

The Influence of Social Media on Student Learning: Opportunities and Challenges in the Digital Age

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Abstract

This study examined how students' perceptions, experiences, and recommendations illuminate the impact of social media on students' learning. Qualitative research design was used and data was collected using open-ended questionnaires with 11 students at Universitas Tidar. Thematic analyses were used to ascertain that social media sites, such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and Reddit, were an important part of their learning practices and processes, and that the social media sites were important for student access to learning materials, online conversation, and collaboration with peers. However, students were also aware of the difficulties with social media, namely digital distraction and peer pressure for social validation. Overall, students thought social media was a positive additive to their education, despite the challenges of social media. Overall, our findings suggest that educational social media utilization needs to be intentional and deliberate and we encourage educators to use social media for content creation that students engage with, and that matches their own preferences for digital engagement and learning.

Keywords: Social media in education, Students' perception, Educational content

INTRODUCTION

Social media takes credit for being the most important feature, creating an extraordinary communication and information dispersal obsession to the extent of teacher and student relationship among others like youth worldwide in the last decade (Smith & Anderson, 2021). For example, multi-national platforms (e.g., YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok) have now become major conduits for academic engagement and knowledge sharing beyond plain social interaction (Johnson et al., 2022)

Social media is increasingly being used for and tutorial, study materials, and connection to other learners, as there is a movement towards a more interactive and student centered, more experiential way of learning (Lee & Kim, 2023). This digital mixing opens up new opportunities for open innovations towards personalized learning in ways that move away from traditional classroom practices and towards flexible self-paced and new rich media learning environments (Garcia & Martinez, 2020).

Additionally to the educational advantages, the widespread reach of social media also presents some serious challenges. For example, research has shown that social media may increase motivation and engagement, but it also brings risks of distraction, decreased attention span, and time management issues (O'Brien & Tran, 2021). The ceaseless mayhem of notifications and power of the on-demand nature of entertainment technology can disrupt students' study routines and productivity when doing academic work (Kumar & Singh, 2022). Additionally, with the quality, credibility, and reliability of what is offered in social space like social media, we should question the notion of social media as a learning environment (Nguyen & Lee, 2021).

The necessity to comprehend both the positive and negative effects of social media on student learning has been heightened by the global transition to online and blended learning models propelled by the COVID-19 pandemic (Patel & Shah, 2023). As educational institutions continue to introduce digital tools into pedagogical and administrative practices, stakeholders need to create and implement evidence-based approaches that maximize the benefits of social media as a learning scaffold while minimizing its drawbacks. Although the interest in this area of study has been growing, there is now a shortage of existing qualitative studies that document and examine student lived experiences and their perceptions of social

media in their academic lives.

This study will investigate the impact of social media on student learning in the digital age, considering both the opportunities it arises and the challenges it poses. Through qualitative analysis of students' views, this research will provide a more balanced understanding of social media in education, and allow for the development of better policies and practices that strengthen students' digital learning opportunities.

METHODS

A qualitative research design was used in this study to examine what effect social media is having on students in a digital context regarding learning. The qualitative design was chosen to investigate the perceptions, views and experiences of students regarding the benefits and challenges of social media in an academic context. This study does not represent numbers, but subjectively understand a thematic analysis as found in open-ended questionnaires.

The targeted population for the study consisted of 10-15 students from Universitas Tidar who frequently used social media when learning or in academic contexts. Participants were chosen through purposive sampling to guarantee that they had particular experiences and insights that were meaningful to the aims of the study.

A qualitative questionnaire which contained open-ended questions was utilized as the main data collection tool. The questionnaire was administered through Google Forms and crafted to ensure participants could freely communicate their opinions without having to follow set response options, although the questions were:

1. Which social media platforms you use frequently for academic purposes?
2. How do you use social media to support your learning?
3. What are the biggest challenges when using social media while studying?
4. Which social media platforms do you find most useful for educational purposes?
5. From 1-5, how do you think the social media has impact for your learning experience?

6. What suggestions would you give to students and teachers about the use of social media for educational purposes?

Participants were invited to provide rich responses in as much detail as they wished, and to seek clarification if needed at a later date via email. With respect to the open-ended questionnaire, participants' responses were analyzed using thematic analysis, similar to Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis allowed for the foreseen themes of “academic motivation,” “digital distraction,” “peer collaboration,” and “self-directed learning” to emerge.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The sample included 11 students with different academic background. They responded in a non-structured way to an online questionnaire as follows:

1. *Frequently Used Social Media Platforms*

The most frequently used platforms were as reported by participants. The students used various social media for academic purposes:

- a. *YouTube*
- b. *Instagram*
- c. *TikTok*
- d. *Twitter*
- e. *LinkedIn*
- f. *Reddit*

These tools have been selected because they are widely available, offer critically based educational materials, and have user-friendly components.

2. *Social Media as a Learning Support Tool*

Students provided multiple examples of how social media can enhance their academic work:

- a. *Access to educational videos and tutorials.*
- b. *Engagement in academic conversations.*
- c. *Uploading and sharing academic work*
- d. *Discovering theoretical explanations or current educational happenings.*

Sample responses:

“I use social media to access educational content and follow academic channels.”

“Discussion and finding information.”

3. Challenges Faced While Using Social Media

The biggest barrier described by students was distraction. The accessibility of entertainment distracts from student work. Other barriers included:

- a. *Difficulty focusing*
- b. *Pressure to receive likes or validation when sharing academic content*

Sample responses:

“The biggest challenge is staying focused, as social media can be very distracting.”

“Gaining likes, because sometimes my grade depends on it.”

4. Most Useful Platforms for Education

When asked to state which platforms were most helpful for education, participants provided the following answers:

- a. *YouTube – YouTube - consistently noted for educational videos*
- b. *Instagram and TikTok – for following content creators that post educational material*
- c. *Reddit – for discussions about theoretical content*
- d. *X/Twitter – for news and updates*

5. Impact on Learning Experience

Table 1. Name of the table

No.	Interpretation	Frequency
1.	Very Positive	4
2.	Positive	4
3.	Neutral	3

The responses indicate that most students perceive social media as having a positive influence on their learning.

6. Suggestions from Participants

These suggestions emphasize purposeful use and educational content creation as a way to maximize the positive power of social media in a learning situation. The respondents made the following suggestions:

- a. *Use social media in a purposeful manner by following relevant educational pages and refraining from content that wastes time.*
- b. *Maintain a balance between using social media for learning versus entertainment.*

- c. *Encourage teachers to create more engaging educational content for platforms like Instagram and TikTok.*

Sample responses:

"Use it as a supplementary or finding discussion material."

"Create interesting content."

"Use social media wisely by following educational accounts."

Discussion

The results demonstrate how social media functions as an essential part of students' academic progress in multiple ways. Educational content represents the primary function of student engagement with YouTube alongside their recreational use of this platform. The audiovisual elements of these platforms create an effective approach for students who learn through multiple sensory channels especially when they study complex subject matter that text-based methods are unable to explain.

Thus, there are some drawbacks to the use of social media. The struggle with distraction was echoed by almost all participants. The blend of academic and non-academic content is so smooth that it can easily lead to distraction. In addition, the quest for 'likes' and visibility can at times lead to stress - somewhat indicating that the social mechanisms of these platforms may not always factor into educational aims.

Despite these multiple challenges in their learning, the overwhelming perception of students is that social media has a positive impact on their learning. Students stated that they learned a lot about the impact of social media from the assignment, evidenced by their high ratings and thorough description of how social media has become part of their studies. The dual use of media—consuming and creating educational content—demonstrates that students are not passive consumers but rather active participants in communicating their own learning environments.

Students' recommendations accentuate the intentional and strategic potential of social media. Students also encourage educators to meet them where they are and design interesting and concise educational content that fits the platforms they are using everywhere.

Lastly, the students' comments reveal the importance of self-practice and critical use,

and the proactive involvement of educators in situating and using these platforms. Teachers can address the gap by creating educational content that is relevant to and consumable through platforms, is useful, while capturing interest.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of social media on student learning by looking at students' perceptions, experiences, and recommendations. The findings show that social media is a significant dual presence in the academic setting that offers a very significant academic support, but also significant distractions. Students often use social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok as sources of educational content, to debate ideas, or as general supplements to classroom learning. Students' access to dynamic, self-driven, and visual content on social media offers opportunities to meet diverse learning styles.

Additionally, the findings showed some challenges, including the distracting propensity of social media and students' need for social validation, which can impact students' focus and mental health. Non-academic content is always available and encourages multitasking, which can negatively affect students' study habits and focus. These issues suggest that while social media has a clear capacity as an educational tool, it is a tool that requires conscious and careful use.

While there were many overarching challenges, the students rated social media's contribution to their learning to be predominantly positive, as most participants considered their education with social media to be a positive experience. They suggested taking educated approaches to social media use, carefully curating content relevant to education and encouraging teachers to leverage contemporary platforms in which to convey instruction effectively.

To sum up, social media has potential as an adjunct instructional tool in the digital world, however, social-media effectiveness relies on intentional use, digital literacy skill/content, and institutional support. Relatively speaking, educational strategies for educational institutions should build on these findings and implement ongoing guidelines for developing the use of social media in teaching while promoting student self-regulation and awareness of social media's double-edged sword.

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