

From Likes to Learning: The Educational Benefits of Social Media for Students

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Abstract: This research reviews the educational benefits of social media for students, focusing on two key aspects: providing user-generated content and improving academic performance. A review of recent literature reveals that platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Facebook offer diverse learning opportunities across subjects and support various learning styles through multimedia content, enhancing engagement and knowledge retention. Social media facilitates collaborative learning, enabling peer-to-peer interactions and fostering critical thinking skills. Studies show improved academic performance when social media is integrated into learning. The interactive nature of these platforms allows students to recognize context and memorize content for longer periods. The limitation of this research is further highlighted in the paper. This research recommends further empirical studies to validate the benefits outlined and explore additional factors influencing social media's educational impact. The integration of social media into education represents a significant shift in learning approaches, offering innovative ways to present educational content aligned with digital natives' preferences. While challenges exist, the strategic implementation of social media in educational settings holds promise for substantial improvements in academic outcomes. The integration of TikTok and YouTube into online learning environments offers significant benefits for students across diverse subjects. Educators should incorporate these platforms into their curricula to create more engaging and interactive learning experiences, particularly in science, technology, and engineering fields. Ongoing research and refinement are crucial to leveraging these tools effectively, ensuring they enhance rather than detract from the learning experience.

Keywords: *Online Learning, Social Media, Students, Academic Performance, Learning Content.*

1. Introduction

Social media has now become a natural part of both elementary and higher education students' daily lives, and its use is more of a norm than an exception (Ramzan et al., 2023). Research has highlighted multiple ways in which students rely on social media (both in elementary and higher education). For example, it supports health-related information seeking (Qi & Omar, 2020) and academic tasks outside of the classroom, especially for peer-to-peer interactions. Students also use these platforms to communicate with teachers about schoolwork, engage in discussions (Wang et al., 2023), share educational content (Al-Maaroof et al., 2021), and boost their academic performance (Alsabti et al., 2017; Tran et al., 2023). Due to the convenience and accessibility of social media, it has become a valuable tool for both students and teachers. As a result, it has been shown to improve learning experiences and positively impact students' academic performance (Lien et al., 2017). Besides, it strengthens cooperation and sharing among peers (Al-Sabti et al., 2017) and increases academic performance (Liu et al., 2017).

For example, in countries such as Tanzania, the use of social media is believed to provide an exciting learning platform where students are able to learn syllabi in the form of audio-visual materials, enhancing their learning experience (Kessy & Pessa, 2022). In Nigeria, Ngelale (2019) stressed that the use of social media in Nigeria improved academic performance among private school students. In Malaysia, online learning was first implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic. Students from the age of seven years old who were enrolled in primary school, till those who were 30 years old and above (postgraduate in a higher learning institution) had no other options but to learn online. Online learning and online education are viewed as a must and not an option for students in Malaysia (Malaysian Investment Development Authority, 2021). Noteworthy, the pandemic has forced educational institutions in Malaysia to begin the initiatives of adopting e-learning approaches through the utilization of various online platforms, including social media. Hence, the use of social media as an online learning tool has become a new norm among students in Malaysia. For example, in Malaysia, the use of TikTok makes learning science subjects fun and improves memorization (Shaafi et al., 2023), while

learning a language using YouTube increases understanding in literacy-based subjects such as the English language (Yunus et al., 2019), resulting in improved students' academic performance.

Surprisingly, in developed countries such as Japan, technological capabilities in each region differ. Differences exist in the level of technological capabilities between elementary and higher education. Elementary education in Japan, comprising elementary school, relies on the use of paper learning medium compared to higher education levels (Isha & Wibawarta, 2023). It stresses the importance of using traditional classrooms to enhance students' academic performance, with the use of social media serving as supportive teaching materials (Karapolat et al., 2024).

Past studies have focused on the impact of social media on children (Kessy & Pessa, 2022) and students in higher education institutions (Nurcahyo et al., 2017; Samad et al., 2019). Unfortunately, the importance of research on the benefits of social media on the academic performance of elementary and higher education students, which this study appraises, has been overlooked. Due to the shortage of articles, this paper attempts to review past studies related to the benefits of social media among elementary and higher education students, specifically focusing on the benefits of user-generated content and its impact on improving students' academic performance. At the end of this paper, limitations, recommendations for researchers, and implications for practitioners in the education field are provided.

2. Students' benefits of using social media

Social media is a necessity for students today. Among the benefits of using social media for students are providing user-generated content and improving academic performance. This section will examine these benefits in detail, specifically from students' perspectives.

Provide user-generated content

The rise of user-generated content on social media platforms has transformed the way students experience online learning. Platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Facebook have reshaped how educational information is shared and consumed, each offering distinct benefits that cater to different learning styles and preferences.

YouTube, for instance, has become a powerful learning tool, giving students access to a vast collection of detailed and specialized knowledge. Its long-form videos allow for in-depth exploration of complex topics, making it especially valuable for subjects that require detailed explanations or visual demonstrations. TikTok, on the other hand, traditionally viewed as an entertainment platform, is increasingly being recognized for its educational potential. While some argue that TikTok primarily serves leisure purposes rather than serious learning (Al-Maarof et al., 2021), more recent studies challenge this perspective. Lan et al. (2024) point out that TikTok's casual and authentic style of communication resonates with learners, especially those who find traditional teaching approaches less engaging.

Research also supports TikTok's ability to boost student engagement and knowledge acquisition. Rajan and Ismail (2022) found that user-generated educational content on TikTok fosters creativity and encourages a student-centered learning experience, making subjects like literature more enjoyable and easier to grasp. The short-form, creative video style of TikTok can simplify complex concepts, while Ardiana and Ananda (2022) emphasize that it increases student activity and improves learning outcomes. Their findings reveal that students who used TikTok for educational purposes became more interested and involved in learning, ultimately achieving better academic results than peers who did not use the platform. This highlights how TikTok's interactive and entertaining nature can drive motivation and participation in education.

Beyond general knowledge sharing, social media has also been tailored for subject-specific education. For example, Mulenga and Marbán (2020) highlight how platforms like TikTok, YouTube, and Facebook have been used to create customized mathematics content, addressing the unique challenges faced by school students. This personalized approach enhances the effectiveness of math education by aligning lessons with students' varying learning needs and abilities. Despite these benefits, concerns remain about the quality and reliability of user-generated educational content. Because anyone can create and share content, both educators and students need to critically evaluate the accuracy and credibility of the information to ensure it supports sound

academic learning. This scrutiny is vital to safeguard the integrity of education.

Additionally, the influence of social media on students' attention spans, critical thinking, and overall academic performance cannot be overlooked. While TikTok's short videos make learning more accessible and fun, they may also reduce students' capacity to engage deeply with long-form academic material. Ongoing research is therefore necessary to understand the long-term impact of these platforms on cognitive and academic development.

Overall, integrating user-generated content into education brings both opportunities and challenges. On the positive side, it can make learning more engaging, accessible, and adaptable to individual needs. On the other hand, it demands careful curation and guidance to ensure that content meets academic standards. As social media continues to evolve, its role in education will likely expand, potentially leading to new platform features, tools, and teaching strategies designed specifically to harness the strengths of user-generated content.

Improve academic performance

The use of social media in online learning has also been proven to improve students' academic performance due to several factors, such as supporting diverse learning styles, recognizing the context and memorizing it longer, and collaborative learning.

Supporting diverse learning styles

Learning styles play a crucial role in how individuals perceive and process information in educational settings. These styles can be broadly categorized into three main types: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic (Gilakjani, 2012). Understanding and catering to these diverse learning styles is essential for educators to maximize their students' potential and enhance the learning experience. The ability of teachers to match students' learning styles with their teaching style and approach by using the most effective social media platform will enable them to develop best-fit learning styles according to their students' needs (Balfaqeeh, 2017), resulting in optimization of learning outcomes and increased knowledge acquisition within short periods (Soetan et al., 2020).

Noting the importance of matching teaching styles with students' learning styles, the use of social media platforms such as TikTok has gained momentum in education. TikTok offers unique and advanced means to accommodate different learning styles simultaneously. TikTok, in particular, has been embraced in both language learning and general education. Research shows that students respond positively to TikTok as a teaching aid, especially in English language classrooms (Yang, 2020). Beyond classroom walls, learners also view it as a helpful strategy for studying English independently. What makes TikTok appealing in this context is its ability to combine education with entertainment, which helps reduce boredom and sustain motivation (Salsabila et al., 2021).

Visual learners, for example, primarily rely on visual cues to absorb information effectively. They tend to excel when presented with diagrams, charts, images, and written text. For these learners, the content of TikTok in the short-form video format allows for the presentation of information in a visually engaging manner, incorporating graphics, text overlays, and dynamic visuals that appeal to this learning style.

On the other hand, auditory learners absorb information most effectively through listening and verbal interaction. They excel in settings where knowledge is shared orally, such as lectures, discussions, or audio-based materials. Noting that, for these learners, the audio elements of TikTok—spoken explanations, background music, and sound effects—offer an added layer of support, enhancing comprehension and memory retention.

Kinesthetic learners, by contrast, prefer hands-on experiences and physical involvement. They learn best through movement, touch, and practical application of concepts. TikTok interactive tools, such as content creation and participation in challenges, provide opportunities for active engagement, making the learning process more dynamic.

Besides, TikTok also supports skill development, particularly in language learning. Its short, accessible content exposes learners to authentic English usage, aiding in the improvement of speaking and pronunciation skills in a more natural way (Salsabila et al., 2021). This is especially beneficial for both visual and auditory learners, who can observe and listen to native speakers for accurate pronunciation and intonation. The platform's effectiveness is not limited to language education; studies also report positive outcomes in other disciplines, such as Civics in vocational schools (Hermanto & Nursafitri, 2024). Furthermore, there is evidence linking TikTok use with overall improvements in learning achievement (Manurung et al., 2023). These findings highlight the platform's potential to support student performance across a variety of subjects when integrated purposefully.

In sum, one of TikTok's greatest strengths lies in its ability to simultaneously address multiple learning styles. Visual learners benefit from its imagery and effects, auditory learners from its spoken and musical components, while language learners can strengthen pronunciation by observing and listening to authentic speech (Paz-Domínguez et al., 2023). The platform's combination of visuals, narration, and sound effects creates a multisensory learning experience that reinforces understanding and retention (Lan et al., 2024). Even kinesthetic learners can find opportunities for engagement, as TikTok encourages interaction through movement, participation in challenges, and content creation—offering a digital form of hands-on learning (Alzubi, 2023).

Recognizing the context and memorizing it longer

The intensive use of Facebook and YouTube among students improves their academic performance, especially their working memory, spelling, and verbal skills, due to the mutual cognitive influence and increased active participation in the learning process (Astatke et al., 2021). The short contents, funny photos, and videos on social media enable students to recognize the context and memorize it longer (Al-Sabti et al., 2017; Pham Manh et al., 2023).

For example, in the Philippines, the use of YouTube enables young students (aged three to six years old) to learn the English language in a more fun and engaging way (Kilag et al., 2023). According to the study, YouTube educational videos taught the students the English language at different levels, ranging from basic vocabulary lessons to more complex grammar and sentence structure lessons with songs and nursery rhymes. The integration of auditory and visual enhances these students' English language skills, enabling improvements in vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation skills. In Bangladesh, Tahmina (2023) revealed that although YouTube videos are capable of assisting students in learning the English language, the materials provided on YouTube are unable to help these students complete their English language writing assignments.

In the same vein, in Malaysia, the use of YouTube, WhatsApp, and Instagram was also able to assist Malaysian elementary school students in learning the English language (Yunus et al., 2019) and improve their academic performance. Besides literacy-based subjects, the use of social media, such as TikTok, has proven to create fun in learning science-based subjects such as chemistry, making it easy to comprehend and increase the memorization of the chemistry syllabus among Malaysian students (Shaafi et al., 2023).

Collaborative learning

Teaching students in the 21st century poses numerous challenges, especially with the need for these teachers to keep abreast with the latest technology, such as social media, and incorporate it into their classes. Nonetheless, the benefits of integrating social media into the classroom environment outweigh its drawbacks. The integration of social media platforms in online learning promotes collaborative learning between teachers and students and between students and students. With the existence of collaborative learning, learning difficulties can be solved swiftly (Misman et al., 2019). For example, the use of WhatsApp and Telegram among students learning physics increases their participation in class discussions, resulting in an improvement in students' academic performance (Yusoff & Abdul Hamid, 2022).

In the same vein, peer-assisted learning inculcates the development of critical thinking and knowledge integration processes, enabling students to think, synthesize different perspectives from their peers, and achieve shared knowledge for solving mathematical problems (Cardino & Cruz, 2020), resulting in improved students' academic performance (Wang et al., 2023; Aba & Makinde, 2023).

Besides, students joining groups created on Facebook for educational purposes perform better academically compared to those who do not join such groups. The improved performance is due to the ability of Facebook to facilitate a sense of community, which encourages students' active engagement and deepens students' learning. The spontaneous peer teaching and learning through Facebook has been able to facilitate students' learning process in an impromptu manner, without the need for their teacher's presence (Kasperski & Blau, 2023).

3. Limitations and Recommendations

This paper primarily examines the advantages of incorporating social media into online learning environments, with a specific emphasis on two key aspects: the provision of specialized content and the enhancement of academic performance among elementary and higher education students. However, the scope of this research is limited, and future studies should expand their focus to encompass additional factors that may benefit students when utilizing social media platforms in their educational pursuits. These factors could include enhanced communication channels between students and instructors, improved access to a wide array of educational resources, and opportunities for global networking, all of which may prove advantageous to students engaging with social media in their online learning experiences.

Moreover, the current study is confined to a review of existing literature pertaining to the benefits of social media integration in online learning. To further advance this field of research, future researchers should consider conducting both qualitative and quantitative studies to explore and empirically validate the benefits outlined in this paper. Such research could involve surveys, interviews, or experimental designs to gather primary data on students' experiences and outcomes when using social media for educational purposes. Additionally, longitudinal studies could be implemented to assess the long-term impact of social media use on academic performance and skill development. By employing diverse research methodologies, scholars can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the role of social media in online learning and its potential to enhance educational outcomes across various disciplines and student populations.

4. Implications to Practitioners

The integration of social media platforms into online learning environments has emerged as a significant trend in contemporary education, offering substantial benefits to a wide range of students. This innovative approach to learning has garnered attention from researchers and educators alike, who have identified various social media platforms as valuable tools for enhancing the educational experience across diverse subjects.

Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) subjects in school have gained prominence in the realm of science and technology education is TikTok. This short-form video-sharing application has proven particularly effective in engaging students with complex scientific concepts, especially in chemistry. The platform's format allows for concise, visually appealing explanations of chemical processes, reactions, and theories, making these often-challenging topics more accessible and engaging for learners. The benefits of social media integration extend beyond physical sciences to other STEM fields. Cardino and Cruz (2020) highlight the positive impact of social media use on mathematics education, further reinforcing the argument for a more comprehensive adoption of these platforms across various disciplines.

For engineering students grappling with science and technology-based subjects such as physics, mathematics, and chemistry, the incorporation of social media platforms like TikTok and YouTube into their study routines can significantly enhance their understanding and retention of complex concepts. These platforms offer diverse perspectives, visual demonstrations, and real-world applications of theoretical principles, complementing traditional textbook learning. By leveraging these multimedia resources, students can gain a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of their subjects, often finding explanations that resonate with their individual learning styles.

Similarly, language-based subjects have recognized YouTube as a powerful resource. The platform's vast repository of educational content, ranging from grammar tutorials to pronunciation guides and literature analyses, provides students with a wealth of supplementary materials to support their language learning

journey. The ability to pause, rewind, and revisit content at their own pace allows for a more personalized and effective learning experience.

Recognizing the potential of these platforms, it is incumbent upon academicians, including teachers and lecturers specializing in language, engineering, and science and technology-based subjects, to incorporate learning materials from YouTube and TikTok into their curricula. This approach can foster a more engaging and interactive learning environment, particularly appealing to the digital-native generation of students. By integrating these familiar platforms into their teaching methodologies, educators can create a more dynamic and enjoyable learning experience, potentially increasing student engagement and motivation.

Moreover, the importance of exposing science teachers to a variety of social media platforms cannot be overstated. As Danso and Mushayikwa (2017) assert, implementing diverse social media tools in physical science classrooms can accommodate students with different learning style preferences, ultimately enhancing learners' achievement in physical science. This finding underscores the necessity for educators to be well-versed in various social media platforms and their potential applications in educational settings.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the evolution of social media from a novel concept to an integral component of students' educational experiences represents a significant shift in the educational landscape. The multifaceted applications of social media platforms for delivering specialized content and enhancing academic performance have been extensively documented across diverse educational contexts. Numerous studies have highlighted the substantial benefits of social media integration in education, including improvements in academic performance, promotion of collaborative learning environments, and facilitation of meaningful interactions between peers and educators.

Notably, popular platforms such as TikTok and YouTube have demonstrated tangible improvements in students' comprehension and retention of complex subjects, particularly in science and language learning. These platforms offer innovative ways to present educational content, catering to various learning styles and preferences. The visual and interactive nature of these media aligns well with the learning habits of contemporary students, who are often characterized as digital natives.

Despite the wealth of research examining social media's impact on students in higher education settings, there remains a significant gap in understanding its potential benefits for students. This paper has sought to address this gap by conducting a comprehensive review of existing literature and emphasizing the advantages of social media in providing specialized, targeted content and boosting students' academic performance across different age groups and educational levels.

The strategic implementation of social media in educational settings holds promise for substantial improvements in academic outcomes. However, it is crucial to recognize that the effective integration of these tools requires ongoing research and refinement. Educators and policymakers must continue to explore optimal ways to leverage social media platforms, ensuring that their use aligns with pedagogical goals and enhances, rather than detracts from, the learning experience.

Future research should focus on developing best practices for social media integration across various educational contexts, considering factors such as age-appropriate content, privacy concerns, and the balance between online and traditional learning methods. Additionally, longitudinal studies examining the long-term effects of social media use in education would provide valuable insights into its sustained impact on academic achievement and skill development.

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