

## Students' Perceptions regarding Social Media as a Tool for Academic Learning and Building Social Capital

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### Abstract

*The research study was carried out under the positivist paradigm to evaluate the perceptions of university students regarding social media as a tool for academic learning and building social capital. A sample of 280 students comprising male and female, from a public University i.e. University of the Punjab, Lahore-Pakistan was taken through cluster sampling method. A Five Point Likert's Scale consisting of 36 items ranging from "Strongly Disagreed" to "Strongly Agreed" was developed and data was collected by using this scale. Data was analyzed by measuring the mean and standard deviation of the responses. T-test was also applied to identify the difference between the male and female students' perceptions regarding social media as a tool for academic learning and building social capital. The study findings showed a strong consensus that social media enhances self-directed learning by offering access to valuable educational resources. The study also confirmed that social media can cultivate a sense of community and improve interactive learning experiences. However, the study revealed mixed opinions regarding social media's effectiveness in building social capital, particularly in providing practical advice and support. In conclusion, while social media is generally viewed positively as a tool for academic purposes and community building among university students, its effectiveness in fostering social capital is more complex and varies by context.*

**Keywords:** Social Media, Social Capital, University, Students, Perception, Academic Learning.

### **Introduction**

Social media refers to online platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and educational platforms like ResearchGate that facilitate social interactions, content sharing, and networking. Social media is generally seen as a medium for social interaction, facilitating the generation and exchange of knowledge at an unprecedented rate (Jan & Ahmad, 2018). Nonetheless, non-users may view it negatively due to issues like cyberbullying, false propaganda, misinformation, and cybercrimes. Despite these concerns, social media can manage diverse groups and reduce personal biases due to its virtual nature (Abrar ul Haq et al., 2015). As social media is increasing altering the culture, morals, and social standards thus it is becoming an increasingly important part of human society. Content distribution and information exchange are becoming crucial societal needs.

Social media has altered the ways in which people especially students communicate, engage, and socialize during their learning processes at Universities and Colleges. Students at their educational institutions as well as the general public are sharing contents through this new medium. With the facility to share photos, videos, leaving comments, spreading ideas etc. now students have many opportunities to take part in social discussions and learning processes. Social media nowadays has a deep impact on young people's daily lives in general and students in particular. Everyday communication, teamwork, and cooperation techniques are being revolutionized by digital media and social networking (Abbas et al, 2019). There are many advantages of using social media and digital gadgets by the students of educational institutions. These benefits or advantages primarily include easy and prompt access to the course materials, video clips, instructional notes and other resources required. In general, students think that mobile devices and social media are the most affordable and practical ways to find pertinent information. Research conducted in Western countries has demonstrated that the usage of online social media for collaborative learning significantly improved students' academic performance and satisfaction (Ansari & Khan, 2020).

Traditional classroom engagement and face-to-face communication remain crucial for education. The key to individual learning is the dissemination of information and knowledge on campus. However, the advent of the internet and social media has introduced significant changes in education (Sheng-Yi et al., 2012). While online knowledge opens new opportunities for educational learning, the challenge lies in proving its efficacy to learners and teachers and implementing new communication methods. According to Caraher & Braselman (2010), problems in education related to new skills cannot be resolved without understanding the experiences of teachers and learners when using social media in the education system. Generally, social media and websites let students communicate, share information with peers, and help them in establishing relations as well as connections with others. In this modern era of information technology, most of the students nowadays are seen as regular user of these advanced gadgets to be connected, informed and updated on internal and external affairs (Ansari & Khan, 2020).

In today's digital age, collective learning is crucial, especially for those with strong socialization processes (Bond et. al., 2018). Research shows that social media covers all aspects of modern socialization and associations. Students need to understand the scope and significance of social media to achieve their educational goals. Learning through social media can enhance their communication skills and increase their chances of success. It also provides new opportunities for creating knowledge and developing innovative skills, setting a progressive trajectory in education (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The study in hand aims to identify the perception of University students regarding role of social media as a tool for academic learning and building social capital. The study is also an endeavor to ascertain the difference between the male and female students' perceptions regarding social media as a tool for academic learning and building social capital.

### **Objectives of the Study**

This study has following objectives:

- To know about the perception of University students regarding role of social media as a tool for academic learning and building social capital.

- To ascertain the difference between the male and female students' perceptions regarding social media as a tool for academic learning and building social capital.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions to obtain the requisite information were as under:

1. What is the perception of university students regarding role of social media as a tool for academic learning and building social capital?
2. Is there a significant difference between the male and female students' perception regarding social media as a tool for academic learning and building social capital?

### **Literature Review**

Research studies explored that social media platforms cover all aspects of modern socialization and associations. Students should understand the scope and significance of social media for achieving their educational goals. Learning through social media can enhance communication skills and increase chances of success. It also opens new horizons for creating knowledge and developing innovative skills. These methods can set a progressive trajectory in education (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Khan et al. (2017) explored that content and course related features that both formally and informally promote teachers' performance. It will improve their knowledge pertaining to the job work profile and communication abilities as well. Social media being an educational tool have lots of benefits and advantages for the students, mentors and other staff members and its benefits are still being discovered. Facebook application contributed to better learning outcomes. Additionally, it gave students access to professional prospects in adjacent fields and broadened their viewpoints (Khan et al., 2017).

In today's world, social media has emerged as a vital tool for fostering peer collaboration and contacts, which promotes learning and transformation. In order to fully reap the benefits of social media, educators must understand the features and structure of this digital online tool. It will facilitate the acclimatization of sophisticated education systems. Schoology acts as a catalyst to empower teaching and educational

effectiveness at different levels of any environment and supports an intimate partnership between educational institutions and technology developers (Khan et al. 2021).

Faizi further explored that social media platforms promote cooperation, which is beneficial for education since they give educators and students a forum to share ideas, collaborate with one another on them, and publish them in an edited format. Considering all of these advantages, we firmly feel that social media may be utilized as an invaluable instructional resource that enhances the educational process. Therefore, whether they are working in totally online, blended, or in-person learning situations, we advise educators to make use of these online social groups (Faizi, Afia & Chiheb, 2013).

Khan et al. (2021) also reported that in technologically advanced societies, use of social media has been considered crucial and significant in awareness raising among students. It plays a key role in enhancing students' creativity and information sharing and helps them in working and interacting with their teachers and other students in terms of enlightening instructional activities. Every day, students spend a significant portion of their time on social networking sites (SNS) for amusement and to obtain information that help them in their academic work and enhances their digital literacy (Khan et al., 2021).

Faizi confirmed that a careful analysis of data has revealed that social media tools provide a lot of educational benefits and advantages to the students. Social media, in fact, improves student-to-student and teacher-student communication and connections. These platforms have made it possible for teachers and students to interact with one another effectively. Additionally, it has been discovered that social media is a useful tool for increasing student involvement because it gives hesitant, uncomfortable or bored students a more comfortable platform to share ideas and to voice their opinions (Faizi, Afia & Chiheb, 2013).

### **Methodology**

This research study was carried out under the Positivist Paradigm to know about the perceptions of University students regarding role of social media as a tool for academic learning and building social capital. A sample of 280 University students was taken from a public university i.e. University of the Punjab, Lahore-Pakistan through cluster sampling technique.

Clusters were made on the basis of gender and study classes and then sample was taken through simple random sampling method. A Five Point Likert's Scale consisted of 36 items ranging from "Strongly Disagreed" to "Strongly Agreed" were developed and data was collected by using this scale.

The sample was comprised of both male and females students equally. The scale was validated while taking the experts' opinion whereas its reliability was checked through conducting its pre-testing. Data was fed into the SPSS statistical software for further analysis. Only those students were included who were agreed to take part in the study whereas those who were disagreed, were sampled out. Data was analyzed through measuring mean and standard deviation of the responses. T-test was also applied to identify the difference between the male and female students' perceptions regarding social media as a tool for academic learning and building social capital. All ethical considerations were strictly observed while conducting this study.

### **Data presentation and Analysis**

To address the research questions of the study the collected data have been analyzed through different statistical methods. The results of the study have been given hereunder:

**Table 1**

*Perception of students (n=280)*

| <b>Statements</b>   | <b>Mean</b> | <b>S.D</b> |
|---|-------------|------------|
| I feel a sense of community online  | 2.836       | 1.379      |
| I feel learning becomes interactive at Social media   | 3.019       | 1.258      |
| Posting questions to my peers helps me understand my readings better  | 3.533       | 0.989      |
| I am able to get faster feedback from my peers  | 3.692       | 1.11       |
| I am able to get faster feedback from my instructor   | 3.644       | 1.11       |
| I am able to communicate effectively  | 3.54        | 1.197      |
| I am able to connect with peers more easily than face-to-face   | 3.265       | 1.438      |
| I increase my participation in classes when I am allowed to contribute through social media                       | 3.28        | 1.316      |
| I learn more when I regulate my own learning experience and seek information on things that I want to learn about | 3.708       | 1.143      |

|  |       |       |
|--|-------|-------|
| I use Internet technology to explore topics of interest  | 4.065 | 0.955 |
| I like to take classes from good professors  | 3.863 | 1.054 |
| Internet technology helps me be successful in my classes   | 3.643 | 1.451 |
| I like to enrol in classes to continue my education  | 3.621 | 1.273 |
| I use Internet communications technology tools when I want to learn about something new                                  | 3.84  | 1.082 |
| I use Internet communications technology to keep current on topics related to my field of expertise                      | 3.73  | 1.059 |
| I like to share interests and reflections online   | 3.719 | 0.846 |
| I use Internet communications and other technology tools for self-expression   | 3.587 | 1.14  |
| I learn many things by interacting with other Internet users   | 3.394 | 1.333 |
| More classroom learning should include interactive communication technology experiences                                  | 3.344 | 1.419 |
| I would like to be a participating member of an online community   | 3.25  | 1.081 |
| I post information that might be of interest to other people   | 3.555 | 1.245 |
| I learn best in a traditional classroom setting  | 3.692 | 1.093 |
| The things I need to know are taught by instructors in the classroom   | 3.546 | 1.151 |
| Comparing my grades before and after participating on SNSs and I experienced rise in my academic performance as a result | 3.284 | 1.236 |
| During vacation, I spend a lot of time participating on social media than reading my books shared by my SNSs friends     | 3.045 | 1.476 |
| I do examination discussions with my friends on social media   | 3.287 | 1.276 |
| During vacation, I spend a lot of time participating on social media than reading my books shared by my SNSs friends     | 3.391 | 1.297 |
| I use SNSs for communicating, mobilizing and organizing national issues like politics, economy and religious matters     | 3.247 | 1.14  |
| It encourages virtual meeting with co-research scholars  | 3.467 | 1.156 |
| Using SNSs I know a person who knows how to fix problems with computers  | 3.472 | 1.224 |
| Using SNSs I know a person who gives me sound advice about money problems  | 2.733 | 1.295 |
| Using SNSs I know a person who gives you careers advice  | 2.788 | 1.259 |
| Using SNSs I know a person who discuss politics with me  | 2.512 | 1.309 |

|  |       |       |
|--|-------|-------|
| My casual friends on SNS are good sources of job/internship opportunities                    | 3.23  | 1.246 |
| My close friends on SNS can offer me advices for important decisions                         | 3.576 | 1.117 |
| I can get quick responses to my question about where/who/how to find resources I need on SNS | 3.591 | 1.096 |

Table-1 shows the perceptions of students regarding social media as a tool of learning. Mean score and standard deviation were calculated from the Likert Scale responses to understand the perceptions of students. Statements having mean scores closer to 4 or above indicate that respondents are agreed or strongly agreed with the statements. Responses showed that statement No. 10 i.e. "I use Internet technology to explore topics of interest" had mean score 4.065 and SD 0.955 which depicts that majority of the students were agreed or strongly agrees with this statement. Similarly, statement No. 11 i.e. "I like to take classes from good professors" had mean 3.863 and SD 1.054 which indicates that many students are agreed with this statement. Likewise, statement No. 14 i.e. "I use Internet communication technology tools when I want to learn about something new" had mean score 3.840 and SD 1.082. Statement No. 9 i.e. "I learn more when I regulate my own learning experience and seek information on things that I want to learn about" had mean 3.708 and SD 1.143.

Contrary to the above, some statements had low mean which indicate that majority of the students are disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statements. Mean scores closer to 2 or below generally indicate that respondents disagree or strongly disagree with the statements. Statement No. 31 i.e. "Using SNSs I know a person who gives me sound advice about money problems" had mean 2.733 and SD 1.295 which indicate that students were agreed with the statements. Similarly, statements No. 32 i.e. "Using SNSs I know a person who gives you careers advice" had mean 2.788 and SD 1.259. Statement No. 33 i.e. "Using SNSs I know a person who discusses politics with me" had mean score 2.512 and SD 1.309 which also indicate that students are agreed. Similarly, the High Standard Deviations of the responses indicated high variability in responses. Statements with high standard deviations (generally above 1.2) suggested

that there is a wide range of opinions among the respondents. Statement NO. 7 i.e. "I am able to connect with peers more easily than face-to-face" had SD1.438, statement No. 18 i.e. "I learn many things by interacting with other Internet users" had SD 1.333 and Statement No. 24 i.e. "Comparing my grades before and after participating on SNSs, I experienced a rise in my academic performance as a result" had SD1.236.

**Table 2**

*Difference between male and female respondents perceptions*

| Gender | <i>N</i> | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>T</i> | <i>P</i> |
|--------|----------|----------|-----------|-----------|----------|----------|
| Male   | 180      | 128.59   | 20.93     |           |          |          |
|        |          |          |           | 278       | 3.84     | .000     |
| Female | 100      | 117.87   | 22.86     |           |          |          |

Table-2 revealed that the male respondents mean score  $M=128.58$  and  $SD= 20.93$  was significantly higher than the female respondents' mean score ( $117.87$ ) and  $SD= 22.86$  along with the  $t= 3.84$  and  $p= .000$  which is less than  $.05$ .

### Discussion

According to the results of the study, several statements with high mean score and relatively low standard deviation highlighted that many University students viewed social media as an effective tool for academic learning. Findings of the study clearly indicated a strong agreement among the respondents that social media can enhance self-directed learning and provide access to valuable educational resources. These results of this study are in line with the findings of the previous studies. A study conducted by Ansari & Khan (2020) reported that based on the empirical research, it can be concluded that students would be more engaged and dynamic if social media is used to transfer for resource materials, collaborative learning, and connection with teachers and peers. His study further recommended to the business community for developing social media strategies related to collaborative learning. Another study also confirmed that it has been discovered that social media is a useful tool for increasing student involvement because it gives hesitant, uncomfortable or bored students a more comfortable platform to share ideas and to voice their opinions (Faizi, Afia & Chiheb, 2013).

The findings of this study also revealed that some responses of the students suggested that social media fosters a sense of community and enhances interactive learning. For example, the statement "I feel a sense of community online" with mean = 2.836 and SD = 1.379 showed moderate agreement with some variability in responses, indicating that while many students feel a sense of community online, experiences may vary. Some previous studies also found the same findings which strengthen the results of this study. Tagalicod (2023) pointed out that using social media by the students helps them to interact with the foreign students by leaving comments on their posts, sharing their contents, and soliciting their opinions. This can foster a feeling of belonging to the communities as well as loyalty and trust. Another study concluded that consequently, social media is widely recognized as a crucial component in creating vibrant university campus communities, strengthening social capital and expanding opportunities for student-to-student engagement (Sutherland et al., 2018).

According to the results of this study, there were mixed views on whether social media effectively builds social capital, especially in terms of receiving practical advice and support. Statement like "Using SNSs, I know a person who gives me sound advice about money problems" with mean score 2.733 and SD 1.295 and a statement "Using SNSs, I know a person who discusses politics with me" with mean score 2.512 and SD 1.309 suggested that University students may not strongly rely on social media for certain types of social capital. These findings of the study clearly indicated that besides various positive characteristics, social media has many negative aspects too. Ansari (2020) pointed out that the use of social media and mobile devices by the students of educational institutions has equally benefits and drawbacks. Likewise, another study also found that negative effects of social media, including stress, anxiety, depression and other health issues have an impact on Pakistani student communities. Students at particular colleges preferred using social media for awareness raising, stress relief, learning helpful information and forming new friendships. However, excessive use of social media by some students always results wastage of time (Abbas et al., 2019).

This study further found that the male respondents mean score was significantly higher than the female respondents' mean score which

clearly indicated that there are significant difference between the male and female students' perception regarding Social Media as a tool for academic learning and building social capital. These findings are in line with the previous studies conducted in Pakistani Educational Institutions. A study conducted by Kamran & Mansoor (2017) confirmed the results of this study with its findings that it is evident that women in higher education are unseen and silent in Baluchistan, where male remarks account for about 90% of the total, while female opinions make up only 10%. In KPK, men outnumber women in terms of active Facebook users as seen by the comments they leave (37% vs. 63%). The comments also demonstrate how women, who are typically expected to display their emotions less than males, utilize emoticons and graphics more frequently to convey their feelings.

### **Conclusion**

The study highlighted the significant role of social media in both academic learning and social interaction among the University students. Study findings indicated a strong consensus that social media enhances self-directed learning by offering access to valuable educational resources. This implies that students widely acknowledge social media as a helpful tool for supporting their academic efforts and promoting independent learning behaviors. Furthermore, the research showed that social media can cultivate a sense of community and improve interactive learning experiences, though students' perceptions of this vary. It suggested that while many students experience a sense of community through social media, this is not consistent across the board, with individual experiences differing. However, the study revealed mixed opinions on social media's effectiveness in building social capital, particularly in providing practical advice and support. It is evident from findings that University students don't greatly rely on social media for certain types of social support. Although social media is valuable for academic and community purposes, its ability to facilitate specific types of social support and advice is limited. In conclusion, while social media is generally viewed positively as a tool for academic purposes and community building among University students, its effectiveness in fostering social capital is more complex and varies by context.

### Study limitations and further directions

This research study has been conducted on university students of a well reputed public university of Lahore city which is the capital and largest city of the Punjab province, therefore, its findings cannot be generalized a whole. The findings may be different if the same study is conducted in any other public or private University of Pakistan. Further, the focus of the study was mainly on identifying the role of social media in both academic learning and social interaction among the University students, thus, negative impact and drawbacks of using social media by the students have not been studied. Similarly, another major aspect i.e. excessive use of social media has been ignored in this study. Moreover, only University students were included in this study and the perspective of the faculty members have not been incorporated. They might have different opinion regarding use of social media as well as its effectiveness for University students. Further research studies by covering all these gaps may be conducted to draw more accurate and comprehensive findings.

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