

## **Social Media: An Effective Tool of Collaborative Learning in Distance Learning: Faculty and Scholars' Perspective**

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### **Abstract**

*Social media has become a useful tool for students' learning. The current study was conducted to find out the effectiveness of social media for collaborative learning in distance learning. It was a quantitative study in nature with a survey method used for data collection. Faculty and scholars' perspectives were explored regarding the topic. The population comprised faculty and M. Phil scholars of a distance education university in Pakistan. For the sample of the study, 20 faculty members from the field of education and 60 students pursuing their MPhil degrees were selected through a convenient sampling technique. Keeping in view the previous literature and experts' perspectives two self-developed questionnaires regarding the role of social media for its effectiveness in collaborative learning in distance education were used for both faculty and the students. Frequency means percentages and standard deviations were calculated to analyze the data using SPSS 20. The findings of the study showed that social media represents an innovative means for distance learning. Its tools can assist teachers in developing online activities to achieve learning goals. The interactive affordances of social media may increase students' motivation. It is recommended that guidance be provided to students on effectively applying social media to enhance participation and readiness for learning.*

**Keywords:** Social Media, Faculty, Scholars, Collaboration, Distance Learning

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### **1. Introduction and Literature Review**

Distance education affords students considerable freedom and flexibility, qualities which they greatly appreciate (Bosch, 2009). To foster social connections with friends, family, classmates and instructors, these learners rely heavily on internet-based social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, Wikipedia, Classmates.com and Yelp. Social media facilitates relationship building by connecting individuals with shared interests in virtual communities (Mazer et al., 2007).

By promoting collaboration and information exchange, social media technologies significantly enhance communication and knowledge sharing in distance learning environments (Alhabash &

Ma, 2017; Bosch, 2009). Facebook, the world's most widely used social media platform is especially impactful in stimulating learners and developing constructive student-teacher bonds through ongoing interactions. Bosch (2009) found that Facebook usage has a measurable positive effect on student learning outcomes. With unmatched global reach (Grandjean, 2016), Twitter also serves as an important communication and educational tool in distance education and research. YouTube's massive video library facilitates easy uploading and sharing of videos, making it a vital resource for informal and self-directed learning across many disciplines (Lee, 2017). WhatsApp's extreme efficiency as a messaging platform drives its widespread adoption by smartphone users. Social media platforms provide environments conducive for social interaction and facilitation of teaching and learning processes. Popular sites like Facebook, LinkedIn, MySpace, and Twitter enable information and resource sharing about academic subjects, businesses, marketing, entertainment, and more while connecting students, teachers, friends and family members virtually (Selwyn, 2012). Integrating social media with educational practices affords flexibility, decreased resource demands, and time freedom for users (Caraher & Braselman, 2010).

A study by the U.S. Department of Education revealed students learning online significantly outperformed their peers in conventional classrooms, demonstrating the achievement benefits of social media integration (Caraher & Braselman, 2010). Surveys indicate that 64% of students use social media multiple times monthly to communicate with peers and teachers about their studies, while 41% consult teaching faculty individually (Caraher & Braselman, 2010).

As web-based platforms for information exchange via small files, blogs facilitate communication, content creation, course design, and more in education contexts (Esbin, 2009). By connecting diverse groups and democratizing information dissemination, social networks have become invaluable for teaching and learning globally (Rovai, 2003). Students and instructors alike stand to benefit from social media integration.

Online video platforms like YouTube, with 24-hour average uploads every minute and 136 million viewers monthly as of 2009, have become predominant educational media enabling content access without barriers (Esbin, 2009). Streaming video lectures allow real-time questioning through services like Skype and options to record sessions for review. Such interactive formats help mitigate disengagement among students and teachers (Chen et al., 2008).

Social media also facilitates collaborative learning, which entails student-teacher interaction, peer engagement, and active learning (Chen et al., 2008). By collaborating to achieve shared goals, students can gain a critical perspective, reflect on their understanding, and construct knowledge (Brookfield, 2017). Since academic achievement has also been focused by different studies (Jamil & Raza, 2024; Shah et al., 2021). Participating in discussions enables students to solve problems through information gathering and viewpoint exchange (Rovai, 2003). Hence, collaborative learning on social media develops higher-order thinking that is necessary and has been focused in different studies regarding students in the Pakistani context (Jamil, 2021; Jamil et al., 2023; Jamil & Muhammad, 2019; Jamil et al., 2020; Jamil et al., 2021a, 2021b; Naseer et al., 2022).

## **2. Objectives of the study**

The Objectives of the study were as under:

1. To find out the effectiveness of social media for collaborative learning in distance education from M. Phil scholars' perspective.
2. To explore the effects of social media on collaborative learning in distance education from the faculty perspective.

## **3. Research Methodology**

The study was quantitative, so the survey method was used to collect data from participants. 20 faculty of education and 60 M. Phil scholars of a University in Islamabad were taken as samples of the study. Census sampling and convenient sampling techniques were used for sample election. Two self-developed questionnaires were used keeping in view the literature and experts' perspectives for the collection of data. In the questionnaires, items regarding the role of social media in distance education and its effectiveness in communicating with peers, discussion of ideas, thorough understanding of the topics, and suggestions for its effective use were asked to get responses from respondents. The questionnaire for the students was based on different responses from the faculty questionnaire 5-point Likert scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree was used. After pilot testing instrument was administered for data collection. Percentage and mean score statistics were used for data analysis.

#### 4. Findings of the Study

*Table 1: Questionnaire for students regarding usage of social media for learning*

##### **1. How often do you use the following social media applications for learning /study purposes?**

Statement	A few times a week	Once a week	A few times a month	Once a month	Less frequently than once a month
Use of social media apps for learning	35	1	6	4	-
	58%	2	10%	7	-
		5%		%	

##### **2. Which one of the following is used most frequently by you?**

	Google+	LinkedIn	Twitter	YouTube
Frequency	30	12	3	15
Percentage	50%	20%	5%	25%

##### **3. Which of the following is more useful for you as being distance learner?**

	Facebook	Google	LinkedIn	Twitter	You Tube
Frequency	20	25	6	2	7
Percentage	33%	42%	10%	3%	12%

##### **4. For what reason do you find social media helpful in your study/learning? (Select all possible)**

	Communication	Competitive Analysis	Conduct Research	Other(specify)
Frequency	40	12	6	2
Percentage	67%	20%	10%	3%

##### **5. How much social media is important in your study?**

	Very important	Somewhat important	Neither important nor unimportant	Somewhat unimportant
Frequency	24	18	12	6
Percentage	40%	30%	20%	10%

##### **6. To what extent you are satisfied with the results of your study by using social media?**

	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
Frequency	36	20	04	-	-
Percentage	60%	33%	7%		

**7. Which one is most valuable for you regarding social media?**

	Sending/Sharing	Receiving/Viewing	Value both equally
Frequency	35	20	05
Percentage	58%	33%	9%

**8. My institution's network services are available when I need them for coursework.**

	Always	Sometimes	Usually	Often	Never
Frequency	10	18	24	8	-
Percentage	17%	30%	40%	13%	-

**9. I skip classes when the material on the course is available online**

	Always	Sometimes	Usually	Often	Never
Frequency	3	5	12	12	18
Percentage	0.5%	9%	20%	20%	30%

**10. Being a distance learner describe your overall experience of using social media.**

	Very negative	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Very positive
Frequency	-	2	10	30	18
Percentage		3%	17%	50%	30%

**11. Which of the following social networking sites do you use most?**

	Facebook	LinkedIn	My space	Yahoo
Frequency	24	12	10	14
Percentage	40%	20%	17%	23%

**12. Approximately how many hours per day do you use social networking sites?**

	1 hour	2 hours	3 hours	4 hours
Frequency	30	18	6	4
Percentage	50%	33%	10%	7%

The questionnaire provides insights into social media usage for learning purposes among distance learning students. The majority of students (58%) use social media applications for learning a few times a week. YouTube and Google+ are the most frequently used platforms, by 25% and 50% of students respectively. This highlights their popularity and utility for learning. 42% of students find Google tools most useful as distance learners, given their wide range of offerings. Facebook is also valued, and seen as most useful by 33% of respondents. The top reason students use social media for learning is communication (67%). This enables collaborating and discussing academic

topics online. Competitive analysis and research are other, less common, reasons cited. Most students find social media very important (40%) or somewhat important (30%) for their studies. Additionally, 60% are very satisfied with their learning outcomes from social media usage. 58% value sending/sharing content more than receiving/viewing it. This suggests students actively leverage these platforms to connect with peers and participate in discussions. 40% of students say their institute's online services are usually available when needed. 30% say they are sometimes available, showing scope for improvement in uptime/reliability. The overall experience of using social media for learning is positive, as per 50%, or very positive, as per 30%, of students. 40% spend 1 hour daily on social platforms.

**Table 2: Teachers' perspective regarding the usage of social media for learning**

r.#	Statement	A	N	A	DA	% ean	l
1.	Social media allows me to collaborate with classmates as well as learners more frequently than conventional face-to-face interaction.					9 5.4%	4
		2				.36	
.	Social media allows me to communicate with students and colleagues.					1 00%	4
		2	0			.54	
	I can have more comprehensive discussions with my students and fellows using different applications of social media.					9 1%	4
		2				.00	
	Using Twitter and Facebook comments and discussion of ideas can be done more effectively.					9 6.3%	4
		0				.22	
	The use of YouTube or videos helped me in facilitating ample understanding of the subject matter taught and addressed in the class.					1 00%	4
		4				.18	
	sharing and discussing my ideas is an easy task for me by using social media.					9 1%	4
		0	0			.36	
.	Social media act as a mentor for me to efficiently reflect on the comments of others.					8 6.3%	4
		2				.13	
.	I respond more easily to online discussions through social media than face-to-face classes.					8 6.3%	4
		1				.31	
0	Highlight the significance of social media use for distant learners. Write down the demerits of social media use for distance learners.						
1	How does social media work effectively in distance education, Give suggestions.						

The questionnaire of teachers provides insights into their perspective on using social media for teaching distance learners. An overwhelming majority of teachers (95.4%-100%) agree that social media enables more frequent collaboration (Mean=4.36) and communication (Mean=4.54) with students, compared to traditional in-person classes. It allows more comprehensive discussions as

well, as agreed by 91% of respondents (Mean=4.00). Specifically, Twitter and Facebook are seen as effective platforms for interactive comments and discussions by 96.3% of teachers (Mean=4.22). Videos on YouTube/similar platforms greatly facilitate subject understanding, with full consensus (Mean=4.18). Sharing ideas becomes easier using social media platforms (91% agreement, Mean=4.36). 86.3% of teachers find social media enables easier response to online discussions versus in-person classes (Mean=4.31). Additionally, it acts as a good reflective tool for peer discussions (86.3% agree, Mean=4.13). Overall, teachers overwhelmingly endorse the utility of social media for enabling more frequent and fruitful interactions with distance learners versus the constraints of in-person teaching. It facilitates seamless collaborative discussions, idea exchange and subject learning - aspects valued highly for the distance education format. Videos and discussion forums on platforms like Facebook, YouTube and Twitter emerge as especially useful.

### **5. Conclusion**

The study showed that social media technology has made online collaboration, association, and teamwork very easy. For illustration, learners can work in association with each other for project completion. Students can get help in their studies by using spreadsheets, presentation slides, and more with Google. Students can also create presentations by using Web conferencing tools. Teaching faculty can use blogging micro-blogging and Twitter as additional teaching/learning resources for assisting their scholars to "tweet" all their academic-related activities. Discussions have become easy and can be linked with the outside real world using social media. Overall, social media has great importance in distance learning. It helped teachers as well as pupils experience new better ways of communication along with interaction to cope with the modern trends in distance education.

### **6. Discussion**

This study explored the relationship between social media and distance education. The findings showed that social media represents an innovative means for enhancing learning in distance education contexts. A majority of student respondents (58%) reported using social media applications for learning purposes a few times per week. Google+ was the most frequently used tool, followed by YouTube. Students found these social media platforms more useful than other networking sites for connecting with peers, accessing course content, conducting research, and meeting learning goals as distance learners. The results are aligned with recent research indicating high usage of social technologies in distance education to enable collaboration and knowledge sharing (Chen et al., 2008). Social interaction has been linked with greater engagement and motivation as well as reduced feelings of isolation among online learners (Rovai, 2003). The interactive capabilities of social platforms also allow students to communicate more frequently with a wider range of individuals regardless of geographic boundaries and time constraints. Such expanded peer networking opportunities as well as the availability of customized content on demand provide affordances that can increase perceptions of learning and improve outcomes. Additionally, a significant majority of instructors surveyed viewed social media as facilitating more regular and meaningful interactions with students at a distance as compared to traditional in-person formats. These findings concur with (Palloff & Pratt, 2010) who found online tools such as blogs and wikis promoted active learning and engagement among distributed participants. With Web 2.0 technologies, teachers can design interactive activities leveraging collective intelligence to achieve learning objectives. Students also have greater autonomy in regulating their technology use to meet self-determined goals. While recognizing the emerging educational potential of networked platforms, it is important to consider how to effectively leverage these affordances. As

stated, the open social environment does not intrinsically impart knowledge without structure and leadership. It is recommended to guide distance learners in adopting strategies for technology use that enhance meaningful participation and cognitive presence in online courses (Palloff & Pratt, 2010). Students still appear to place greater value on the information-sharing capabilities of social media rather than the collaborative affordances. Further research should investigate how to improve competencies for leveraging these participatory media to co-construct understanding as active learning communities.

## 7. Recommendations

1. Provide training to distance learners on how to effectively use social media for enhancing participation, collaboration, critical thinking, and deeper learning in online courses.
2. Integrate specific social media activities into the course curriculum to actively engage students, such as facilitating debates on Twitter, collaborative writing on Google Docs, peer video presentations, etc.
3. Develop best practice guidelines for instructors on pedagogical strategies leveraging social media tools to achieve defined learning outcomes and promote learner autonomy.
4. Conduct further research to track the impact of social media integration on student performance, satisfaction, persistence, and reducing isolation in distance education programs over time.
5. Increase access to networked mobile technologies on campus to allow a seamless transition between online and face-to-face interactive spaces for promoting blended learning.

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