

Students' Perception About Online Social-Media in Higher Education: An Empirical Study

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Abstract: Technological evolution had a significant impact on human interactions and digitization transformation increased usage of social networking. The use of social networks in education represents the recognition of the social change produced by this phenomenon. Social media may cover part of the digital domain and provide another dimension for education where space and time limitations no longer exist. The aims of this paper are to investigate and understand academics' attitudes towards integrating social media into Education, but from a student's perspective. After reviewing the literature, it can be suggested that there is great potential for social networking integration in education. However, it is understandable the existence of obstacles which restricts its integration among the students. Finally, it can be concluded that from students' perspective the university is still in the initial stages of recognizing the educational benefits of social networking, but indeed it observed that it has been an attempt to accommodate students time by time with online learning and thus, a positive attitude being present.

1 INTRODUCTION

Social networking refers to platforms used by different categories of people for social interaction. Social networks significantly changed the way people communicate and interact with each other. It gave the opportunity for people to not just be consumers, but producers of content as well, be it educational or not, too. The usage of Social Networking can represent a fast-growing phenomenon both in day to day and academic life.

These tools also became relevant in academia. Using social networks tools in the education field can bring significant differences from traditional classes and can also enhance teaching. Many of these tools provide many materials and useful information in different types of forms (video, educational games, etc.) in order to make the students more active and understand the subjects better, other tools help the students and teachers to communicate regardless of time and place. Examples of those tools are Facebook, YouTube, Moodle, Wikipedia, etc. (Purgat, 2017) All these social networking platforms can make education or the learning process more flexible, accessible and can increase the student's engagement through active communication

(Draskovik et al., 2017). The main platforms can be split in two categories: Learning Management Systems, which include: Moodle, Canvas, Blackboard and Brightspace (Bouchrika, 2022) and social media: LinkedIn, Twitter, TikTok, Instagram and Facebook (Frehan, 2021).

Complementary to such an approach, George Siemens (2005) outlined in his article about learning theory in the digital age: hence, contrary to traditional view, learning does not happen inside the person, but rather the process is facilitated by a large number of connections. Thus, Siemens stated a new learning theory called connectivism which follows principles such as "*learning and knowledge rests in diversity of opinions*", "*learning may reside in non-human appliances*", "*nurturing and maintaining connections is needed to facilitate continual learning*", but other three principles, too. Hence, education can be enhanced and developed through SM platforms, therefore, all of these principles may be respected using social networks which facilitates the process of learning in the digital era (Draskovik et al., 2017).

Many higher education institutions or even tertiary education have integrated e-learning platforms (Course Management Systems) such as Moodle which enhance and facilitate student collaboration, engagement, interaction with other

students or with teachers, in this way it ensures a more satisfactory experience (Dumpit et al., 2017)). However, this kind of systems does not satisfy the collaboration and sharing in contrast to those facilitated by social media (Bryer and Chen, 2012). Also, it is very clear that student-learning style has drastically changed because of these technologies and because of this, as Bynum (2011) said, the teaching style and curricula also need to be changed in order to align with students' life-style development.

2 EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

2.1 Opportunities of Employing Social Networking in Education

In the last few years, as technology has developed fast, social networking has highly influenced people's lives, especially the adult generations. Moreover, the majority of students tend to use platforms such as Facebook or YouTube in a more informative way and not just for leisure, spending their free time or entertainment, but to collaborate and learn (Freehan, 2021). Teachers also tend to look for new technology to mediate and promote active learning for students. Higher education institutions can make good use of this opportunity to employ social networking platforms in order to align with the digital era (Anderson 2017). Another situation which may represent an opportunity of employing social networking in education has been the appearance of Covid-19. Due to the pandemic, the education field had to be adapted in order to deal efficiently with the drastic regulations.

2.1.1 Accessibility

Accessibility represents one of the main reasons why social networking is integrated in education. This feature encourages the students, but also the lecturers to use social networking in their community. Many authors such as Vandeyar (2020) and Akabri (2012) showed that the users of these tools (students, teachers, trainers etc.) value the accessibility as it can give immediate and continuous engagement with knowledge, but also with people, regardless of their place. Therefore, the accessibility can be seen from two perspective, as follows:

1. Accessibility of Knowledge: Social Networking systems offer a great opportunity to access universal

knowledge and a range of methods for learning and communication (Jabr, 2011). Moreover, the knowledge can not only be accessible during the class or learning time, but also outside of them, therefore it can be said that the accessibility of knowledge via social networks is not limited in time.

2. Accessibility of People: Several studies have shown that via social networking tools people around the world can connect efficiently and even in real time, regardless of distance. In their study, Arquero and Romero-Frias (2013) mentioned that many subjects agree with the fact that social networking tools are a convenient way to communicate and feel closer to teaching staff.

2.2 Flexibility

Flexibility is another plus in education. In the study of Arquero and Romero-Frias (2013) the respondents particularly appreciated this feature: about 93% of students agreed that using social networking allows them to manage their time better to study for the subject. Also, the resources are more flexible, and students could use them any time, in this way it provides more time for learning. Students could have their own schedule and still keep in contact with others. They can be independent by using online resources and available online information. Flexibility and independence also make interactions more efficient. As Piccoli et al. (2001) have stated, an important advantage using social networking in education is the convenience and flexibility over traditional education.

2.3 Involvement in Collaboration

Social networks represent an environment which was created to meet the people needs for interaction. This environment allows individuals to interact with other individuals without time and space limits (Greenhow et al., 2009). In many studies, the respondent's opinion stated that social networking tools enhance collaboration significantly, provide helpful tools for project teams and also help students to exchange their opinions freely, learning from other student's point of view. Gleason & all (2020), highlighted two important features of Social Networks usage in teaching: sharing subject material and collaborating on learning opportunities.

2.4 Challenges of Employing Social Networking in Education

2.4.1 Student Productivity and Time Management Skills

Regardless of the benefits related to information accessibility and communication improvements, there is still a debate related to the negative impact on productivity in learning (Falahah and Rosmalab, 2012).

It may be stated that the time management skills of the student may play a major role in controlling his usage of social networks which can lead to a certain level of productivity.

2.4.2 Lack of Training

The lack of training or technology expertise may also play a major role which can challenge the employing of social networking in education. Both parties, the teachers and students may need training seasons. Technical expertise is needed for teachers to efficiently integrate and use social networking in the teaching process as a teaching tool and in the case of students, they also should be trained in order to make good use of the learning tool. If there exists a lack of training, a high possibility may occur to complicate the teaching learning process so as the facilitation offered by social networking may be lost.

2.4.3 Overwhelming Information

Most Social Networks are based on the web which provides an ocean of information because of the large number of users. The information is overabundant and searching for the right resources may be time-consuming. However, even social networks apps (Teams, WhatsApp) in which the users are much fewer, overabundance of information may appear because, for example there will be a probability that many messages in a learning group chat will contain redundant information, which is not all the time related with a specific education subject and therefore, the activity of searching of that essential information is also time-consuming.

2.4.4 Lecturer–Student Relationships

Different points of view exist in literature. In general cases, it is believed that using social media the student-lecturer relationship can be improved. In other cases, there are findings (Camas et al, 2021) which show that faculty members are not convinced if by using social media impact on the relationship

between them will be positive or negative. The study showed that the education or accounting lecturers tend to not be too involved in their offline relationship.

2.4.5 Faculty Members' Online Identity

In higher education, professional online identities have become an important subject. A wrong worded post can get a professor fired. Faculty members have concerns regarding their online identity, they have the tendency to separate their professional life from personal life, as stated in G. Veletisanos (2012) study, it is present a necessity of intentionally maintaining professional and personal boundaries: *“I think that it’s okay for students to not know everything about their professor”*. The findings from Prescott’s (2014) study revealed that the concern about identities has a significant influence on the faculty members’ approaches to use these social platforms in teaching and learning activities. Regarding this, Jones et al. (2011) stated that there are issues raised by lecturers, because of potential for defamation of character and harassment — which represents an important issue regarding the integration of social networking. It’s true that some faculty members need some guidance in order to protect their identities in this context.

3 INTEGRATING SOCIAL NETWORKING INTO EDUCATION: A STUDENT’S PERSPECTIVE TO ENHANCE THE ACQUISITION OF SKILLS

As the world is evolving and new generations are digital ones, there are risks and opportunities in introducing more social media and LMS in the educational process. Our approach looks at the impact of those new platforms on student’s behaviours and goals. The objectives of learning haven’t changed much in the last years, but the means did. We will analyse the behaviour loop changes.

3.1 Description and Justification

The aims of this study are to investigate academics’ attitudes towards integrating social networking into Education, but from a student’s perspective, and more exactly how the usage of social media in their perception can enhance the acquisition of skills. After reviewing the literature, it can be suggested that there is great potential for social networking integration in

education. However, it is understandable the existence of obstacles which restricts its integration in education. In this paper, the focus will be on the student responses so that developers and other interested parties can use the information in order to know what to emphasize when creating a social networking-based learning tool in an educational setting for the parties studied.

3.2 Study's Objectives

Thus, 2 research questions were formulated each corresponding with an objective to be filled.

Research Questions:

1) What is students' attitude towards using social networking in education? 2) Is there a relationship between the factors analysed? Are the factors influencing each other?

Study's Objectives:

1) To ascertain the attitude of students towards using social networking in education 2) To identify the influence between the factors analysed (like interactivity, collaborativeness, enrolment and active performance) based on students' attitude.

3.3 Study Design and Method

The study was carried out at University Politehnica of Bucharest, Romania with 81 students of Faculty of Automatic Controls and Computers who formed the sample of this study. The sample consisted of 36 females and 45 males. The research design has included a structured questionnaire with quantitative responses, measured on a 6-point scale from 0 to 5 (0 = Not important, 1 = Fully disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Fully agree).

The questionnaire consisted of 20 questions classified in 5 categories/items (each with 4 questions) concerning 5 different learning aspects, such as interactivity with other students, interactivity with teachers, collaborative e-learning, active enrolment, learning performance. Cronbach's Alpha was calculated in order to see the internal consistency of the questionnaire and the value obtained was 0.773 which shows that the internal validity of the questionnaire is accepted. Table 1 illustrates the mapping of questionnaire items.

Table 1: Mapping of questionnaire items

Questionnaire Items	Questions
Interactivity with other students	Q:1, 2, 3, 4
Interactivity with teachers	Q:5, 6, 7, 8
Collaborative e-learning	Q:9,10, 11, 12
Active enrolment	Q:13, 14, 15, 16
Learning performance	Q17, 18, 19, 20

To follow the aims of the study, the analysis of the questionnaire was divided in 2 parts. First, a descriptive analysis was realized to see students' attitude toward integrating social networking, therefore every item (category) with its questions were represented with a stacked bar, to see the proportion of responses. Second, to see the correlation and therefore the influence between the items analysed, a Pearson coefficient analysis was used. All the analysis was conducted using the IBM SPSS statistical software. Based on the objectives of the study, the following model and hypotheses were developed. In Figure 1, the followed model and the hypotheses is represented:

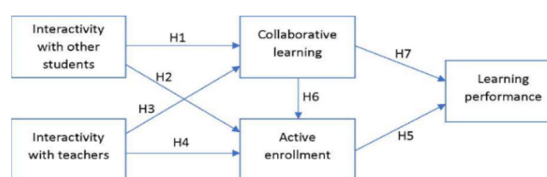


Figure 1: Social Media (SM) & Academic studies

Based on the objectives of the study, the following model and hypotheses were developed, as follows:

- H1:** Student interaction with other students via SM will increase student collaborative learning activity;
- H2:** Student interaction with other students via SM will increase student enrolment;
- H3:** Student interaction with teachers via SM will increase student collaborative learning activity;
- H4:** Student interaction with teachers via SM will increase student' enrolment
- H5:** Student enrolment via SM will improve student learning performance;
- H6:** Student collaborative learning activity via SM will improve student' enrolment;
- H7:** Student collaborative learning activity via SM will improve student learning performance.

4 DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

A number of 81 students formed the subjects of this research. The study was carried out at University Politehnica of Bucharest, Romania on students of Faculty of Automatic Controls and Computers.

Main results:

1. Conclusion 1: 95% of students see a positive impact of SM tools in student-student interactivity.

Positive impact on student-student interactivity

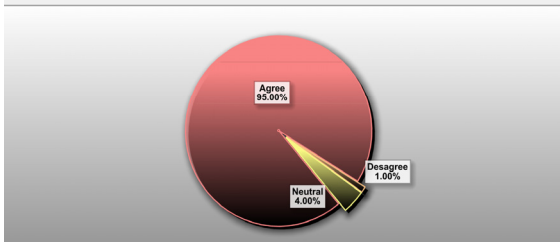


Figure 2: Conclusion 1

2. Conclusion 2(a): The opinions regarding student-teacher interaction are divided. As we can see 48% of students don't consider SM positive for student-teacher relationship, while 32% actually find employing SM tools useful in this regard.

Positive impact on student-teacher interaction

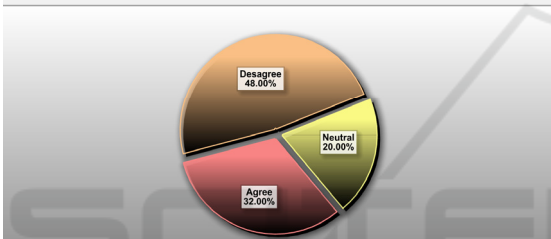


Figure 3: Conclusion 2(a)

Conclusion 2(b): A high % of students consider possible negative impacts on student-teacher interaction comes from the fact that 42% of the students agree there is a „to-friend/not-to-friend” dilemma between parties in SM.

3. Conclusion 3: 88% of the students agree that employing SM tools could easily facilitate collaborative learning due to the possibility of knowledge sharing and high accessibility.

There is a "to-friend/not-to-friend dilemma"

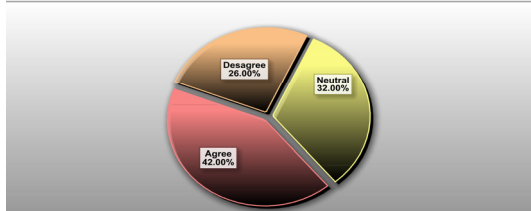


Figure 4: Conclusion 2 (b)

Positive impact on collaborative learning

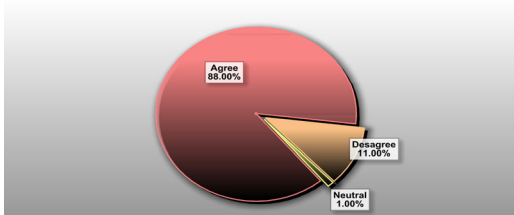


Figure 5: Conclusion 3(a)

4. Conclusion 4: In this case the opinions of students are divided too, however not so much: only 31% of students find a negative impact on active enrolment due to employment of SM tools due mostly to serial switching between tasks.

Positive impact on active enrollment

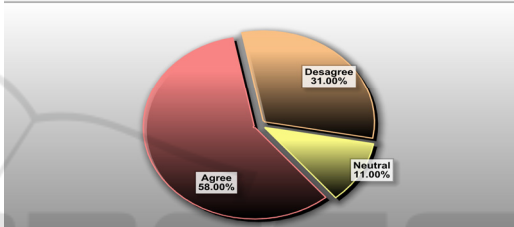


Figure 6: Conclusion 4 (a)

Conclusion 4(b): 40% of students consider the negative impact is due mostly to serial switching between tasks.

Negative impact due to serial switching between tasks

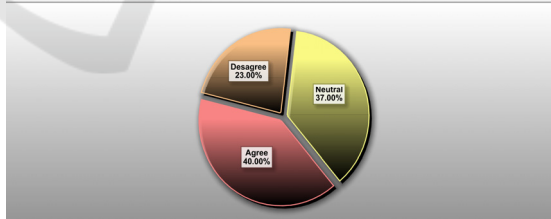


Figure 7: Conclusion 4(b):

5. Conclusion 5(a): Lastly, learning performance is one aspect that needs to be taken into consideration when talking about using SM in HE processes. According to the next graph, 63% of students agree that SM employment produces a positive impact on learning performance.

Positive impact of SM on learning performance

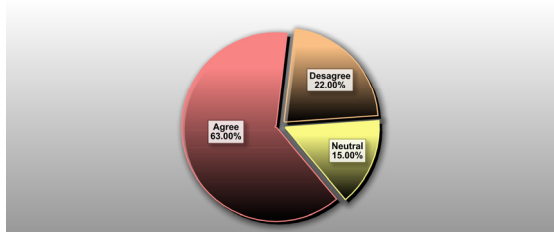


Figure 8: Conclusion 4

Conclusion 5(b): However, 34% also agree that there might be possible drawbacks, such as producing more knowledge than receiving, or social-media becoming more of a distraction rather than a tool to help its completion.

Negative impacts due to lack of concentration

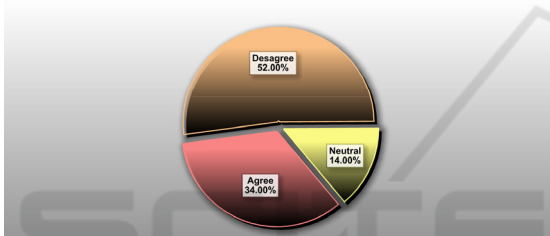


Figure 9: Conclusion 5

Finally, using a multiple regression and correlation analysis, all the 7 hypothesis statements were confirmed. Therefore, the variables chosen in the model do influence each other in a direct positive direction.

Table 2: Hypothesis validation

Hypoth	Pearson Coeff.	Regression Coeff.	Confirmation?
H1	0.415	0.556	Yes
H2	0.281	0.392	Yes
H3	0.316	0.243	Yes
H4	0.267	0.225	Yes
H5	0.416	0.274	Yes
H6	0.442	0.479	Yes
H7	0.418	0.284	Yes

5 CONCLUSIONS

This paper was concerned with exploring students' attitude toward integrating social networking in education and what influences exist between the

factors analysed, interactivity with students, interactivity with teachers, active enrolment, collaborative learning and learning performance.

In the first part, a theoretical conceptualization was conducted in order to understand how these social platforms are integrated in teaching practices, what advantages and disadvantages online learning have both for students and teachers and how social networking integration in education is perceived in other studies by other authors across the world.

In the last chapter, the case study offered an understanding from a student perspective about how they perceive the use of social media in their learning activity. The findings have indicated that the use of social media in education can offer a very good environment for their interactivity with other students and the collaborative learning activity, therefore most of the students have a positive attitude toward integrating social networking.

On the other hand, about interactivity with teachers, and learning performance there exist different opinions and some students may feel reluctant or not really conscious of SM contribution in these aspects, in this case action should be taken to raise the awareness of the students.

Finally, it can be concluded that from students' perspective the university is still in the initial stages of recognizing the educational benefits of social networking, but indeed it observed that it has been an attempt to accommodate students time by time with online learning and thus, a positive attitude being present.

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