

Social Media Platforms: Perceptions and Concerns of Saudi EFL Learners

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Abstract

This study evaluates the place of social media platforms (SMP) and their use patterns amongst Saudi EFL learners, their preferences, and academic impact at the Department of English and Translation of Qassim University, Saudi Arabia. The study uses a seven item closed-ended questionnaire to conduct a survey to gather the data from male students at the University. A total of 100 randomly chosen (male) students in the department of language and translation were given the questionnaires to answer. Analysis of data shows that most students judiciously utilise SMPs to meet their scholastic or academic demands, with YouTube and Facebook topping log-in time and diversity of use by EFL students. In addition, the use of SMPs helped significantly improve students' capacity to contribute to information exchange and collaborative education, enhanced their academic standing and strengthened their reading and writing abilities. On an average, most students spend three hours a day on SMP. Among the positive impacts of SMP on students' global development included accessing and sharing updated information in an entertaining format. At the same time, some negative impacts reported were minimized interpersonal contact, non-academic use of the SMPs, and physical ailments (mainly vision centred) due to being glued to electronic device for long durations of time. The current study demonstrates the efficacy of SMPs for academic purposes, which is a positive factor for their grades and academic competence and recommends that teachers engage their learners to use SMP for both entertainment and academics.

Keywords: academic achievement, academic competence, EFL college students, English language, social media platforms

1. Introduction

Social media networking is the technique of communication that is most often employed and used by people irrespective of their backgrounds in the contemporary world. Many studies have clearly established that students have a positive attitude toward social media use in education (Alghamdi et al., 2021; Bin-Hady & Al-Tamimi, 2021). In addition, several online networking platforms such as Flickr, Google+, Snapchat, YouTube, Tumblr Facebook, Facebook, Twitter, and Twitter, have added to a new dimension to educational technology expanding the horizons of online networking sites (Kumar et al., 2020). As a result of its capacity to expeditiously convey vital information, social media networking has emerged as the mode of communication with the fastest rate of growth.

The education system as a whole and classroom instruction in particular, have witnessed the most extensive changes due to the impact of social media in all aspects of the learning environment (Tilak & Kumar, 2022). In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of researchers interested in learning more about how educational institutions are utilising digital technology. While on campus, students interact with others while carrying extremely advanced digital gadgets in their pockets. These learners frequently utilize these gadgets for a range of activities unrelated to academics, exposing an important gap. Higher education institutions are concerned about how well their faculty and students understand how to use digital technology as a teaching and learning tool (Haque & Al Salem, 2019; Nasr, 2020).

The internet has become a cutting-edge facility for people and students to connect through social networks as a result of recent advancements in technology. Social media has given rise to an online phenomenon that has gained popularity in recent days: Students establish and maintain connect with professors and peers through social media platforms like YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp (Manca & Ranieri, 2017; Sivakumar, 2020). These social networking sites enable users to communicate with other site members while also allowing them to build individual profiles (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Users can submit pictures, describe their academic pursuits and classroom activities, and send private or public comments to others on the portal. In other words, social media appears to be fast gaining popularity in this "information era," particularly among students (Karamat & Farooq, 2020). In the pre-Covid19 learning environs, SMP use in the classroom was largely seen as a divisive and debatable issue. The ramifications of permitting social media in the classroom worried parents and educators alike as their potential as an educational tool was as yet mostly unexplored although in many developed countries teachers stayed in touch with both present and former students (Madge et al., 2009), both on and off campus, thanks to social media. In the post-Covid19 phase, however, teachers utilise SMP as a method of instruction by setting up groups, private or public and accounts where learners may access learning materials. Moreover, teachers collaborate on ideas and direct pupils to Facebook and LinkedIn. The flow of information on SMPs is two way as students can tag their academic postings with hashtags that teachers designate, and viewers can read

entries to see the group's creative output (Carrigan, 2019).

Significance of the Study

The impact of social media on EFL Saudi students has been probed by many researchers (Alshabeb & Almaqrn, 2018; Allam & Elyas, 2016; Haque & Al Salem, 2019; Sharma, 2019; Slim & Hafedh, 2019). However, each of these previous studies studied the impact of social media on one language skill or system (Alharthi et al., 2020), their impact on EFL teachers (Allam & Elyas, 2016), their use in developing English language learning (Alshabeb & Almaqrn, 2018; Sharma, 2019). The study at hand differs in its orientation to developing students academic competence holistically. Many students continue to use social media despite parents' concerns about their early exposure to these sites. So, studies are being conducted to see if and how students' social media use impacts their grades. There is a growing trend among college students to use social media as a fun and educational activity and resource. Therefore, research on the effects of SMP on students' academic competency is required, with an emphasis on the educational value of SMP.

Research objectives

The objective of this study is to look at how students used social media platforms (SMP) for educational purposes. The following were the study's secondary goals:

1. To examine the patterns of using SMP among Saudi students of language and translation studies.
2. To explore the impact of SMP on the academic activities of Saudi students of language and translation studies.

2. Literature Review

Social media

Social media includes a variety of internet websites, services, and behaviours that foster cooperation, community building, involvement, and sharing, according to Junco et al. (2010). It is impossible to emphasise the extent to which today's youth use social media. This fact cannot be stressed enough. The use of social networking sites by students in their second cycle of education is currently at an all-time high in terms of popularity (Alghamdi et al., 2021; Allam & Elyas, 2016; Alshabeb & Almaqrn, 2018; Bin-Hady & Al-Tamimi, 2021; Haque & Al Salem, 2019; Sharma, 2019; Slim & Hafedh, 2019). It teaches modern learners how to connect with peers not just in college but also off-campus, such as in the surrounding community. Because of social networking, many of us may have a greater sense of belonging to a group. Because of its rising prevalence, both academics and financial experts are beginning to question whether or not the amount of time that students spend on social networking websites is having a negative impact on their academic performance (Astatke et al., 2021). According to estimates provided by Lenhart et al. (2015), around 57% of people who use social networks are between the ages of 18 and 29 and maintain private profiles across a variety of social media networks.

According to the findings of a study that was carried out by Pempek et al. (2009), the amount of time that users spend on social networking sites on a daily basis might vary significantly. An examination of the data, on the other hand, showed that almost all of the participants spent approximately thirty minutes each day on SMPs engaging in social activities. This was especially true in the evenings, between nine and one in the morning, when students spent an hour per day, on average, using Facebook and more than half of EFL students who are enrolled in college are regular users of social networking sites (Sheldon, 2008). According to Quan-Haase and Young's (2010) research, 82% of college students said that they go onto Facebook many times on a daily basis. Mohd Faudzi (2019) studied the addiction on SM amongst Maaaysian students. The study reported that school students spent nearly about 21 hour per week on SM. College students are more likely than older students to utilise social networking sites like Facebook, Instagram, Twiter and Snapchate to maintain contact with their classmates from high school or their families (Alhabash, & Ma, 2017).

All is not in favor of learning objectives though. Using social media has been reported to negatively impact students' GPA. Cheney (2010) reported that the amount of time spent on Facebook negatively influenced on students' academic accomplishment, social media users scored a mean GPA of 3.06, but non-users had a mean GPA of 3.82. According to Karpinski and Duberstein (2009), undergraduate students at Ohio Dominican University who are engaged in social networks have considerably lower grade point averages (GPAs) than those who do not. Likewise, Jacobsen and Forste (2011) proved a negative correlation between the use of various forms of media, particularly mobile phones, and first-year university students' self-reported GPAs in the United States. Maqableh et al. (2015), and Astatke et al.(2021) have come to the conclusion that the usage of social networking sites by students has a negative effect on academic achievement of such students. Likewise, Dhiman (2022) investigated the impact of social media on Indian students at Kurukshetra University. The study reported that students used SM between half an hour to 3 hours a day. The study also revealed that using social media negatively affects students' academic performance. The study recommended students to spend their times on reading useful books instead of indulging in social media sites.

Still other studies reported the positive association of using SM on students' academic performance. Mankani (2022) sought to find out the level of use and impact of SM on academic performance on students in Gujarat in India. The study indicated that the great majority of students possess mobile phones with internet connection. Students are familiar with the SMP. The study reported the presence of direct relation between using SM and negative academic accomplishment amongst the participants. Sivakumar (2020) explored the effect of SM on academic performance of Cuddalore District students. The study gathered data from 1000 students. Results showed that the majority of student used SM positively to improve their academic performance despite of the negative opinion view toward SM. The study reported a significant impact of using SM on students' academic performance. Talaue et al. (2018) reported that students spent most of

their free time using SM and that using SM has positive impact of students’ development including chatting with their colleagues which boosts their sociality. The study reported that in these interaction students’ discussed topics related to their study.

Other studies that have been undertaken on the same issue (Alwagait et al. ,2015; Celestine & Nonyelum, 2018; Ahmed & Qazi, 2011; Hanqittai & Hsich, 2010; Pasek & Hanqittai, 2009) have found that there is no association between the usage of social media and academic accomplishment. Alwagait et al. (2015) reported that there is no statistical correlation between using SM and Saudi students' GPA. The study indicated, however, that time management in addition to using SM may affect students' performance. Martin, (2009) reported that there is no association between the amount of time spent on social networking sites and grades, as indicated by the responses of 127 students who participated in a study conducted by the Whittemore School of Business and Economics. Celestine and Nonyelum (2018) evaluated the SM on the students of Samuel Adegboyega University academic performance. Findings showed a significant correlation between using SM and the lost time. The study, on the other hand, reported that using SM has no statistically significant impact on students' performance.

3. Methods

Research design

In this study, a quantitative design was used, and a questionnaire was created to collect data from the participants. The study took place at Qassim University's College of Sciences and Arts, Methnab in the first semester of academic year (1444AH).

Participants

This study evaluated the perceptions of 100 randomly chosen students on the impact of using SM on their academic performance. The researcher got approval letter dated (Nov 13, 2022) from the deanship to conduct this study. Furthermore, the researcher obtained participants’ consent as well after the purpose of this research was explained to them. Verbitem consent is applicable in the Saudi deanship of higher studies which was duly obtained. The researcher went to various college classrooms to hand-deliver and manually collect filled-in questionnaires from respondents. 138 of the 150 questionnaires were found fit for inclusion as these were completely answered and of these, 100 were randomly included in the study. Only college students of language and translation studies enrolled in the undergraduate programme participated. Different inquiries on the participants' usage of SMP, their academic relevance and use, and time spent using SMP were made.

Instrument

Closed-ended multiple choice questions were included in the preliminary draft of the questionnaire and item validity was ensured by having this vetted by four language and teaching experts. Answer choices included yes/no response, Lickert Scale based gradient response, and multiple choice response types. Additionally, the study scope was restricted to four widely used social media platforms: Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, YouTube.

4. Data Analysis and Results

The following section analyzes participants’ responses to each of the seven items included in the questionnaire.

1). Do you use any social media platform?

The students were questioned about their usage of SMP in general, and the 100% positive results reveal that all the participants (100%) used these. As per statistics pertaining to year 2021, 57.6% of the total population worldwide were active social media users. In contemporary times, these platforms have beaten any other internet-based use of technology, making them the most potential for applications in practically all fields of life, for people of all ages, cultures, and needs. However, the impact of these still needs careful study as the Covid19 expanded their use in ways unknown to modern civilizations more out of compulsion than choice.

2). Which social media platforms do you use for educational purposes?

Results in Table 1 demonstrate that of the four networks included in this study, the video-sharing website YouTube is the most well-liked platform. There was absolute positive unanimity in the responses to the question of the survey as all the respondents reported their use of YouTube. In addition, a very large percentage at (95.%) indicated their use of Facebook, about (69%) of the respondents said they use Instagram and 54 % of them reported to use Twitter. This finding is significant in this study as the platforms reportedly used by the respondents facilitate sharing of audio, video, and text content, pointing to the need for multimodal educational choices for university learners in today’s educational paradigm.

Table 1. Type of social media platforms used

Rank	Preference	Frequency	%
1	YouTube	100	100
2	Facebook	95	95
3	Instagram	69	69
4	Twitter	54	54

Graphically representing this data in Figure 1 below clearly shows the primacy of YouTube followed closely by Facebook as the SMP preferences of the respondents in the study.

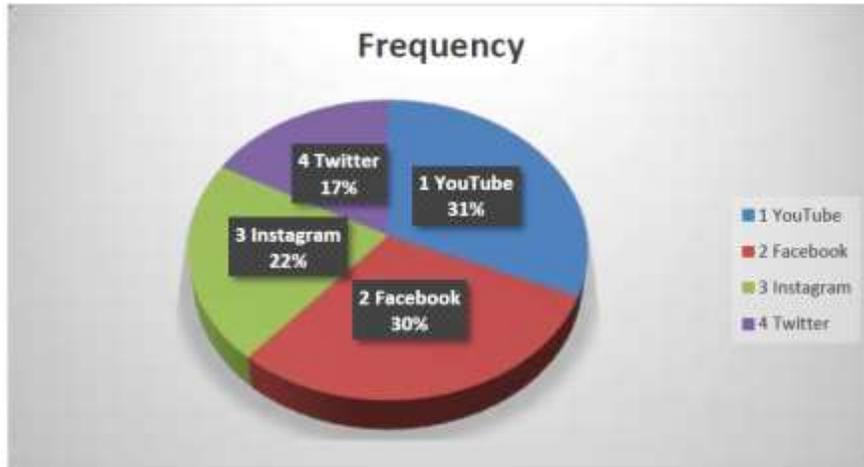


Figure 1. SMP use patterns

3). How much time do you normally spend on social media platforms for educational purposes?

Parental and academic objection to the use of educational technology has long been connected to the amount of time that young people stay glued to their devices and concerns for the long-term health ramifications of this behavior. When questioned about how often the respondents in this study used SMP for schoolwork, as summarized in Table 2, 50 % of the respondents reported spending between three and four hours, while 27% of them spent between one and two hours. 12% of the respondents said, they spent less than one hour, and 11 respondents said they spent between five and six hours per day on social media platforms for educational purposes.

Table 2. Spending time on social media platforms

Time spent	N
Less than 1 hour	12
One- two hours	27
Three- four hours	50
Five- Six hours	11

Figure 2 below depicts at a glance that the preoccupation of only half the learners in the study with SMPs is between three to four hours a day which is not as alarming as data reported in a Pew Research Center study (2021) which showed that as high as 48% of American between the ages of 18-29 years remain online ‘almost constantly’. However, the study does not report if the purpose of this activity is academic or general.

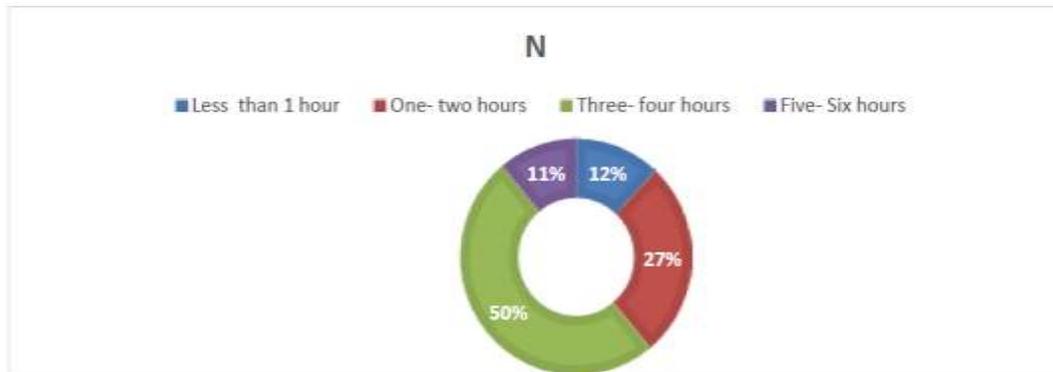


Figure 2. Time spent on SMPs

4). Do you think that social media platforms have improved your grading in academics?

The students were questioned whether or not their use of SMP had a favourable influence on their academic achievements. According to Table 3 depicted in Figure 3, about a third or 35% of the students believe that using SMPs helped them earn high marks. Similarly 33% of the participants believed that social media platforms helped them improve their grades to some extent. In total, 23% of the students were unsure about their grading improvements, while just 7% of them indicated that SMPs were ineffective in enhancing their marks.

Table 3. The influence of social media on academic grade improvement

S.No.	Preference	Frequency
1	Highly effective	35
2	To some extent effective	33
3	Not effective	7
4	Not sure	23

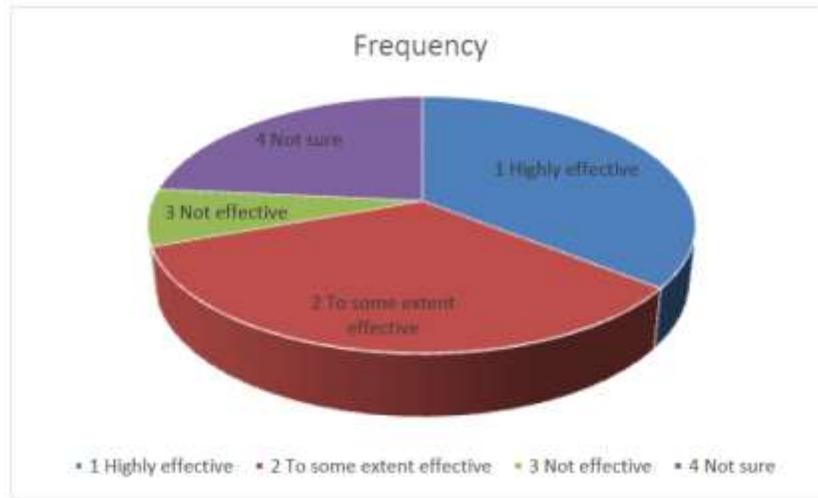


Figure 3. Agreement that use of SMP improves grades

5). Do you believe that social media provides a useful platforms for sharing of academic work?

We also asked the students' opinions on how they used social media to share information, resources, and academic tasks. The results of this question are shown in Figure 4, where 42% of the students strongly agreed and 20% agreed that SMP can be used for sharing academic work. Only 17% of the respondents expressed disagreement with this statement.

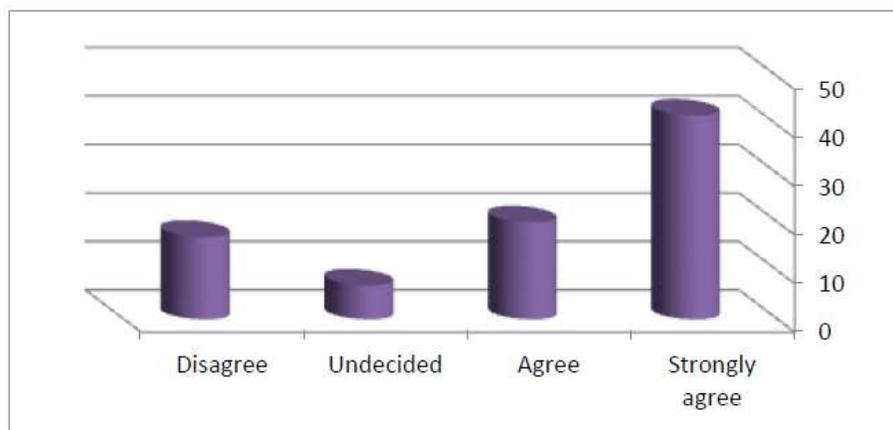


Figure 4. Usefulness of sharing academic content on SMP

6). What positive effects do social media platforms have for your educational activities?

Figure 5 shows the possible benefits of SMPs. Data depicted here shows that a majority of students believe that SMPs had a great beneficial influence on students' academic performance. Updates and information were deemed to have the most beneficial effect by all (100%) the students, followed by contributions to information sharing and education by 82% of the participants. A total of 56% of the participants said that using SMPs for entertainment reasons is another benefit.

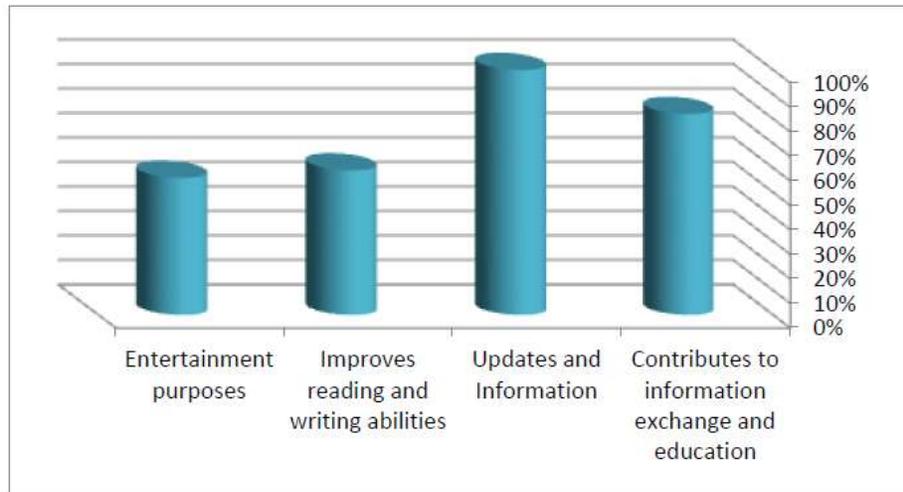


Figure 5. Positive influences of SMP on students' academic performance

7). What negative effects do social media platforms have for students?

On the other hand, some of students reported negative consequences. Figure 6 indicates that 54% of the respondents reported that using SMPs reduced direct interpersonal interaction, and 32% said that social media was a big time. In all, 28% of them said that SMPs had a detrimental impact on their eyesight. Furthermore, 26% of the students, believed that SPMs raised certain health concerns for students.

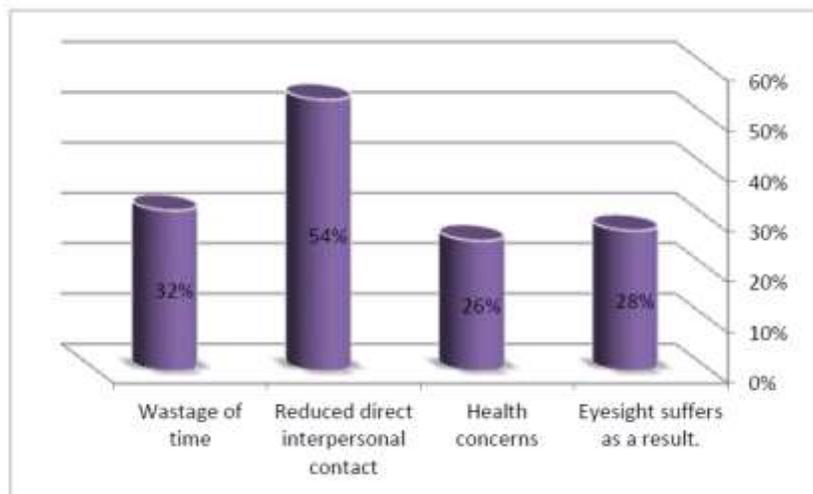


Figure 6. The impact of SMP use on students' academics performance

5. Discussion

This study set out to evaluate the place of social media platforms (SMP) and their use patterns amongst Saudi male EFL learners, their preferences, and academic impact at the Department of English and Translation of Qassim University, Saudi Arabia. The study used a seven item closed-ended questionnaire to conduct a survey to gather the data from (male) students at the University. Findings indicate the significant role that SMPs have taken on in students' daily lives as a large number spend as many as four hours exclusively using SMPs reportedly for academic purposes. This finding is congruent with previous studies (Doleck & Lajoie, 2018; Foltean et al., 2019; Yang et al., 2020). They documented the prevalence and popularity of SMPs among individuals of various ages though in the current study the median age of the participants was 21.3 years with the age group being 21-22.5 years. Our findings show that all the students use YouTube, followed by Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, in that order of preference. These results are consistent with the study of Sakkir et al. (2020) which found that that YouTube and Facebook are the most popular SMPs.

Further, the current study found that half of the Saudi students spent 3-4 hours a day using SMPs. This finding is in line with Mohd Faudzi (2019) who reported that Malaysian students spent about 21 hour per week on SMPs.

Besides, we also found that one third of the students believed that SMPs improved their academic grades to a high extent while another third reported their grades were improved to some extent due to using SMPs. Therefore, SMPs may be quite helpful for students who seek to

better their academic grades as well as their reading, writing and speaking skills. Popular SMPs like Facebook and YouTube are used by academic institutions across the globe, as reported in a research by Barry et al. (2016) and Yang et al. (2020) since they give significant and up-to-date information and greatly facilitate learners' educational needs.

Results in the present study also revealed that more than half of the participants (strongly) agreed on the usefulness of SMPs for sharing academic work pointing towards opportunities for collaborative learning. These results are in contradiction to those drawn from earlier studies conducted by Karpinski and Duberstein (2009), and Al-Sharqi et al. (2015). The researchers argued that because social media technologies may distract students' attention and drastically lower their engagement with teachers and classmates, they may have a detrimental effect on their academic performance. Additionally, they said that excessive use of social media might affect students since as people age, they become more dependent on their phones and pay less attention to their academics.

Furthermore, the study reported that using social media has many advantages, mainly updating and getting information, exchanging information and boosting the reading and speaking abilities. Wickramanayake and Jika (2018) discussed the beneficial effects of SMPs for students gathering data from 1000 students. The study reported that the majority of student use SMPs positively to improve their academic performance despite of the negative public view toward these. The study reported a significant impact of using SMPs on students' academic performance. Talaue et al. (2018) reported that their study found that students spent the maximum of their free time using SMPs and that this had positive impact of their development including chatting with their colleagues and boosting their sociality. The study reported that students mostly discussed topics related to their study when they used SMPs.

Finally, the study showed some negative impact of using SMPs on students' performance including the reduction of interpersonal contact time, wasting of study time and vision related issues. In Antoehr study, Mankani (2022) indicated that the great majority of students possess mobile phones with internet connection and there is a direct relation between using SMPs and negative academic accomplishment amongst the participants. Sivakumar (2020) explored the effect of SMPs on academic performance of Cuddalore District students and reached similar conclusions.

6. Conclusion

There is no doubt that technology has altered all aspects of life, including business practices and other social arenas, as well as communication and information transmission routes, institutional and organizational structures, and teaching and learning techniques. Today, owing to technological advancements, the entire planet functions as a single giant community. There has been a radical shift in how we educate our youth as a direct result of the development of ICTs. In the classroom, it is believed that everyone stands to gain from the proficient application of Web 2.0 applications. Using social media, people may quickly share and understand the information in a wide variety of ways. Based on the results of this research, learners can benefit greatly from using SMPs with specialists in their field from all over the world. They can also benefit from staying updated on the latest advances in their respective sectors. Social media platforms make available free content in a range of multimedia formats which caters to all kinds of student needs. Therefore, SMPs have a vast academic potential that needs to be optimally exploited for learner benefit.

7. Recommendations

This study will have substantial repercussions for stakeholders in the educational system and society at large. The significance of social media platforms in the instructional activities of students should be acknowledged initially. The research advises instructors to use social media technologies in their classrooms. Teachers could provide their assignments, quizzes, and discussions via social media networks to encourage students to adopt an e-learning habit. Our findings will aid in the advancement of e-learning training in local educational institutions. As a result, educational institution administrators must build the infrastructure and develop policies to include e-learning in the educational paradigm. The enjoyment of students in their usage of social networks might be a future research topic.

8. Limitations

The researcher acknowledges the limitation of not comparing gender data in this study. We understand that previous studies have shown differences in SMP use and application by males and females and this may be significant in mixed classrooms. It is hoped that future studies include this variable to reach wider results.

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