

## Using Social Media Websites in Enhancing Learning and Interactions at Post Graduate Level

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### Abstract

*The excessive use of social media websites (SMW) may bring benefits or problems for students. The use of such websites may help students to inculcate the habits of team work and collaboration with their class fellows and teachers. The instructors at university level can make use of social media to enhance learning, to develop interaction, discussion, to increase collaboration and foster good interaction skills among students. The major advantage of using social media websites is an increase in the ability to skim and scan information. The present study was aimed to explore the potential of social media websites in relation to learning. It was conducted following the mixed method approach, using a questionnaire and interview. A sample of 646 students and 10 teachers was drawn. It was found that the potential of social media websites is well recognized in the educational sector. The sites provide access to much information, with Face book being the most popular among students and teachers for academic interaction. However, the cost of the equipment, along with problems of erratic electricity supplies and uncertainty over privacy settings, posed problems while there was evidence that the excessive use of these devices could create problems for students. The study recommended the appropriate use of social media resources to the students, and teachers.*

**Key words:** Social Media Websites, Interactions, Face book, Learning, Mobile Technologies

### Introduction

In the present age of technology, technological advances are revolutionizing the world. For many, social media websites have become an essential aspect of our lives. Social media websites are taken as all types of online technologies through which

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people interact with each other (Media Rating Council, 2015). In views of Colin *et al.* (2011), social media is defined as *applications of web based and mobile technologies to convert interaction into a dialogue*. It can be defined as any type of device which is used to generate information, share ideas and develop learning and interaction among people in virtual communities. By the types of media, social media falls within the area of electronic media. In views of Jones and Uribe-Jongbleod (2013) social media is a type of online media. This provides opportunities to its users to interact, exchange ideas, discuss and comment online.

In the past, people used to communicate with others using letters, cards, telegraph and telephone. Today, world has much changed and people correspond with others through social media websites like Facebook, Twitter, etc. (Millanovic, 2015). The internet has made the world smaller and information is only as far away as a single click. With social media websites, we have even more access to news and opinions than ever before.

Social media is being used for interacting others not only for business purpose but also for entertainment, educational and even sharing information to unknown persons. Educationists and students are also using it to disseminate and receive academic information with one another. They have awareness about effective role of social media in developing interactions and improving learning. Much literature on the topic is available in result of research in the field.

Markovic (2010) noted that institutes of higher education are making use of online learning or e-learning. Sabol and Pianta (2012) are in view that interaction between students and their teachers is important to enhance interaction with each other that is important for academic and personality development of students. Therefore, Barczyk, and Duncan (2013) observed that many teachers consider use of a social media websites like Facebook as a tool to enhance learning and interaction among students and teachers. Roblyer, Marsena, Witty, and Roblyer (2010) revealed that 297,000 teachers are Facebook members and it is not only a means of social interaction but also a source of exchanging educational material among students and teachers.

Mazer, Murphy and Simonds (2007) has reported the use of social media as an important tool to improve rapport and enthusiasm among students and teachers. Colin *et al.* (2011) see social media websites being of value in delivering educational outcomes, as well as encouraging supportive relationships, identity formation, and promoting a sense of belonging and self-esteem among users.

Yamamichi (2011) noted the two-way interaction aspect that is possible though use of social media, very different from books and papers. By using forms of social media, students get opportunities to verify information and share with friends and teachers on the basis of give and take. They develop their interaction with people that

are not near to them. Sometimes they interact to those whom they have not ever seen or met. On the other hand, they learn to analyze materials found from different sources. These develop habit of discovering correct information and learn by trial and error. This is not possible by just attending classes in the institution or by reading course books.

Introvert students feel confident to communicate while using the social media websites. Moody (2010) suggested that more introvert and shy students might make use of social media websites. Curtis (2014) argued that teachers should interact with students via a social media group without exposing private information. Therefore, a site like Facebook helps in academic discussion through group formation among students and teachers.

Haque (2014) observed that Facebook is the most used site in Pakistan, with 15.4 million being involved (8.5% people of the population of Pakistan), with Pakistan ranking 7<sup>th</sup> number among the top 10 countries making use of the internet in Asia. Zafras (2011) found that 79% university students in Pakistan make use of Facebook. Khan (2012) noted that 60% male students claimed to make use of social media websites for educational purposes while Maqsood (2008) found that Pakistan university students consider social media websites as platforms to express their personalities. However, there is little evidence about the ways social media websites are being used in developing learning and interaction in Pakistan, along with an exploration of any difficulties encountered by the students and teachers.

In considering potentials and problems, it has to be recognized that the internet has offered to students an unparalleled access to information. Information can be accessed and shared easily. It encourages collaboration and, perhaps, team work. However, it can make students too dependent on others and over-reliant on the collations of information developed by others. The easy access to information and insights can undermine the benefits that students can gain when they have to spend time gathering, sifting and seeking to make sense of information. Indeed, the social media websites cannot be seen as any replacement for direct face to face communications.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Present study was conducted to analyze use of social media sites for enhancing learning and interactions at post graduate level. In this study, patterns of use of social media websites in context of enhancing learning and interactions were attempted to explore. In addition, investigations of problems of students in utilizing social media websites were focused.

### **Objectives of the study**

Three broad aims were in mind in this study. Working with postgraduate students, the objectives of study were to:

1. Explore patterns of use of social media websites in the context of enhancing learning and interactions.
2. Identify the important advantages of social media websites for students
3. Explore the difficulties of students in using social media websites.

### **Research Questions of the Study**

Keeping in mind the objectives of the study, present study focused to search answers of following research questions:

1. How do postgraduate students perceive the potential of social media websites in enhancing learning and interactions?
2. How do the teachers of postgraduate students perceive the potential of social media websites in enhancing learning and interactions?
3. How do postgraduate students perceive the difficulties of using social media websites in enhancing learning and interactions?
4. How do the teachers perceive the difficulties of using social media websites in enhancing learning and interactions?

### **Research Methodology**

In present study, survey method of descriptive research was adopted. Population of this study was postgraduate level students and their teachers across a range of the public and private universities. At sampling stage, a sample of 646 master's level students and 10 teachers from three districts of Punjab, Pakistan was chosen on the basis of convenience of researchers. Random sampling was not done because approach and cooperation from randomly selected sample was not possible for researchers.

Tools of the study were a questionnaire and interview. The questionnaire involved three sections, with a total of 35 items. Items on questionnaire were on 4 point likert scale about main constructs inquired about the uses of Social media websites and its advantages and limitations in using social media websites. The interviews were semi-structured in nature. Content validity of items of the tools was evaluated by the expert opinion method involving five experts in education. Internal consistency of questionnaire was calculated applying Cronbach's Alpha method that was 0.79.

Data was collected approaching sample of the study personally. Respondents were requested to fill in questionnaire objectively without showing their personal identity on the script. For analysis of data, frequencies of responses were calculated and chi square statistics were applied.

Inevitably, self-report, though either questionnaire or interview is open to potential inaccuracy in that respondents may not be able to see themselves as they really

are but more in line with what they wish to be. However, in this study, there is no reason to think that this will be a major source of error in that the aims are simply to gain insights into how students and the teachers see the potential and problem associated with the use of social media websites in the context of learning at postgraduate level. In this, there was no personal or social pressure to respond in any ways other than with totally honesty. Thus, validity of results does not seem a major issue. Given the very large samples of students, reliability is highly unlikely to be an issue either (Reid, 2003). However, overall, it has to be recognized that self-report only gives an indication of what respondents think and that this may for not correspond precisely to the situation. Therefore, calculated value of  $r = 0.79$  (Cronbach Alpha Value) from students' responses indicated good level of consistency in responses. In the light of this, results from students' questionnaire and interview of their teachers are discussed with caution in the following.

### **Results and Interpretation**

Results of the study based on data collected from questionnaire and interview. Therefore, results of the study have presented in the following separately.

### **Findings from Questionnaire**

The first group of questions considered the potential usefulness of social media websites. The results about the potential uses of social media have showed in table 1

Table 1

*Opinions about usefulness of social media websites*

<i>Statements</i>	<i>SA</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>DA</i>	<i>SDA</i>
<i>n = 646</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>
Social media has become an integral part of my life	37	53	7	3
I enjoy using social media websites	25	59	12	4
I mostly use social media through mobile internet	33	40	22	5
The use of social media websites is not a complete wastage of time	20	53	21	6
I use social media websites to get new information	35	46	14	5
Social media websites help me to make new friends	22	43	28	7
I am informed of the homework assigned by teachers	24	50	19	7
Social media websites help me in developing research skills	30	50	15	5
Social media websites facilitate me in my interaction with teachers	18	45	30	7
I prefer getting new information using social media websites instead of reading books	25	41	25	9

Note: SA = Strongly Agreed, A= Agreed, DA= Disagreed, SDA= Strongly Disagreed

According to table1, Overall, respondents hold positive views about the potential of social media websites seeing them as personally useful as well as helpful in relation to studies. However, significant minorities do not see social media websites helpful in making new friends while the use of such sites for interactions with teachers is not supported by a large minority.

The next group of items considered Facebook specifically. This section considered the potential uses of facebook in developing students-teacher interaction. The results have given in table 2.

Table 2  
*The use of Facebook in developing students-teachers interaction*

<i>Statements</i>	<i>SA</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>DA</i>	<i>SDA</i>
<i>n = 646</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>
Facebook helps me in sharing information related to my courses	24	46	22	8
I use Facebook to collaborate with my class fellows	25	50	17	8
Facebook is easy and quick means to update my knowledge	20	47	26	7
Facebook discussion forum helps me to discuss any topic with class fellows and teachers	17	42	31	10
Facebook has changed my perceptions about a course	12	33	45	10
Facebook facilitates me in learning my subjects	14	34	40	12
Facebook use is helpful for shy students to express themselves	20	46	25	9
I use Facebook to post pictures / diagrams	24	42	24	10
Facebook inculcates healthy student teacher interaction	18	38	36	8
I use Facebook to share links with my friends	28	47	18	7
I use Facebook to get news updates	26	46	20	8
Facebook facilitates me to complete my home work	13	30	45	12
Facebook helps me to contribute educational resources	15	41	33	11
Facebook is good to interact with teachers outside of campus	16	45	26	13
Facebook play vital role in my campus life	17	30	39	14

Note: SA= Strongly Agreed, A= Agreed, DA= Disagreed, SDA= Strongly Disagreed

According to table 2, overall, students reacted positively to the majority of statements made. However, in a number of areas related to learning, Facebook is clearly not seen as a key way forward by large numbers. Thus, in the context of their own learning, large proportions are unconvinced that Facebook facilitates learning, help with homework completion, or play a vital role in learning. At the same time, large proportions do not see Facebook laying any major role in learning and interactions while it has not altered perceptions about the courses undertaken or offered educational resources. All this suggests that the use of Facebook varies very considerably across the student population. Perhaps its major use lies in academic interactions (social or educational) but, for many, its impact may be minimal out with social interactions.

The next group of questions explored the difficulties and limitations in using social media websites that students could identify. The results have shown in table 3.

**Table 3**  
*Think about possible difficulties or limitations in using social media websites*

<i>Statements</i>	<i>SA</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>DA</i>	<i>SDA</i>
<i>n = 646</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>
Heavy cost to purchase computer is a difficulty in using social media websites	26	44	23	7
Shortage of electricity is a difficulty in using social media websites	28	44	24	4
Privacy setting of Facebook account is a problem for its users	20	38	31	11
Excessive use of Facebook creates health problem for its users	29	43	22	6
Having too many friends through social media websites likely to be more harmful	28	44	24	4
Facebook detracts my attention from studies	29	43	22	6
Facebook use has isolated me	18	45	28	9
Students using social media websites feel hesitation in face to face interaction	22	44	27	7
People with fake details can create problem for others	43	34	16	7
Lack of clear cut policies about use of social media websites can create difficulties for students	28	45	20	7

Note: SA= Strongly Agreed, A= Agreed, DA= Disagreed, SDA= Strongly Disagreed

According to table 3, Students identify some practical problems and this includes financial costs, electricity supply problems, privacy settings and unethical use of the systems. In addition, many students are aware that social media websites can generate dangers of social isolation, leaving social contacts to be electronic rather than face to face. Perhaps, this is how they see the sites as unhealthy. They are also aware that extensive use of such sites can take them away for their studies.

With such a large sample, it was possible to compare the response patterns for males and females. This was carried out using chi-square as a contingency test (see Reid, 2003). Table 4 shows the items where statistically significant differences were observed in relation to gender of students.

Table 4  
*Gender Differences in the Preference of Using Social Media Websites*

<i>Statements</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>DA</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>SA</i>	$\chi^2$	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Social media websites help me to make new friends	Female	26	124	157	73	11.6	3	p< 0.01
	Male	17	57	121	71			
Social media websites help me in developing research skills	Female	17	38	206	119	17.4	3	p< 0.05
	Male	14	57	118	77			
Heavy cost to purchase computer is a difficulty in using social media websites	Female	23	74	189	94	11.8	3	p< 0.01
	Male	20	72	97	77			
Shortage of electricity is a difficulty in using social media websites	Female	16	72	185	107	12.6	3	p< 0.01
	Male	12	80	100	74			
Excessive use of Facebook creates health problem for its users	Female	33	71	157	119	10.7	3	p< 0.05
	Male	12	70	118	66			
I use Facebook to collaborate with my class fellows	Female	39	68	181	92	8.3	3	p< 0.05
	Male	12	42	142	70			
Facebook is good to	Female	52	109	167	52	8.8	3	p< 0.05



interact with teachers outside of campus	Male	29	57	126	54			
Lack of clear cut policies about use of social media websites can create difficulties for students	Female	24	64	167	125	13.5	3	p< 0.01
	Male	23	66	120	57			
I prefer getting new information using social media websites instead of reading books	Female	24	89	166	101	8.9	3	p< 0.05
	Male	32	70	103	161			

According to table 4, the statements are highly significant and women response of agreement is high than males except for the last one that is “I prefer getting new information using social media websites instead of reading books”. About the limitations for use of social media for students female agreement pattern is high than of men in perspectives to; developing research skill, paying cost of computer and facing problems by using social media due to lack of clear cut policies about use of social media websites . Furthermore, social media websites facilitate female students in their work to make new friends, collaborate with class fellows and interact with teachers.

Tables 5 to 6 show a comparison between the subgroups on the basis of area of study of students. Only those items where significant differences were found are being shown.

*Table 5*  
*Area of Study Differences in the Preference of Using Social Media Websites*

<i>Statements</i>	<i>Area of study</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>SA</i>	$\chi^2$	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Social media has become an integral part of my life	Science	4	17	74	62	17.52	8	p< 0.05
	Social sciences	11	13	113	58			
	Education	7	14	155	117			
I mostly use social media through mobile internet	science	9	50	48	50	15.61	6	p< 0.05
	Social sciences	10	33	84	69			
	Education	12	61	129	91			
Social media websites	Science	9	33	69	46	16.49	6	p<

help me in developing research skills	Social sciences	13	33	97	53	0.05
	Education	9	29	158	97	

According to table 5, the students belongs to Education department, agreement response pattern is more likely higher than sciences and social sciences students. This explores that students of education have more trend to use social media websites, use social media through mobile internet and feel social media websites helpful in developing research skills.

*Table 6*

*Area of Study Differences in the difficulties of Using Social Media Websites*

<i>Statements</i>	<i>Area of study</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>DA</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>SA</i>	$\chi^2$	<i>df</i>	<i>P</i>
Shortage of electricity is a difficulty in using social media websites	Science	11	43	60	43	14.5	6	P<0.05
	Social sciences	9	54	88	45			
	Education	8	55	137	93			
Lack of clear cut policies about use of social media websites can create difficulties for students	Science	14	27	80	36	19.6	6	P<0.01
	Social sciences	11	50	93	42			
	Education	22	53	114	104			

According to table 6, the response pattern of agreement in education department is higher than the other two categories. Shortage of electricity and lack of clear cut policies can create problems for students and of education sector.

### **Findings from the teachers Interview data**

A semi-structured interview was conducted with 10 teachers teaching postgraduate classes, the participants all having experience of more than 3 years. All teachers were qualified with M.Sc./M.Phil and IT trained. Mostly teachers were in the 30 to 35 years age range. They were teaching a variety of subjects. The interview data were transcribed and the transcripts were read carefully to identify common ideas that were being expressed. In analyzing and coding data, the teachers were described as T1, T2, and T3 ....etc. The data suggested the following three broad themes:

- a. Uses of SMW in developing student-teacher integration
- b. The role of SMW in developing learning and interaction
- c. Limitations/Disadvantages of SMW in educational context at post graduate level

### **Uses of SMW in developing student-teacher integration**

The majority of the response from interview data shows that the teachers agree that social media websites are popular among students and teachers and useful in various ways as said: *Social media (Facebook) has been proved in my case an interactive instruction medium for contents and students respond accordingly* (T1). Thus, teachers at university level make frequent use of social media websites for delivering lectures and they also share different types of material in audio or videos form, seeing this as time saving and interesting for both the students and teachers.

There was a time when physical presence of teachers and students was integral for the accomplishment of teaching-learning process. Now, teachers can teach students sitting in far off areas safely. For example, said one: *This tool of social media can be every effective for remote areas where physically it is impossible to conduct regular classes due to lack of security, infrastructures and other feasibilities* (T5). Thus, distance and location do not pose problems. Also, the teachers use SMW to discuss different topics via Facebook groups and share course related material with students even out of campus. Moreover, one said as: *physical presence is not necessary. In classroom we do not have appropriate tools. If students missed classes even then they can persuade flow. Social media websites can be used to show videos and chat* (T10). Thus, the use of SMW is beneficial for those students who missed some of the lectures due to some reasons, personal problems or health issues etc.

### **The role of SMW in developing learning and interactions**

A majority of the teachers appreciated the role of social media websites in classroom activities and developing learning and interactions among students and teachers. The teachers perceived that the Facebook is helpful in generating interaction with students. For example, said by T8: *I use Facebook and Twitter as supportive aid to upload assignment to Facebook groups. I use Facebook for discussion and interaction with students* (T8). Thus, Facebook help teachers to interact easily with students.

Teachers said that they used social media websites for delivering instructions, receiving students' assignments and providing feedback on their work, for example: *Social media tools are highly interactive for Pakistani environment. The teachers can be in a better position to keep track of students all educational activities* (T4). Thus, using social media websites, the teachers and students can obtain latest information about their studies. Also, they thought that students mostly use social media websites

for leisure time or entertainment but they thought that the mindset could be changed easily. For example, one said: *Students mostly use SMW for entertainment but we can mold their habits to adopt SMW to get latest information* (T8). However, this view may be optimistic.

Thus, social media websites are the best means of obtaining latest course related information without limitation of time and place. Furthermore, some of the interviewees expressed that the use of social media websites help in watching students' activities: *Students' activities can be easily tracked and saved for future or later validation and analysis* (T9). Therefore, a trend of electronic learning is on rise in the world. Students and teachers can easily interact with each other which are helpful for students' adjustment in this modern world of technology.

### **Problems in using Social media websites**

According to some interviewees, incoming students have to face difficulties in the use of social media websites but they felt that this problem could be solved by proper training and guidance by their teachers, as said by one: *Newcomers can feel difficulties and this is only in the beginning. Mentors can demonstrate or upload a video lecture about how to effectively use social media in teaching-learning process* (T5). Thus, newcomers feel difficulties in using social media websites. Also, articulated by T10 as: *There is awareness of technology in developed countries but in developing countries like Pakistan there is lack of awareness and training to use latest technology* (T10). Thus, Facebook is not helpful because lack of awareness about the use of latest technology.

One of interviewees criticized the government on not developing policies regarding the use of social media websites in education departments and universities and on misuse of funds for that purpose. He pointed out that *libraries are not equipped with the latest books. These are not up to date; our students do not have other resources* (T3). Thus, our libraries are not up to date according to current needs of students. The majority of the interviewees expressed that *social media websites use may divert student attention from their studies: SMW are used to perform a lot of tasks. SMW can divert your attention from your goal and may reduce your performance* (T7). Thus, the biggest disadvantage of social media websites could be that our students may get distract from their true direction and performance.

### **Discussion**

This study found that the students and teachers highly appreciate the importance of social media websites in educational program. This study was aimed to explore students' perceptions of the social media websites usage and difficulties. Firstly, the research question inquired about the students' perceptions of using social media websites. Secondly, the research questions inquired about the student's perceptions of using Facebook. Thirdly, the research questions inquired about the

difficulties in using SMW.

This study shows that teachers are in the favor of using social media websites for the exchange of educational materials among students similar with the findings of Roblyer *et al.* (2010) revealed that 297,000 teachers are Facebook members and their study express that the Facebook is not only the source of socializing things but also the means of exchanging educational material between teachers and students. Maintained the above, Barczyk and Duncan (2013) also revealed that Facebook is a great tool to enhance the teaching learning process in classroom and outside the campus.

The results shows that figure which is similar with this findings of Gafni and Derin (2012) stated that social media websites facilitate students to give and get feedback and new suggestions for their studies and they also enhance the attraction among student and teachers relationship. Maintained the above, Onomo (2012) suggested that social media websites are the great means of interaction with others, organization of data, and collection of data and exchange of information with other concerns. And this study is also revealed that by the student's agreement social media websites are a great source of getting, organizing, interpreting and analysis of data.

Crook (2008) argued teachers are mostly interested to mix up SMW in classroom to make interaction abilities with students and social networking sites (SNS) facilitate university students in interaction with other students and teachers, and help in psychological development of students. This finding is also similar with this research social media websites are used to enhance the educational program. Maintained that, the results show the student will know how he can take it whether as a source of entertainment or for education purpose. That is also similar with (Crook, 2008). This research also revealed that students used Facebook as it is the integral part of their lives and it is also an easy access of material to them. And they use it frequently at any time anywhere from any source similar to the findings of Kirschner and Karpinski (2010). Roblyer *et al.*, (2010) described that students consider Facebook an integral part of lives because it provides an easy access to educational resources. The findings show that the SMW play a vital role in campus life. According to Jou, Chuang and Wu (2010) previous studies clearly reflect that SNSs have become vital and essential components of education. Also SMW helps the learner to make adjustments with their peers of emotional, educational and behavioral different patterns to sort out (Fovet, 2009).

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

From the students and teachers data, the use of SMW is well perceived. The students are more satisfied in working with the help of social media websites. Both the teachers and students use Facebook for close collaboration with their colleagues and friends. Facebook helps participants to make new friends and facilitate students to interact with their teachers. They highly enhance the teaching-learning process and help the students to keep in touch with their teachers outside the campus. SMW introduce

the new educational trends and all the individuals are well aware of all the happenings. SMW are important in the production of fruitful material. They are a quick and direct means of academic interaction. On the contrary, the heavy cost of these devices create hurdles for using them and shortage of electricity, privacy settings, excessive use of these devices creates problems of health for students.

It is clear that the postgraduate students and their teachers are very familiar with the new technologies and social network sites. There is considerable potential in such developments in that there is easy student access to information on almost anything, albeit with risks of plagiarism. Such sites also offer useful ways for teachers to make contact with students, perhaps to give instructions, to issue information, as well as for teachers to receive work from students and offer feedback. However, there are dangers and personal information is best never included.

While there are dangers related to privacy and excessive time spent on social network sites, the technologies do offer potential for the learning process. However, such sites must never replace the personal contact between students and their teachers (or indeed, student-student contact). Further work is needed to establish the ways by which such new technologies are changing student work and learning habits, with potential benefits and losses. In addition, the cost implications need explored to see whether some students are facing unfair disadvantages.

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