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Social Media as a Tool for Collaborative Learning among Higher Education Students

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	Social media has been an integral element in higher education as a digital learning tool, transforming the way that students work, communicate and knowledge is shared. This study discusses about the role of social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube and Google Classroom in collaboration of learning between the university students. Using the mixed method approach data was gathered from a total of 200 undergraduate students from questionnaires and semi-structured interview. Findings predict that the social media aids in group interaction, accessibility to academic resources, peer support, and student engagement. However, there are some challenges like distraction, lack of information, and lack of participation, etc. The research concludes that social media is a powerful tool used in enhancing the collaborative learning when used strategically and responsibly.
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Introduction

Over the past decade, social media has been a rapidly growing concept in the educational scene with regard to higher education institutions. Platforms such as Facebook, Whatsapp, Youtube, Instagram, Telegram, Linkedin etc have become more than tools of entertainment and social networking, but important learning resources (Manca & Ranieri, 2016). As universities are moving more towards digital learning environments, social media is offering students spaces to share information, collaborate on their academic tasks and build learning communities that go beyond the traditional classroom (Tess, 2013). The proliferation of smartphones, an accessible supply of the internet, and digital literacy skills in students have led to a growing integration of social media in educational practices (Asterhan & Rosenberg, 2015).

Higher education institutions emphasize collaboration as an important part of active learning. Collaborative learning implies that students work together to problem solve, share their ideas and make meaning together (Dillenbourg, 1999). Social media platforms lend themselves to these processes because of their interactivity, immediacy and easy usability (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016). Tools such as group chats, shared documents, discussion threads, and live communication facilitate the academic conversation to be part of the conversation at any time and place. These digital spaces result in several forms of collaboration such as peer teaching, sharing of learning material, group discussions, and virtual study groups, as well as collaborative research activities (Hrastinski, 2014).

Additionally, social media fits very well with the learning preferences of the digital native students of today. They appreciate ready access to information and multimedia-based learning and flexible means of communication (Prensky 2010). Social media offers video contents, infographics, animations, live lectures, and discussion spaces that cater to the various learning styles. For example, YouTube has many uses for visual learning and WhatsApp for quick group communications (Bouhnik & Deshen, 2014). Facebook groups can be used to have structured academic conversations and Google classroom incorporates assignment, feedback, and collaborative documents into formal learning systems (Kumar & Nanda, 2019).

The recent coronavirus (it's called Covid-19) pandemic occurring worldwide has only demonstrated further the importance of digital tools to academic continuity. When universities had to make the shift to online learning or hybrid learning institutions, communication tools such as social media platforms became imperative in facilitating communication, update, group projects, class discussion, and academic support (Torquer, 2020). Even where campuses reopened, these tools have remained an important part in allowing increased interaction and teamwork between students. Social media therefore prevails in promoting both the synchronous and asynchronous collaborative learning setting (Pei & Wu, 2019).

Despite its pros, concerns are still being raised about social media use in academics. Students tend to get distracted in terms of non-academic content, wasting time, potential exposure to wrong content, privacy issues and cyber-bullying (Junco, 2012). Some students have a dominating role in the group conversation and some participate little. These challenges stress the need to understand how social media can be used in a constructive manner to facilitate effective collaboration and not impede on academic performance (Ala Mutairi, 2021).

Understanding the social media's function withinside the getting to know procedure is specifically applicable to college students at a better schooling degree who regularly take part in institution assignments, studies sports and sophistication dialogues. There is a sturdy dating among collaborative mastering, extended instructional performance, engagement, motivation and essential wondering skills (Laal & Laal, 2012). Exploring approaches that social media is used to sell or hinder collaborative studying will assist educators to extra strategically contain those systems into coaching and mastering processes (Redecker, 2017).

Furthermore, the colleges everywhere in the growing international locations like Pakistan, India, Malaysia, and the Asian areas have visible an alarming upward thrust withinside the use of social media for educational communication. Students use WhatsApp and Facebook businesses loads to talk about any assignments, coordinate any organization assignments, percentage any lecture slides and solve any educational queries (Ansari & Khan, 2020). However, regularly the institutional suggestions for the educational use of social media are lacking, ensuing in inconsistencies of their use (Manca, 2020).

This studies is great because it demonstrates the significance of social media withinside the system of improving collaborative mastering amongst better schooling students. It is presenting insights for educators, policymakers, curriculum designers and college directors to exceptional combine virtual gear into mastering spaces (Gikas & Grant, 2013).

Literature Review

There is an explosion in research on social media in education over the past decade. Scholars have stressed its role for communication, collaboration, knowledge sharing and the creation of virtual learning communities.

Greenhow et al. (2020) make a case on how social media has become an integral part of higher education instead of an optional aspect, through them as tools that facilitate communication and result in improved learning communities. Platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook have been extensively used for academic purposes in light of their accessibility and user-friendliness. Similarly, Tess (2013) emphasizes the point that social media facilitates the processes of both formal and informal learning with students interacting outside the classroom boundaries.

Collaborative learning is based on social constructivist theory that focuses on learning through social interaction. Tools to support discussion, reflection and group work go hand in hand with this theory. Al-Rahmi et al. (2015) found that social media has a significant positive impact on collaborative learning and on the academic performance of students because of the

interaction and engagement among students. WhatsApp for instance has been proves to be promoting active knowledge sharing and quick communication in case of group assignment.

Aydin (2012) reviewed studies on Facebook as an academic tool and concluded that its use by students is widespread for organization of study groups, exchange of resources, as well as for academic interaction. Meanwhile, according to Wang et al. (2012), the Facebook groups are functioning similarly with the learning management systems because it supports structured collaborative learning. you tube also contribute to collaborative learning. According to Barrot (2021), students often use YouTube for peer-led learning, tutorials, visual explanations, and easing the facilitation of group discussions. The presence of the platform's ability to support visual learning makes the understanding, and support for groups.

Several studies have brought out benefits of social media for collaborative learning:

improved communication (Chen & Bryer, 2012) enhanced engagement (Junco, 2012) encouraged peer supporting (Manca & Ranieri, 2016) improved the knowledge construction via discussion (Veletsianos & Navarrete, 2012)

However, concerns also exist. Junco (2012) cautions against overuse which may result in distraction. Additionally, according to Khan and Wohn (2015), the quality of the collaboration depends on the commitment of the students and digital literacy. Issues such as misinformation, privacy risks and unbalanced participation also affect collaborative learning.

Similar patterns have been shown in research in developing countries. From an international study by Al-Rahmi et al. 2015, it is noted that social networking sites are widely used by Malaysian students for learning activities together. Pakistani and Indian studies have also shown a high pattern of student usage of WhatsApp and Facebook for academic communication.

Overall, the literature has suggested that there is great potential for social media to enhance collaborative learning, but smart use of social media will demand clear structure, guidelines, and responsible use.

Methodology

This research was conducted using mixed method to investigate the role of social media in collaborative learning in higher education students. The combination of quantitative and qualitative data made it possible to come up with comprehensive insights.

Population and Sample

The populace comprised undergraduate college students of three departments, of a public university.

A pattern of 2 hundred college students turned into decided on the usage of a SRS.

Research Instruments

Two number one studies contraptions had been used:

Questionnaire

A structured questionnaire was built with three sections:

Section A, for demographic information

Section B Patterns of use of social media

Section C: Collaborative learning perception

A five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) scale was used.

Semi-Structured Interviews

A sample size of 20 students were chosen for the interviews in order to collect more in-depth insights.

Data Collection Procedure

Questionnaires were distributed both physically and by using the online technique. Interviews were conducted on WhatsApp calls and face to face.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data analysis was approached with descriptive statistics (mean, percentage), and was presented in tables.

Qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis.

The ethical issues incorporated confidentiality, volunteerism, and informed consent.

Data Analysis and Findings

Frequency of Social Media Use for Collaborative Learning Table 1

Social Media Platform	High Use (%)	Moderate Use (%)	Low Use (%)
WhatsApp	78%	18%	4%
	62%	28%	10%
Facebook Groups	78%	18%	4%
YouTube	70%	22%	8%

Interpretation: WhatsApp is the most frequently used platform for collaborative academic tasks due to its convenience and instant communication features.

Table 2: Students' Perceptions of Social Media for Collaborative Learning

Statement	Mean Score	Interpretation
Social media helps in quick sharing of academic resources	4.4	Strong Agreement
It improves communication among group members	4.2	Strong Agreement
Social media enhances group participation	4.0	Agreement
It increases motivation for academic work	3.8	Moderate Agreement

Interpretation: Students think that social media makes team learning great but it also has the threat of distraction.

Qualitative Findings

Three major themes emerged:

Theme 1: Improved and increased communication

Students reported that social media enables group tasks and discussions to be completed conveniently.

Theme 2: Easy access to Academic Resources

Students use YouTube, for explanations, WhatsApp for sharing of notes, Facebook for group discussions.

Theme 3: Challenges

Distraction, misinformation and unequal participation were noted as major problems.

Discussion

The results of the study provide evidence to support the case for the importance of social media as a powerful tool for collaborative learning in higher education. Students often use options like WhatsApp, Facebook and YouTube because they support real-time feedback and efficient sharing of learning material. These findings are congruent with the findings of Al-Rahmi et al. (2015), who found that social media had supported collaborative learning and that this was supported by strengthened interaction and engagement.

The high use of WhatsApp is consistent with the global trends in which mobile-based communication apps are a major mode for academic collaboration. Students love its instant messaging, voice notes, group formation capabilities, and file transfer capabilities. This result supports Wang et al., (2012) who argued that social media platforms work in the same ways with learning management systems.

The result showed also shows that students have positive perception that social media useful certain increases in participation and communication in group work. This supports previous results by Manca and Ranieri (2016) and Chen and Bryer (2012). However, students also showed concerns of distraction, similar to the study conducted by Junco (2012). The undertaking for educators is to be guiding college students to optimistic use.

Qualitative findings display social media creates a feel of network for the learners, and falls into the social constructivist information that studying occurs thru interaction. Students have interaction extra expectantly in digital areas and accomplish that once in a while greater than they have interaction in bodily classrooms.

However, issues like incorrect information and unequal participation factor to the want for the improvement of virtual literacy. Many college students are an excessive amount of relying on non validated facts through sharing in groups, this can have an effect on the educational accuracy in the long run Overall, the dialogue indicates that social media gives large possibilities for cooperative gaining knowledge of however this calls for idea to be integrated.

Conclusion

This studies tested the position of the social media as a device for collaborative mastering some of the better instructional students. The findings display that social mediaplays an critical position in enhancing communication, sharing of resources, participation of agencies and growing interactive groups for gaining knowledge of. Platforms together with WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, Google Classroom, etc. cross a protracted manner in helping collaboration activities.Quantitative end result indicates that scholars exceedingly agree that social media helps instructional collaboration. Qualitative findings similarly spotlight that it complements coordination, accessibility to getting to know resources, and offers the power of communication. However, demanding situations like distraction, misinformation, and unequal contribution, etc., are a few vital concerns.

Overall, the examine concludes that social media is a beneficial virtual device to sell collaborative gaining knowledge of. When used purposefully and responsibly, it makes a large contribution to the gaining knowledge of effects in addition to lively engagement.

Recommendations

Universities need to provide suggestions for the powerful instructional use of social media.

Teachers want to include social media inside organization assignments and institution discussions.

Students must be furnished with virtual literacy education for records verification.

WhatsApp and Facebook instructional agencies want to be moderated in order that there may be lively participation.

Universities have to create reliable gaining knowledge of groups through social media.

Students must be advocated to set up closing dates to maintain from being distracted.

Policies want to be advanced regarding privateness and true behavior.

Teacher's need to be the use of YouTube and GoogleClassroom for collaborative work.

Group leaders must be precise to make sure that there's identical participation.

Further research need to strive to analyze college thoughts approximately social media use.

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