorded, with permission, and complemented by field notes to ensure accuracy and contextual richness.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were central to this study. Autonomy was respected by allowing participants to voluntarily decide whether to take part, with the option to withdraw at any stage without consequence (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012). Informed consent was obtained through

clear explanations of the study's purpose, procedures and expected use of data before participation (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012). Confidentiality was ensured by securely storing all data and restricting access to the researcher alone (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012). To protect anonymity, pseudonyms were assigned to participants in the reporting of findings, ensuring their identities remained untraceable (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012). These measures safeguarded participants' rights, dignity and privacy while maintaining the integrity and trustworthiness of the research process.

3.9 Authenticity and Trustworthiness

To ensure authenticity, the study employs thick description, providing detailed accounts of participants' views and experiences to immerse readers in the setting and allow shared understanding of the context (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Additionally, member checking is used by taking the major findings back to participants for verification, ensuring interpretations accurately reflect their perspectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). For trustworthiness, all transcripts were carefully reviewed to eliminate obvious errors that might occur during transcription, maintaining fidelity to participants' accounts (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). These measures enhance the credibility, accuracy, and dependability of the findings, ensuring they remain a true and fair representation of the participants' experiences.

3.10 Data Analysis Techniques

This study employed thematic analysis as the data analysis technique (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Thematic analysis is a qualitative method used to identify, analyse and interpret patterns of meaning (themes) within textual data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). It provides a systematic

approach to making sense of participants' perspectives while maintaining flexibility in interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Practically, the analysis followed three stages of coding (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Open coding was done, where initial concepts were generated from the raw data. Axial coding was done by establishing connections among codes. Selective coding was done by refining core categories into themes.

3.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the methodological choices underpinning the study. It justified the use of a qualitative case study design within the interpretivist paradigm, explained participant selection, data collection through focus groups, and data analysis via thematic coding. Ethical considerations were also discussed to ensure integrity and participant protection.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.0 Chapter Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the findings from the focus group discussions conducted across UniMAC, UPSA, and AUCB. It organises the results around the study’s objectives, highlighting students’ adoption patterns, motivations and challenges with generative AI. The discussion links these findings to existing literature and theoretical perspectives.

4.1 Preliminary Descriptions

A total of 15 undergraduate students participated in the study across the three cases of UniMAC, UPSA and AUCB. Each case contributed one focus group discussion with five participants. Participants were purposively selected from media and communication programmes, representing varied year groups, gender, and academic experiences. To protect anonymity, pseudonyms were assigned. The demographic overview provides context for interpreting the findings, as students’ perspectives on adopting generative AI are shaped by their institutional settings. The table below presents the distribution of participants.

Table 4.1: Demographic Description of Participants

Case (University)	Pseudonym	Year Group	Gender	Age
UniMAC	Ama	Level 100	Female	20
UniMAC	Daniel	Level 300	Male	22
UniMAC	Akosua	Level 400	Female	23

UniMAC	Michael	Level 200	Male	21
UniMAC	Adwoa	Level 300	Female	22
UPSA	Kofi	Level 100	Male	19
UPSA	Sarah	Level 300	Female	21
UPSA	Ebo	Level 400	Male	24
UPSA	Abena	Level 200	Female	20
UPSA	Joseph	Level 300	Male	23
AUCB	Kwame	Level 200	Male	20
AUCB	Akua	Level 300	Female	22
AUCB	Nana	Level 400	Male	25
AUCB	Grace	Level 100	Female	19
AUCB	Kojo	Level 300	Male	21

4.3 Findings

4.3.1 Adoption and Integration of Generative AI

The findings reveal seven main themes of Academic Support, Efficiency and Convenience, Creative Exploration, Writing Quality and Confidence, Infrastructural Constraints and Uneven Access, Ethical Negotiation and Responsible Use, and Collaborative and Group Use regarding how undergraduate media and communication students adopt and integrate generative AI into their academic work.

Academic Support

Prior to understanding how students adopt and integrate generative AI, all the participants acknowledged that ChatGPT was the generative AI tool they knew most and used most. Hence, participants described ChatGPT as a very important tool for academic support, particularly in structuring assignments, summarising readings and clarifying difficult concepts. Students often relied on the tool to complement lecture materials and enhance understanding. Ama, a UniMAC, Level 200 student, explained that, *“Sometimes when I don’t understand a lecture note, I paste it into ChatGPT and it breaks it down in a simpler way for me.”*

Collaborative and Group Use

Another theme was the integration of ChatGPT into collaborative work. Students frequently used the tool as a shared starting point in group assignments, especially when drafting project outlines, interview guides or campaign concepts. ChatGPT often acted as a neutral text that groups collectively critiqued, edited and localised to the Ghanaian context. Ebo, a UPSA, Level 400 student, explained:

When we have group assignments, someone will usually start a draft using ChatGPT, then we all discuss what to keep or change. It becomes like a neutral starting point that we argue with. It actually makes our group discussions more focused because we are reacting to something concrete.

Efficiency and Convenience

The second theme that emerged as a strong driver of adoption was efficiency and convenience. Students highlighted how ChatGPT saved time in drafting outlines, generating references and

proofreading their work. Many described it as a way of managing academic pressure while balancing other responsibilities. Kojo, an AUCB, Level 300 student, noted that: *“Instead of spending three hours searching online, I can get something useful in minutes and then work around it.”*

Writing Quality and Confidence

Students also described using ChatGPT as a tool for refining language and improving the overall quality of their written work. Rather than drafting entire essays with AI, many reported writing first and then using ChatGPT for revision, clarity and tone adjustment. This practice appeared to build confidence in their academic writing. Nana, a AUCB, Level 400 student, remarked:

To be honest, ChatGPT has helped me polish my writing. I usually write my essay the normal way, then paste it in and ask for suggestions. It points out weak sentences, repetition and even tone issues. I do not copy everything, but it guides me to improve my own work.

Creative Exploration

Finally, students integrated ChatGPT for creative exploration, using it to brainstorm project ideas, simulate interview questions and experiment with writing styles. This use was often framed as expanding their creativity rather than replacing it. Sarah, a UPSA, Level 300 student, reflected that, *“It gives me fresh ideas I might not have thought of, and I still add my own touch.”*

Infrastructural Constraints and Uneven Access

Despite high enthusiasm, students' accounts also highlighted infrastructural constraints that shaped how consistently they could adopt and integrate generative AI. Limited data bundles, unstable internet connectivity and overcrowded computer labs meant that ChatGPT could not always be relied upon. This produced a hybrid practice in which AI use was combined with traditional resources. Abena, an UPSA, Level 200 student, observed:

Sometimes the internet is slow or the lab is full, so I cannot rely on ChatGPT all the time. On days with poor connectivity, it changes my whole plan. I have to fall back on textbooks and lecture notes. That limitation reminds me that it is only one of my tools.

Ethical Negotiation and Responsible Use

Finally, students actively negotiated ethical concerns around originality, plagiarism and overdependence. Many distinguished between using ChatGPT as a “shortcut” and using it as a “guide” and expressed fear of sanctions if lecturers detected overreliance on AI-generated text. This produced cautious and selective integration in high-stakes assessments. Daniel, a UniMAC, Level 300 student, reflected:

I know some people just paste the whole question and submit whatever comes, but I am scared of that. Lecturers talk about plagiarism and originality, so I use ChatGPT more like a thinking partner. I check facts, rephrase in my own words and make sure the final assignment still sounds like me.

These seven themes show that adoption and integration of generative AI among media and communication students is multi-layered. ChatGPT functions as an academic support and

efficiency tool, but also as a resource for creativity, writing development, collaboration and ethical reflection, all within the constraints of Ghana's digital infrastructure and evolving institutional norms

4.3.2 Motivation for Generative AI Usage

The analysis revealed six key themes underpinning students' motivations for using generative AI in learning and research. These themes are Academic Performance Enhancement, Curiosity and Digital Competence Building, Time Management and Workload Pressure, Compensating for Gaps in Teaching and Learning Resources, Language Support and Expression in Academic Writing, and Peer Influence and Normative Expectations.

Time Management and Workload Pressure

A prominent motivation was the need to cope with heavy coursework and competing responsibilities. Many students combined studies with part time work, internships or family duties and described ChatGPT as a strategy for managing tight deadlines. The tool was used to speed up specific stages of academic tasks, such as outlining, drafting or revising, so that students could distribute their time across multiple courses. Kofi, a UPSA, Level 100 student, explained:

Sometimes in one week we have quizzes, group presentations and assignments from different courses. I still have to commute and help at home, so the pressure is high. ChatGPT helps me organise my ideas quickly, so I do not waste hours staring at a blank page.

Compensating for Gaps in Teaching and Learning Resources

Students were also motivated by perceived gaps in teaching quality, limited contact hours and inadequate access to up to date learning materials. ChatGPT was seen as a way to supplement crowded lectures, outdated textbooks or incomplete handouts. It provided alternative explanations, examples and case studies that students felt were missing from formal instruction.

Sarah, a UPSA, Level 300 student, noted:

Some courses are large and the lecturer cannot answer everyone's questions in class. Sometimes the slides are very brief and the recommended books are not even in the library. I use ChatGPT to fill those gaps, get more detailed explanations and see practical examples for my assignments.

Academic Performance Enhancement

Participants were strongly motivated by the prospect of enhancing academic performance. Many viewed ChatGPT as a supportive tool that improved the quality of their assignments, facilitated exam preparation and provided quick clarifications. They described it as a "silent tutor" that offered explanations beyond what they received in lectures. This theme reflects students' belief in the tool's capacity to boost academic confidence and outcomes. Daniel, a UniMAC, Level 300 student, explained that, "*I want to do well in my courses, so I use ChatGPT to check if I am on the right path with my assignments before submitting.*"

Language Support and Expression in Academic Writing

Another motivation related to language and expression. Several participants indicated that they sometimes struggled to express complex ideas in formal academic English, even when they

understood the content. ChatGPT was therefore used to improve wording, coherence and grammar, which they associated with better grades and clearer communication. Kwame, an AUCB, Level 200 student, reflected:

I know what I want to say, but sometimes my sentences do not come out clearly. Lecturers complain about grammar and structure. When I write my draft and paste it into ChatGPT, it helps me rearrange the ideas and suggests better phrases. It motivates me because my work looks more professional.

Peer Influence and Normative Expectations

Finally, peer influence and emerging norms within the student community motivated many to adopt generative AI. Participants described how friends introduced them to ChatGPT, shared prompts and even compared who could use it more effectively. Over time, using AI tools started to feel like a normal part of university study. Ama, a UniMAC, Level 100 student, commented:

At first I did not pay attention to ChatGPT until my coursemates kept talking about how it helped them with assignments and presentations. They showed me how to use it on their phones. Now if you are not using it, you feel you are missing something important that others are benefiting from.

Curiosity and Digital Competence Building

Again, curiosity and the desire to build digital competence motivated students to explore generative AI. Participants expressed an eagerness to experiment with new technologies, seeing AI as part of the future of communication and media practice. For some, using ChatGPT was

not only about immediate academic benefits but also about acquiring skills that would be relevant for professional opportunities. Abena, a UPSA, Level 200 student, shared that, “*I am curious about AI because I know it will be important in journalism and PR in the future, so I want to start learning how to use it now.*” These motivations demonstrate that students’ engagement with ChatGPT goes beyond convenience. It reflects both instrumental goals of improving academic outcomes and forward-looking aspirations of preparing for a technology-driven communication industry.

These themes indicate that students’ motivations to use generative AI are shaped by academic goals, future-oriented digital aspirations, structural pressures, resource limitations, linguistic challenges and social dynamics. ChatGPT is not only a tool for performance enhancement, but also a response to the realities of studying media and communication in Ghanaian universities.

4.3.3 Challenges for Generative AI Usage

The findings highlight nine major challenges students face when using generative AI in their academic work. They include Accuracy and Reliability of Information, Ethical and Institutional Concerns, Infrastructural and Access Constraints, Limited Skills in Prompting and Evaluation, Tension with Critical Thinking and Learning, Contextual and Local Relevance Gaps, Stylistic Mismatch and Detection Anxiety, Conflicting Expectations from Lecturers and Peers, and Emotional Discomfort and Guilt.

Accuracy and Reliability of Information

Participants expressed frustration with the accuracy and reliability of ChatGPT's responses. While the tool was widely used, students were aware that it sometimes produced outdated or misleading information, requiring them to cross check with other sources. This challenge often created hesitation in fully trusting AI outputs for graded work. Such inconsistencies limited reliance and reinforced the need for critical engagement. Michael, a UniMAC, Level 200 student, explained that

Sometimes ChatGPT gives you wrong references or information that does not exist, so you cannot just depend on it blindly. When you search the references on Google, nothing comes. It is not only the references. Sometimes it presents made up facts with so much confidence that you might easily believe.

Ethical and Institutional Concerns

Ethical and institutional concerns also shaped students' experiences. Many participants were conscious of the risks of non originality and academic dishonesty associated with over reliance on generative AI. Others noted uncertainty due to the absence of clear university guidelines on acceptable AI use, leaving them in a grey area between innovation and potential misconduct. Akua, an AUCB, Level 300 student, shared that

We are not sure whether the school sees it as cheating or not, so sometimes I feel guilty even when I only use it for ideas. Some lecturers speak strongly against it and warn us, while others ignore it completely. You do not really know what can lead to punishment.

Infrastructural and Access Constraints

Students reported that technical and infrastructural constraints limited consistent use of generative AI. Unstable internet connectivity, high data costs and limited access to laptops meant that ChatGPT could not always be integrated into daily study routines. As a result, AI use was often interrupted, especially for students commuting long distances or relying on mobile data. Joseph, a UPSA, Level 300 student, commented:

On days when the network is bad or I do not have enough data, using ChatGPT becomes a luxury. You can start a conversation and then everything hangs. In those moments you realise that, practically, access is a challenge, especially when you are off campus and using your own bundle.

Limited Skills in Prompting and Evaluation

Another challenge related to students' limited skills in crafting effective prompts and evaluating the quality of responses. Some participants admitted that they did not always know how to ask the right questions, which resulted in vague or irrelevant answers. They also felt unsure about how to judge the depth or credibility of AI generated explanations. Kwame, an AUCB, Level 200 student, noted:

Sometimes I see screenshots where people get very detailed answers, but when I try, the response is shallow. I am now learning how to frame prompts properly. If you do not phrase it well, you get generic answers. The challenge is that nobody really teaches us how to use it critically.

Tension with Critical Thinking and Learning

Participants expressed concern that frequent reliance on ChatGPT could weaken their own critical thinking and independent research habits. Some described a struggle between using AI for convenience and wanting to build strong analytical skills. This tension was especially acute during exam periods, when time pressure made AI support attractive but also worrying. Akosua, a UniMAC, Level 400 student, reflected:

There are times I feel I am becoming lazy mentally because I run to ChatGPT too quickly. Instead of struggling to think through a concept or read the full chapter, I am tempted to just ask the AI. It helps in the short term, but I worry about my long term reasoning skills.

Contextual and Local Relevance Gaps

Students also highlighted that ChatGPT often lacked Ghana specific or African examples, legal frameworks and media cases that were central to their coursework. Responses tended to focus on Western contexts, which limited the direct usefulness of the information for assignments that required local illustrations. This gap demanded extra effort to localise content. Ebo, a UPSA, Level 400 student, explained:

When you ask about media regulation or journalism practice, it usually gives examples from the US or UK. For Ghana, the information is brief or missing. You then have to go and search for local cases yourself. That makes it less reliable when the lecturer expects very specific Ghanaian examples.

Stylistic Mismatch and Detection Anxiety

Another challenge involved the style and tone of AI generated text. Students felt that ChatGPT sometimes produced writing that sounded overly polished or foreign compared with their usual style, which raised fears about being suspected of using AI or plagiarism. This led some to avoid direct copying and spend extra time rewriting. Adwoa, a UniMAC, Level 300 student, observed:

When you paste the answer directly, it sounds very different from how we normally write. It looks like some foreign student wrote it. That alone can make a lecturer suspicious. So I always have to paraphrase and simplify it, which takes time and still makes me anxious about being detected.

Conflicting Expectations from Lecturers and Peers

Students described conflicting pressures from lecturers and peers regarding generative AI use. While some lecturers strongly discouraged AI, friends encouraged its use and shared prompts and tips. This mixed messaging created confusion about what counted as acceptable and responsible usage, especially in group work and take home assignments. Ama, a UniMAC, Level 200 student, stated:

In class, a lecturer will warn us that using AI is dangerous and can destroy our thinking. After class, the same classmates are sharing ideas from ChatGPT on the group platform. You are stuck between what your friends are doing and what your lecturer is saying, and it becomes confusing.

Emotional Discomfort and Guilt

Finally, several participants reported feelings of guilt, anxiety and self doubt linked to their reliance on generative AI. Even when they used ChatGPT mainly for guidance, some felt that they were taking a shortcut that undermined the value of their degree. This emotional discomfort shaped how openly they talked about AI use. Kofi, a UPSA, Level 100 student, remarked:

Sometimes after using ChatGPT, I feel like I have cheated myself. Even if I do my own rewriting, I still ask whether I really deserve the mark. You cannot freely tell your parents or lecturers that AI helped, because you are afraid they will think you are lazy or dishonest.

The findings show that challenges associated with generative AI use are technical, ethical, pedagogical and emotional. Students navigate inaccurate information, infrastructural barriers, skill gaps, contextual limitations and mixed institutional signals, all of which shape cautious and negotiated patterns of adoption in Ghanaian media and communication classrooms.

4.4 Discussions of Findings

4.4.1 Empirical Discussions

The empirical findings of this study both confirm and extend existing scholarship on generative AI adoption in higher education, while adding a distinct disciplinary and contextual perspective from Ghanaian media and communication classrooms.

First, the dominance of performance-related motivations in students' accounts aligns with studies that foreground performance expectancy as a key driver of adoption. Budhathoki et al. (2024), Chaamwe (2025), Sergeeva et al. (2025) and Aldreabi et al. (2025) all report that perceived usefulness, expected benefits or performance expectancy significantly predict intention to use generative AI or related technologies. In this study, performance is not confined to grades alone. Students described ChatGPT as an academic support tool that helps them understand lecture content, structure assignments, prepare for examinations and refine written work. The themes of Academic Support, Academic Performance Enhancement and Writing Quality and Confidence show that students view ChatGPT as a complementary resource that strengthens their ability to meet assessment demands and communicate clearly. This adds nuance to the largely survey based literature by revealing the specific academic practices through which perceived usefulness is realised, such as simplifying complex concepts, drafting outlines, revising language and checking the coherence of arguments.

Second, the findings provide further evidence that effort expectancy and efficiency concerns matter, but in ways that are closely tied to the structural realities of studying in Ghana. Like Budhathoki et al. (2024) and Aldreabi et al. (2025), this study shows that ease of use and time-saving functions are central to adoption. Students valued ChatGPT for helping them manage heavy workloads, multiple deadlines and off-campus responsibilities. However, the theme on Time Management and Workload Pressure reveals that the appeal of generative AI is partly a response to crowded curricula, limited contact hours and the expectation to juggle academic work with commuting, part-time jobs and family roles. This extends prior research, which tends to treat effort expectancy as an individual perception, by showing how it is shaped by institutional timetables, teaching practices and socio-economic conditions.

Third, the study confirms the importance of social influence but also exposes tensions that are less visible in quantitative work. Asag et al. (2024) and Budhathoki et al. (2024) find that social influence significantly predicts intention to adopt generative AI tools. Here, peer influence clearly motivates usage, with students learning about ChatGPT from classmates, sharing prompts in group chats and normalising AI-supported work in group assignments. At the same time, participants reported strong scepticism and in some cases outright discouragement from lecturers, combined with silence at the institutional level. This produces what might be called a divided social environment, in which peer norms encourage experimentation while academic authority figures often frame AI as risky or morally suspect. The resulting emotional discomfort, including guilt and fear of detection, is largely absent from the survey-based studies but is central to how students in this context negotiate everyday use.

Fourth, the findings speak directly to concerns in the conceptual literature about the impact of generative AI on intellectual engagement. Costa and Murphy (2025) caution that Gen AI may encourage “thoughtlessness” by outsourcing core intellectual tasks. Students in this study did not simply accept or reject this risk. Instead, they articulated a tension between the convenience of ChatGPT and their desire to build strong critical thinking skills. Some worried that rapid recourse to AI might weaken their independent reasoning or reduce their willingness to read full texts. Others tried to manage this by using ChatGPT mainly as a starting point or as a “thinking partner” rather than a substitute. These accounts empirically ground Costa and Murphy’s theoretical concerns, showing how students themselves perceive and manage the potential erosion of critical engagement in practice.

Fifth, the study deepens understanding of facilitating conditions, policy and governance issues. Salha et al. (2025) highlight low awareness of AI in education and the absence of clear policy frameworks. Consistent with this, Ghanaian students reported confusion about whether using ChatGPT counts as cheating, uneven enforcement by lecturers and a lack of explicit guidance in course documents. This uncertainty shaped cautious and often hidden use, with students selectively disclosing AI support. Compared with Chen et al. (2024), who show that students in the United States actively call for institutional guidance, the present study reveals a similar demand but in a context where material infrastructure is also fragile. The theme on Infrastructural and Access Constraints illustrates how unreliable internet, high data costs and limited hardware access condition the very possibility of engaging with generative AI, a dimension that is largely absent from work conducted in better resourced settings such as Schefer Wenzl et al. (2024) or Liu and Yushchik (2024).

Sixth, the findings contribute to debates on AI literacy and responsible use. Chen et al. (2024) conceptualise generative AI literacy in terms of utilisation, interaction, evaluation and ethics. This study shows how these dimensions are negotiated in a lower middle income African setting and within media and communication programmes. Students confronted hallucinated references, contextually irrelevant examples and stylistic mismatches, which required them to develop strategies for cross checking information, localising content to Ghanaian cases and rephrasing AI output to align with their own academic voice. At the same time, limited prompting skills and limited training in critical evaluation created vulnerabilities. These patterns suggest that AI literacy cannot be reduced to technical familiarity. It also requires discipline specific critical competencies, such as the ability to evaluate sources, recognise implicit cultural biases and adapt content to local media landscapes.

Finally, the study addresses a recurring gap in the reviewed literature, which is the lack of qualitative evidence from African higher education and from non technical disciplines. Existing studies are dominated by survey designs in engineering, computer science and general university populations in Europe, Asia and North America. They often treat generative AI as a single category and focus on intentions to use, adoption predictors or policy frameworks. By contrast, this study provides context rich accounts of how media and communication students in Ghanaian universities actually weave ChatGPT into their practices of reading, writing, collaboration and creative production, and how they grapple with ethical and institutional ambiguity. In doing so, it complements and complicates the dominant UTAUT and UTAUT2 based narratives, showing that adoption is not only a function of perceived usefulness and ease, but also of infrastructural realities, disciplinary norms, emotional responses and unresolved questions about what counts as legitimate intellectual labour in the age of generative AI.

4.4.2 Theoretical Discussions

The findings of this study can be meaningfully interpreted through the lens of the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT). UTAUT proposes that technology adoption is shaped by four core determinants: performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence and facilitating conditions, which influence behavioural intention and use behaviour (Venkatesh et al., 2003; Venkatesh et al., 2016). Studies applying UTAUT to educational technologies have repeatedly shown that performance expectancy and effort expectancy are the strongest predictors of students' intentions to use new systems, with social influence and facilitating conditions exerting more context dependent effects. The present study both confirms and extends these propositions in the specific context of generative AI adoption among media and communication students in Ghana.

Performance expectancy is clearly visible across the themes of Academic Support, Academic Performance Enhancement, Writing Quality and Confidence, and Creative Exploration. Students perceived ChatGPT as a tool that improved their understanding of lecture content, helped to structure assignments, supported exam preparation and enhanced the clarity and coherence of their writing. They repeatedly framed ChatGPT as a “silent tutor” that checked whether they were “on the right path” and provided explanations that extended classroom teaching. This reflects the core UTAUT claim that perceived performance gains drive adoption and aligns with Budhathoki et al.’s (2024) finding that performance expectancy is a significant predictor of ChatGPT adoption intention among students in the UK and Nepal. However, the Ghanaian students’ accounts move beyond intention to reveal concrete patterns of use in tasks such as idea generation, drafting, editing, brainstorming interview questions and experimenting with styles. This suggests that performance expectancy in the context of generative AI is multi dimensional, encompassing not only grades and efficiency but also confidence in academic expression and perceived creativity.

Effort expectancy is also strongly reflected in the data, particularly in the themes of Efficiency and Convenience, Time Management and Workload Pressure, and Curiosity and Digital Competence Building. Participants valued ChatGPT because it reduced the time spent searching for information, planning essays and revising drafts, which enabled them to manage heavy coursework alongside commuting, part time work and family responsibilities. They highlighted the ease of interacting with the tool through natural language, which reduced the technical barrier often associated with specialised software. These accounts echo UTAUT’s assumption that technologies perceived as easy to use are more likely to be adopted, especially in voluntary or semi voluntary settings. At the same time, students pointed to the challenge of limited prompting skills and uncertainty about how to evaluate AI generated responses.

Learning to frame effective prompts and critically interrogate answers introduced a different kind of effort, which is not well captured by conventional measures of perceived ease of use. This suggests that for generative AI, effort expectancy should be understood in relation to both interface simplicity and the cognitive work of critical engagement.

Social influence operates in complex ways in this study. On the one hand, motivations related to Curiosity and Digital Competence Building and Peer Influence and Normative Expectations show that students are strongly shaped by perceptions that generative AI is integral to the future of journalism, public relations and communication practice. Friends introduce one another to ChatGPT, share prompts and treat AI use as normal, even expected, within study groups. This pattern reinforces UTAUT's proposition that the expectations of important others drive adoption, and resonates with evidence from quantitative studies where social influence significantly predicts intention to use ChatGPT and other AI tools. On the other hand, lecturers often discourage AI use or frame it as academically suspect, while institutional policies remain unclear. Students therefore experience conflicting social signals, with peers encouraging experimentation and some staff warning about moral and academic risks. This tension produces ambivalence and emotional discomfort, including guilt and anxiety, especially for high stakes assessments. The findings here converge with Budhathoki et al.'s (2024) argument that anxiety is an important extension of UTAUT in generative AI contexts, yet they show that such anxiety is not only individual but also socially produced through contradictory expectations.

Facilitating conditions are evident both in material and institutional forms. Infrastructural and Access Constraints, such as limited or unstable internet connectivity, high data costs and lack of personal laptops, restrict consistent use of ChatGPT and force students to combine AI with

more traditional resources. These constraints are typical of many African higher education settings and reinforce Yakubu and Dasuki's (2019) finding that facilitating conditions and infrastructural limitations significantly shape e learning adoption in Nigeria.

Beyond infrastructure, the absence of clear university guidelines on acceptable AI use, and variability in how individual lecturers respond to AI supported work, constitute institutional facilitating conditions that are weak and ambiguous rather than enabling. The study's findings echo Salha et al. (2025), who report low awareness of AI in education policies and emphasise that policy frameworks for AI are still emerging and fragmented. In the Ghanaian case, this policy vacuum leaves students in what they describe as a "grey area" between innovation and misconduct, which reduces their confidence in using AI openly and consistently.

The challenges identified in the study also point to areas where UTAUT requires adaptation for generative AI. Concerns about Accuracy and Reliability of Information, Contextual and Local Relevance Gaps, and Stylistic Mismatch and Detection Anxiety indicate that students' adoption decisions are shaped by epistemic trust and perceived risk of misalignment with course expectations. While UTAUT acknowledges the role of system quality indirectly through facilitating conditions, it does not explicitly theorise how users negotiate systems that can fabricate references, present plausible but false claims or default to global North contexts. Similarly, Ethical and Institutional Concerns, Tension with Critical Thinking and Learning, and Emotional Discomfort and Guilt show that academic integrity and self perception as a "good student" play a central role in decisions about whether, when and how to use AI. These dimensions are only partially captured by existing UTAUT constructs and suggest that for

generative AI, perceived integrity risk and emotional responses may act as additional mediators between the core determinants and actual use.

Taken together, the findings confirm UTAUT's core insight that performance expectancy and effort expectancy are powerful drivers of technology adoption, and that social influence and facilitating conditions shape these processes in context specific ways. They also demonstrate the value of applying UTAUT qualitatively. Rather than treating constructs as fixed variables, this study shows how Ghanaian media and communication students interpret performance, effort, social expectations and support structures in their everyday practices with ChatGPT. The analysis suggests that enriching UTAUT with constructs such as anxiety, epistemic trust, integrity risk and local relevance, and situating it within concrete policy and infrastructural environments, can improve its explanatory power for generative AI in higher education. For practice, the discussion indicates that interventions which strengthen institutional guidelines, build students' critical prompting and evaluation skills, improve infrastructure and clarify pedagogical expectations are likely to reinforce positive performance and effort expectancies while reducing ethical ambiguity. In that sense, the study both affirms UTAUT as a useful framework and points to the need for its careful contextualisation in African and discipline-specific settings.

4.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter reported how Ghanaian media and communication students adopt ChatGPT for academic support, efficiency, and creativity, motivated by performance improvement and digital competence building. It also highlighted challenges of accuracy, ethics, and institutional

uncertainty. The findings were situated within the UTAUT framework and relevant empirical literature.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

5.0 Chapter Introduction

This chapter concludes the study by summarising key findings, drawing conclusions, and reflecting on their implications for media and communication education in Ghana. It highlights the opportunities and challenges of adopting generative AI tools such as ChatGPT and offers recommendations for policy, pedagogy, and future research in higher education.

5.1 Summary of Findings

The study revealed that undergraduate media and communication students in Ghana adopt ChatGPT in diverse and integrated ways. Students primarily use the tool for academic support, including clarifying difficult concepts, structuring assignments and revising written work, and for efficiency and convenience in managing heavy workloads and tight deadlines. ChatGPT also supports creative exploration, as students use it to brainstorm ideas, simulate interview questions and experiment with different writing styles. In addition, it is employed to improve writing quality and confidence, particularly in refining language and coherence, and is often incorporated into collaborative and group tasks as a shared starting point for discussion and drafting. However, these practices are shaped by infrastructural constraints such as unreliable internet and limited access to devices, and by students' own efforts to negotiate ethical and responsible use.

Students' motivations for using generative AI are driven by the desire to enhance academic performance, manage time and workload, and compensate for perceived gaps in teaching and learning resources. They are also motivated by curiosity and the wish to build digital competence for future careers, to strengthen their English expression, and to keep pace with peer norms around AI use.

At the same time, students face significant challenges. They are concerned about the accuracy and reliability of AI generated information, contextual and local relevance gaps, and their limited skills in prompting and evaluation. Ethical and institutional uncertainties, stylistic mismatch and fear of detection, conflicting expectations from lecturers and peers, and feelings of guilt and anxiety further temper adoption. Overall, students perceive ChatGPT as a valuable but contested academic resource, whose benefits are mediated by infrastructural realities, institutional ambiguity and ongoing efforts to protect critical thinking and academic integrity

5.2 Conclusions

From this study, I conclude that the adoption of generative AI, particularly ChatGPT, among undergraduate media and communication students in Ghana is multi-layered, intentional and reflective. Students draw on ChatGPT as an academic support tool to clarify complex concepts, structure assignments, refine language and generate ideas, while also using it for efficiency, creative exploration and collaborative work. They simultaneously view engagement with generative AI as an investment in digital competence and employability in a communication industry that they expect to be increasingly shaped by AI. Adoption is therefore not incidental, but closely linked to concrete academic demands and future oriented professional aspirations.

At the same time, students' use of generative AI is consistently tempered by a range of concerns and constraints. Reported challenges relating to accuracy, hallucinated references, limited Ghana specific examples, infrastructural barriers, weak prompting skills and stylistic mismatches foster cautious and selective reliance rather than wholesale dependence. Ethical and institutional uncertainties, including fear of plagiarism accusations, inconsistent lecturer attitudes and a lack of clear university guidelines, further produce ambivalence, emotional discomfort and largely hidden practices. Students actively negotiate these tensions, seeking to benefit from AI while protecting their critical thinking, academic integrity and sense of self as legitimate learners.

The study shows that generative AI adoption among Ghanaian media and communication students is neither uncritical nor uniform. It reflects an ongoing negotiation of benefits and risks within specific infrastructural, institutional and disciplinary conditions. My study therefore underscores the need for guided, context sensitive integration of generative AI in higher education, including clear policies, discipline specific AI literacy, improved infrastructure and pedagogical approaches that support students to use ChatGPT as a constructive aid rather than a substitute for intellectual engagement.

5.3 Limitations

This study is limited by its focus on three case institutions, UniMAC, UPSA, and AUCB, restricting the generalisability of findings to other Ghanaian universities or disciplines beyond media and communication. The sample size of 15 participants, though adequate for qualitative inquiry, limits the breadth of perspectives captured. Additionally, reliance on focus group discussions may have influenced participants' responses through group dynamics, potentially

constraining more personal insights. Finally, the study concentrated only on students' perspectives, excluding lecturers and institutional policymakers whose views could provide a more holistic understanding of generative AI adoption in higher education contexts.

5.4 Recommendations

Future research should expand to include more universities and a broader range of participants, including faculty and administrators, to capture institutional perspectives on AI adoption. Longitudinal studies would be useful in assessing how generative AI use evolves as policies and technologies develop. Universities should consider developing clear guidelines on the ethical use of ChatGPT and other AI tools to avoid uncertainty among students. Additionally, integrating AI literacy into media and communication curricula would prepare students to use such technologies responsibly while strengthening digital competence and critical thinking skills needed for professional practice in the communication industry.

5.5 Chapter Summary

The chapter emphasised that students adopt ChatGPT for academic support, efficiency, and creativity, motivated by performance and future competence, yet constrained by ethical and institutional concerns. It concluded that responsible integration requires clear policies and guidance, while recommending further research to deepen understanding of AI adoption in education.

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APPENDIX

Coding Sheet

Axial Codes	Selective Codes
structuring assignments summarising readings clarifying difficult concepts	Academic Support
drafting outlines generating references proofreading work	Efficiency and Convenience
brainstorm project ideas experiment with writing styles	Creative Exploration
quality of assignments exam preparation quick clarifications	Academic Performance Enhancement
experiment with new technologies AI as part of the future	Curiosity and Digital Competence Building
outdated or misleading information cross-check with other sources	Accuracy and Reliability of Information
non-originality academic dishonesty	Ethical and Institutional Concerns