



## Social Media Applications and their Effect on Undergraduate Students' Learning in Higher Education

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### Abstract

*The development of social media has significantly impacted education, with institutions striving to use these tools to foster critical thinking, collaboration, and knowledge creation among students. This study investigates the effects of social media on student learning in higher education through the lived experiences of six participants using a qualitative methodology. Interviews were conducted to explore the impact of social media on academic performance, its use for learning assistance, academic goals, and perceived benefits. The findings show that social media is widely used by college students, who believe it plays a significant role in their academic growth. Social media facilitates interactions with educational content outside traditional classroom settings, peer collaboration, and access to quality educational resources. Additionally, participants emphasized that social media helps connect people globally, providing access to diverse learning opportunities and perspectives. This study suggests that incorporating social media into teaching strategies can drastically alter students' learning experiences, boosting engagement and preparing them for success in a technology-driven world.*

**Keywords:** *Social media, Higher education, Academic performance, Learning*



## **Introduction**

The advent of social media has revolutionized various aspects of contemporary society, including educational paradigms. Educational institutions have increasingly leveraged these platforms to foster critical thinking, collaboration, and knowledge dissemination among students. However, the precise effects of social media on student learning in higher education remain a subject of intense scrutiny and investigation. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Google Plus, and Flickr have become powerful instruments for collaboration and involvement in education, transcending their original social networking purposes (Pimmer et al., 2017; Farwell and Wates, 2018).

Studies reveal that students generally favor incorporating social media into their coursework, acknowledging its value for information sharing and group projects (Gonzalez et al., 2016; Li, 2016). Academics like Wankel (2013) claim that social media platforms encourage students to experiment with different ways of learning and interacting, allowing them to break away from traditional teaching methods. Furthermore, investigations by Chippie et al. (2015) and Karle (2016) show that social media facilitates multitasking, augmenting students' academic endeavors and increasing their interest in learning.

Given the growing interest in using social media for learning, it is imperative to fully comprehend how social media affects student learning in higher education. While global research provides insights into the advantages of integrating social media into education, local contexts offer unique opportunities and challenges that warrant further examination. It is essential for academic institutions, researchers, student affairs professionals, and educators to understand social media's impact on student learning to effectively leverage these tools in educational settings.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Despite the increasing body of research on social media's impact on student learning, there remains a lack of knowledge regarding its precise effects in local educational environments. Global research provides some insight into the potential advantages of social media in education, but more local studies are needed to examine its effects within specific contexts. This gap in knowledge about the best ways to use social media to improve student learning outcomes highlights the need for further investigation.

### **Significance of the study**

This research holds significant implications for various stakeholders in the educational ecosystem. The findings can inform the development of curricula, institutional policies, and



pedagogical practices that foster a supportive learning environment. Additionally, the insights gained from this study can help teachers integrate social media into their lesson plans, enhancing student engagement and academic performance.

## **Objectives of the study / Research Questions**

### **Research Objectives**

- To assess the extent of social media usage among students in higher education institutions.
- To evaluate students' perceptions of the integration of social media into educational settings.
- To identify the major challenges and opportunities associated with the use of social media in the classroom.
- To investigate the impact of social media usage on student engagement, collaboration, and academic performance.

### **Research Questions**

- To what degree do students in higher education institutions use social media?
- What are students' impressions of incorporating social media into educational environments?
- What are the biggest obstacles and opportunities presented by using social media in the classroom?
- What does effects social media use have on student participation, teamwork, and academic achievement?

## **Literature Review**

### **Theoretical Framework**

Informed by Social Cognitive Theory, this study examines the interplay between social media usage and student learning in higher education. Social Cognitive Theory posits that individuals acquire knowledge and skills through observing and imitating others within social contexts. In the context of this research, social media platforms serve as conduits for social learning experiences, enabling students to observe and model behavior, exchange information, and collaborate with peers and educators (Bandura, 1986).

Building upon this theoretical framework, the study will integrate insights from previous research to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics between social media usage and student learning outcomes. Previous studies by Junco, Heiberger, and Loken (2011) have demonstrated that social media can enhance student engagement and foster



collaborative learning, while others like Tess (2013) have highlighted the potential distractions and challenges associated with social media use in academic settings.

Moreover, the concept of academic life is situated within the context of higher education, which prioritizes the development of analytical and reasoning skills above technical or practical ability. This comprehension aligns with the educational environment, where social media is becoming increasingly integrated and influencing students' academic experiences. Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn, offer students opportunities to engage in discussions, access diverse perspectives, and participate in academic communities. These platforms provide a space for students to develop critical thinking skills, engage in reflective learning, and enhance their academic performance through collaborative and interactive learning experiences.

The study will also consider the dual nature of social media's impact on student learning. On one hand, social media can facilitate access to educational resources, peer support, and academic networks, promoting a richer learning experience. On the other hand, it can pose challenges such as distraction, information overload, and potential negative impacts on attention span and time management. By exploring these aspects, the research aims to present a balanced view of how social media influences higher education and to identify strategies for optimizing its use to enhance student learning outcomes.

According to Papacharissi (2012), social media is important because it is a self-networked space where people create and negotiate their identities through online interactions. This means that social media plays a crucial role in promoting sociality and identity recognition, which in turn shapes users' beliefs and actions. Furthermore, young people actively shape their online experiences, desiring convenience, choice, and control in their interactions with digital platforms, according to Tapscott and Williams (2013). The concept of user agency highlights how students actively use social media for learning, expressing their preferences for interaction and customization.

Additionally, Mason and Rennie (2007) stress the value of intergroup contact and shared community spaces in promoting student motivation and perseverance in the classroom. This idea shows how social media may be used to foster collaborative learning situations outside of typical classroom settings, allowing students to freely share ideas and perspectives. Additionally, Gurcan (2015) talks about how social media encourages accountability and transparency in educational institutions by allowing students to openly assess and remark in



real time on a variety of aspects of their academic environment. Cifuentes (2015) and Huang et al. (2016) highlight how information and communication technology (ICT) have revolutionized education by changing how people perceive space, time, and social interaction. This viewpoint, which illustrates how technology, education, and social dynamics are intertwined, clarifies the wider socio economic ramifications of incorporating social media into higher education.

By synthesizing these perspectives, the study aims to elucidate the characteristics through which social media usage influences student learning processes and academic achievement, thereby contributing to a nuanced understanding of the evolving role of technology in education.

### **Academic Life and Social Media**

Social media refers to a broad range of internet platforms that enable user-to-user contact, communication, and content exchange (Selwyn, 2019). These platforms which include social bookmarking, wikis, weblogs, and social networking sites are essential for encouraging participation in the community and cooperative information sharing. Social media is crucial for promoting higher education activities in the academic setting and for highlighting the critical thinking and analytical abilities needed for both professional and academic success.

### **Social Media Use in Education and Daily Life**

As a primary channel for social interaction and identity development, social media has ingrained itself profoundly into both everyday life and academic experiences (Papacharissi, 2012). People now multitask by juggling multiple digital tasks and responsibilities at once due to the widespread use of social media (Subrahmanyam & Šmahel, 2011). In addition, Tapscott and Williams (2013) emphasise how youth actively shape their digital environments, highlighting the necessity for educational institutions to change with the times in order to effectively interact with students (Selwyn, 2012).

### **Improving Collaboration and Student Engagement**

Social media platforms provide students with unparalleled chances for participation and cooperation, surpassing the confines of traditional classroom settings (Mason & Rennie, 2007). These platforms give students a place to openly voice their thoughts, engage in real-time communication with peers and teachers, and discuss academic subjects (Gurcan, 2015). Furthermore, social media makes it easier for people to share and retrieve information,



collaborate on projects, and access educational materials from any location with internet connection (Dewing, 2010).

### **Institutional Views on the Integration of Social Media**

Institutional views towards social media integration in education differ, despite the potential benefits of this tool. Certain academic institutions demonstrate hesitancy to integrate social media into their organizational operations, preferring to use traditional methods of communication such as email (Tur et al., 2017). Nonetheless, research indicates that social media can promote cooperation and communication in learning environments, which will improve the sharing of knowledge and the organization of tasks (Wates, 2018).

### **Technology's Effect on Education**

A new era of digital learning has been ushered in by technological breakthroughs, notably social media, which have revolutionized several elements of education (Harper, 2010). These developments have altered how people view time and place, enabling previously unheard-of levels of international communication and knowledge sharing (Huang et al., 2016).

### **Possibilities for Using ICT to Empower Students**

ICT provides students with a wealth of options to broaden their horizons intellectually and improve their educational experiences (Cifuentes, 2015). Students can engage with peers and specialists virtually and access a multitude of material by utilising ICT tools, which enhances their educational experiences and promotes personal development. The use of ICT and social media into education has significant effects on student empowerment, engagement, and teamwork. Although there are issues with institutional attitudes and rules, there are a lot of potential advantages to using social media in education. Students will have access to learning and development opportunities never before possible. Educational institutions must change as technology advances in order to give students the tools and resources they need to succeed in the digital age.

### **Research Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative approach to gain a deep understanding of the phenomena rather than a surface description of a large sample of the population. A qualitative technique was adopted to explore the topic thoroughly. Phenomenology was chosen as the qualitative research method, emphasizing subjective interpretations and meanings ascribed to experiences.



The study recognizes that there are various subjective realities and that people create their unique interpretations of the same phenomena. Phenomenology guided the research design, focusing on participants' lived experiences and perspectives. Inductive research methodology allowed themes and patterns to emerge from the data without imposing predetermined ideas or theories. Six students from a private university in Karachi, enrolled in the MS (ELM) program within the Education department, volunteered for this study. They were selected through purposive sampling. Face-to-face interviews were conducted to minimize potential human bias, with each interview lasting approximately 10 to 15 minutes and conducted in English. The researcher took notes and audio recorded the interviews with participants' consent to ensure accuracy and ease of transcription.

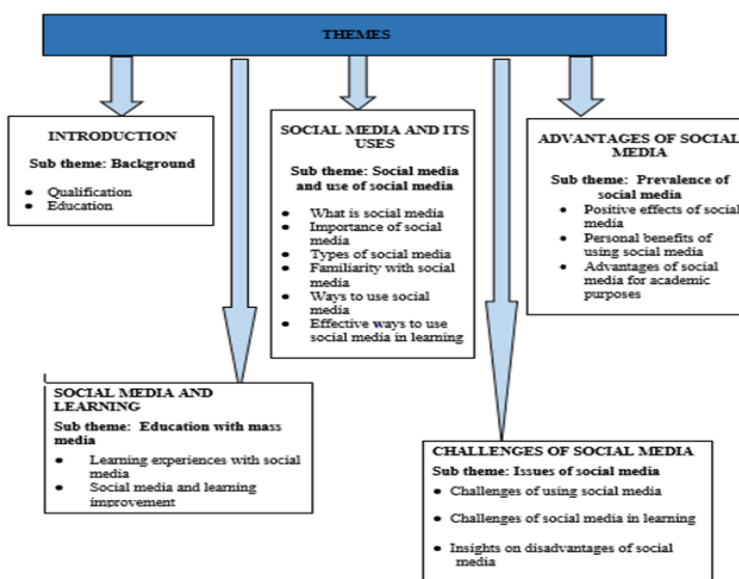
Interview questions covered several topics: (a) how students use social media, (b) the extent to which social media has supported and enhanced their learning, (c) their familiarity with social media, (d) the social media platforms they predominantly use for academic purposes, (e) whether they believe social media can enhance their learning, (f) the impact of social media on their academic life, and (g) the challenges associated with using social media.

## Discussion and Analysis

### Data Analysis

Five themes emerged from participant narratives: (a) Introduction, (b) Social media and its uses, (c) Advantages of social media, (d) Challenges of social media, and (e) Social media and learning.

Figure 1





## **Discussion and conclusion**

### **Theme 1: Introduction**

The respondents' background information provides insightful information about their professional responsibilities, educational backgrounds, and areas of expertise in the subject of education. The study benefits from the varied viewpoints and varied backgrounds and experiences that the respondents, who are educators, academics, and teachers, bring to the table.

The educational backgrounds of the interviewees demonstrate their dedication to professional development and academic success in the field of education. Two respondents have extra qualifications in the form of B.Ed and M.Ed degrees, which is significant even though all respondents are pursuing or have finished an MPhil in Education. The participants' wide range of experience is highlighted by their diverse educational backgrounds, which may enhance the study's depth of conversations and analysis.

The respondents' educational backgrounds reveal their commitment to both professional growth and academic achievement in the field of education. Though all respondents are pursuing or have completed an MPhil in Education, two respondents have additional qualifications in the form of B.Ed and M.Ed degrees.

This is significant. The participants' varied educational backgrounds show their vast variety of expertise, which could improve the study's in-depth discussions and analysis. The amalgamation of academic endeavors with hands-on expertise in the educational domain bolsters the validity and pertinence of the research outcomes. Active educators, researchers, and educational leaders among the respondents offer direct knowledge of the opportunities and difficulties involved in incorporating social media into educational environments. Due to their wide range of experiences and backgrounds, they are in a unique position to influence conversations on how social media affects student engagement and learning.

Overall, the respondents' background data highlights the interdisciplinary aspect of the study, which uses knowledge from practitioners, academics, and educators to guide conversations on social media's place in the classroom. In order to provide a more nuanced view of the complex processes at play within modern educational contexts, the study will take into account the opinions of persons with varied degrees and professional jobs.





## Theme 2: Social media and its Uses

The study participants' narratives frequently touched on the issue of social media and its usage, representing their views, experiences, and opinions with various social media platforms. This conversation explores the main takeaways from the participants' answers, emphasizing the role that social media plays in communication, information exchange, and improving learning.

*Views regarding social media:* All of the sample's participants indicated a general awareness of social media as platforms that encourage engagement, sharing of material, and communication. The social media platforms Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest, and Snapchat were all included in their definitions. This diversity highlights how social media is a ubiquitous force in modern society, acting as essential instruments for establishing virtual communities and bringing people together across geographic distances.

The participants recognized social media as important for more than just communication; they saw it as a dynamic instrument for knowledge sharing and information distribution. They underlined how it helps connect disparate people with different viewpoints and overcome geographical constraints. Social media was also seen as a collaborative learning environment where people could exchange ideas, pick up knowledge from one another, and deepen their understanding by considering different points of view.

The respondents' varied levels of acquaintance with various social media sites are indicative of the variety of online activities they engage in. Some individuals showed a more restricted range of usage, whilst others were familiar with a wide variety of social media programs. The most often mentioned platforms were Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, YouTube, Instagram, and Snapchat, suggesting that these platforms are widely used by the survey participants.

The respondents' differing degrees of familiarity with different social media platforms are a good indicator of the range of online activities they partake in. While some participants had a more limited range of usage, others demonstrated familiarity with a broad number of social media platforms. Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, YouTube, Instagram, and Snapchat were the platforms that were most frequently named, indicating that poll respondents use these sites frequently.



The results highlight how social media is revolutionizing education and how it has the power to upend established learning paradigms. Teachers may use social media platforms to build collaborative learning experiences, dynamic learning settings, and engaged students. Educational institutions can enable students to take an active role in their education by integrating social media into their instructional methods. This allows students to leverage the potential of digital connectedness to expand their intellectual horizons.

The conversations surrounding social media and its applications offer insightful information on the complex role that social media plays in modern society. Educators and policymakers may leverage social media's potential to promote innovation and propel educational transformation by acknowledging its importance as a platform for communication, collaboration, and learning enhancement. Social media integration in educational settings offers fascinating potential to reimagine learning and equip students to flourish in an increasingly connected world as technology advances.

### **Theme 3: Advantages of Social Media**

The theme of "Advantages of Social Media" was evident in the participant narratives, emphasizing the many advantages of using social media platforms in educational settings. The sub-theme on social media's predominance investigated participants' understanding of the benefits of social media, how it may be utilized for education, and their positive experiences with using social media apps. The panelists discussed a number of benefits of social media in education, highlighting how it promotes information sharing, collaborative learning, and knowledge sharing. Respondents emphasized how social media platforms make it simple for students to interact with teachers and peers, facilitating the smooth interchange of ideas and resources. This is consistent with other study (Junco et al., 2015) that shows how social media can help build a feeling of community and support peer-to-peer learning.

Participants also emphasized social media platforms' worldwide reach and their capacity to provide users with access to a variety of global resources and viewpoints. The use of social media for academic reasons was seen as especially advantageous, as participants acknowledged that it might enhance traditional classroom instruction and provide chances for learning outside of formal educational settings. This is consistent with other research' results that social media improves student involvement and academic achievement (Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010).



Participants also emphasized how social media platforms may be used to assist a variety of learning activities, such as academic conversations, group projects, and information retrieval. It was observed that the incorporation of multimedia content—like YouTube videos and online tutorials—was very helpful for improving comprehension and reiterating lessons learned in the classroom. This emphasizes how crucial it is to use multimedia tools to accommodate a range of learning preferences and styles (Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012).

But it's important to be aware of the possible drawbacks and difficulties that come with using social media in the classroom, like worries about the accuracy of the information, privacy issues, and digital distractions. Future studies should examine methods for reducing these difficulties and optimizing social media platforms' educational advantages. All things considered, the results emphasize the diverse ways that social media can improve student learning, encourage teamwork, and increase access to educational materials. Through the strategic use of social media and the resolution of related issues, educators may establish vibrant and stimulating learning environments that equip students with the necessary skills to succeed in the digital age.

#### **Theme 4: Challenges of Social media**

The "Challenges of Social Media" theme, which was discovered through participant narratives, illuminates a number of problems that students run across when using social media for learning. These difficulties include worries about privacy, usability of the interface, security, and possible detrimental effects on learning motivation and engagement.

A number of participants emphasized security concerns as a noteworthy obstacle linked to the utilization of social media. Data breaches and concerns about the security of personal information were frequently mentioned. This is consistent with previous research showing how susceptible online platforms are to security risks, such as hacking and illegal access (Respondents 1, 2, and 5).

One significant obstacle that students faced was having to pay to access specific materials, like journals and articles. Students' capacity to properly utilize social media for academic purposes can be limited by financial restrictions that impede access to good instructional materials (Respondents 2 and 5).



Respondents also mentioned having trouble utilizing social networking services' interfaces and usability. Respondents 3 and 4 reported difficulties they had accessing and using various platforms efficiently, which may have affected their use of online learning resources.

A recurrent theme that arose was privacy concerns, as participants expressed anxiety about the protection of their personal data on social networking platforms. Students' trust and confidence in using social media for academic reasons are seriously challenged by the frequency of data breaches and the possible misuse of personal data (Respondents 1, 5, and 6).

Concerns were also expressed about social media's possible detrimental effects on students' motivation and involvement in the classroom. Some participants (Respondents 4 and 6) expressed concern that using social media excessively could distract from academic attention and cause a lack of desire towards studying. These results highlight how critical it is to address the issues surrounding the use of social media in school settings. Prioritizing efforts to improve platform security, lower financial barriers to educational resource access, and make social media interfaces easier to use should be top priorities for educational institutions. Additionally, initiatives to educate the public about privacy concerns and provide students the tools they need to protect their personal data online should be undertaken. Educators should also investigate ways to use social media to improve student motivation and engagement while encouraging appropriate usage of these tools.

The difficulties with social media use that have been noted draw attention to the subtleties and complexity involved in incorporating these platforms into learning environments. Teachers and legislators can use social media to enhance student learning experiences while reducing associated hazards by recognizing and resolving these issues. In the end, creating a welcoming and favorable atmosphere for using social media in the classroom necessitates a multidimensional strategy that places an emphasis on learning engagement, security, accessibility, usability, and privacy protection.

### **Theme 5: Social Media and Learning**

One of the study's key themes is "Social Media and Learning," which illuminates participants' views of how social media improves their educational experiences and encourages participation. A number of significant revelations about the function of social media in education are revealed by the respondents' narratives.



All of the participants agreed that social networking sites have improved their educational opportunities. Beyond the walls of traditional classroom settings, students can access educational resources, collaborate with classmates, and seek expert guidance thanks to the ease of use and accessibility provided by platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Skype. Respondent 1 emphasized the importance that Facebook plays in promoting information distribution and collaborative learning, highlighting the ways in which accessing learning materials posted by peers on the social media platform enhanced their educational experience. Respondent 4 also emphasized the significance that social media plays in facilitating group collaboration for assignments. She gave an example of how platforms such as WhatsApp help group members communicate easily and coordinate tasks. Respondent 5 concurred, noting that social media platforms provide pupils with worldwide connectivity, allowing them to interact with peers from diverse backgrounds and gain new perspectives on academic topics.

Participants also mentioned the educational opportunities that social media platforms provide, such as the availability of online courses and materials that supplement traditional classroom instruction. Respondent 2 emphasized how social media gives students the opportunity to investigate various learning vantage points and learn about a wide range of subjects through online classes and educational materials found on websites like Facebook and YouTube. This is consistent with the notion that social media gives students chances for self-directed learning and skill development, extending the reach of education beyond the walls of traditional institutions.

Particularly in the sector of education, respondent 3 highlighted the importance of social media in the creation and dissemination of instructional content. As an education specialist, the answer emphasized how social media affects learning experiences globally and how it helps teachers and students throughout the world share knowledge and distribute information. This demonstrates how social media has the power to democratize access to education and promote worldwide collaborative learning groups.

Participants also emphasized how social media is becoming more and more integrated into educational settings, with colleges using these channels to interact with students, provide information, and convey campus news. As a teacher and education specialist, respondent number six emphasized the contribution of social media to bettering student lives and enriching educational experiences in institutional settings. This is indicative of a larger trend



in which academic institutions are adjusting to the digital era by integrating social media into their operations to accommodate students' changing requirements and preferences.

In conclusion, this theme highlighted how social media has a revolutionary effect on education, allowing students to interact creatively with educational content, collaborate with classmates, and access resources. The results emphasize how social media platforms may be used to improve learning opportunities and experiences in a variety of ways. This emphasizes how important it is to include social media into educational practices in order to satisfy the needs of modern learners.

### **Findings**

The study shows that postgraduate students in a private university have high access to social media, which impacts their academic performance. Social media is beneficial for learning, as it helps teachers connect with students and integrate it into lessons, making them more engaging. It is a familiar tool for students, used frequently in daily life. Social media can be extremely useful in university settings for reaching out and engaging with students.

### **Results**

Participants expressed their views on the significance of social media, its uses in learning, challenges faced, and its impact on academic performance. The results indicate that social media is widely used by students and significantly influences their academic lives. However, it also has some negative effects on academic performance. The study found that social media is a valuable tool for engaging and informing students and staff.

## **Conclusion and Recommendation**

### **Conclusion**

The study's findings reveal how higher education students use social media and its significant influences on their academic lives. Social media provides a direct medium for students to evaluate and comment on their campus environments, institutional policies, classes, professors, administration, and fellow students in real-time. The results indicate that social media is widely used by students in higher education institutions and significantly contributes to their learning development.

### **Recommendations**

The study recommends that higher education institutions utilize semi-formal social media networks monitored by teacher assistants to ensure the credibility of exchanged information.



Faculty should consider creatively engaging students with class content through social media. Additionally, students need social media awareness to address addiction issues.

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