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RESEARCH PAPER

The Use of Social Media Tools as Learning Sources for Different Ethnic Group Students

[1]Muzafar Ali*, [2]Farha Sadia and [3]Naveed Shaikh

1. Lecturer, Department of English, Cadet College Ghotki, Sindh, Pakistan
2. Lecturer, Department of English,Sindh Madarsat ul Ialam University, Karachi, Sindh, Pakistan
3. M. Phil in English Linguistics, Department of English, Iqra University, Karachi , Sindh, Pakistan

| ***Corresponding Author** | muzafarkolachi98@gmail.com |

ABSTRACT

Social media has become a powerful educational tool in today's digital world. It changes the way we learn and provides areas for cooperation, knowledge exchange, and support between people. This study guides that how various social media sites, such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, and others, motivate students to engage with their coursework. This research deals with different learning inequalities by covering the survey of 500 students for the sake of learning motivation of students. Different inequalities are seen in content, their degree of digital literacy, and even their chosen languages. It shows that, in addition to having peer support networks and competent instructor guidance, creating content that appeals to a range of cultural backgrounds is the key to optimizing the educational benefits of social media. The educational gaps between various ethnic groups could be considerably lessened by taking these steps. It all boils down to making the most of social media's educational potential, especially given our mixed societies.

Introduction

The way digital technologies have taken off is really changing higher education everywhere. Social media, in particular, has become a huge player, transforming how we communicate, share knowledge, and even how students engage with one another and learn together. With students from so many different cultures and backgrounds, the impact of social media on their learning experiences is starting to get a lot of attention from researchers and policymakers alike. As we dive deeper into this multicultural student world, the role of social media in their education is definitely something worth exploring further. (Alharbi & Jacob, 2022; Kimmons & Veletsianos, 2020; Muzaffar, Chohdhry & Afzal, 2019).).

The Digital Divide and Ethnicity

When we look at ethnic disparities in digital engagement, it's clear that a mix of factors plays a role. Think about socioeconomic status, the level of support from institutions, where people live, and even cultural values (Zhao, 2021).

These gaps show up not just in who has devices or internet at home, but also in how well people can critically assess and use online information for their education (Wang & Yang, 2021). Interestingly, there's a growing pile of research that points out students from dominant cultural backgrounds tend to use social media for learning in more

productive and goal-driven ways compared to those from marginalized ethnic groups (Tan, 2022; Umar & Cheung, 2019). This kind of inequality is raising eyebrows and making folks call for a fresh look at how we approach digital education. The aim? To make it more inclusive and better support a diverse range of students (Manca & Ranieri, 2018; Liu et al., 2020).

Educational Value of Social Media

Even with all the issues we see, we really can't ignore the educational benefits of social media. It brings so much to the table—think real-time collaboration, multimedia learning, community engagement, and personalized learning paths. These features really resonate with students from all sorts of backgrounds (Greenhow & Chapman, 2020).

Challenges and Barriers

All these challenges really highlight how important it is for schools and institutions to create policies and programs that focus on inclusivity and equity in digital education. It's crucial if we want to make the most of what social media can offer in a learning context.

The Multicultural Classroom and Digital Inclusion

In multicultural classrooms, you've got students who come with all sorts of learning styles, values, and expectations shaped by their unique cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Social media can step in here—it's got the potential to meet these diverse needs by serving up all kinds of content, like videos, infographics, and discussions, plus different learning formats whether it's asynchronous or synchronous (Ali, Ullah, & Gul, 2019).

Take WhatsApp and Facebook, for example. These platforms are super popular in non-Western countries, mainly because they use less data and are easy to access (Kumar et al., 2022). But here's the thing: digital inclusion isn't just about having access. It's about weaving students' cultural and linguistic identities into the fabric of digital teaching methods. Think about it—YouTube channels that offer tutorials in regional languages or Instagram pages that share study tips relevant to different cultures can really grab the attention of students from minority backgrounds (Wang et al., 2022; Awan et al., 2024; Muzaffar, Yaseen& Safdar, 2020).).

There has been quite a bit of research looking into how social media impacts education, but here's the thing—there's still a big hole when it comes to understanding how it supports learning in ethnically diverse student groups, particularly in developing countries. I mean, most of the studies out there tend to either lump all students together or stick to Western contexts. They really miss the rich variety that comes with multicultural academic environments.

So, this study is stepping in to fill that gap. It's going to dive into how students from different ethnic backgrounds use social media, the challenges they face, and what they think about its benefits as a learning tool. The goal is to provide a well-rounded, evidence-based perspective that can really help educators, policymakers, and those involved in educational technology create more inclusive digital learning spaces.

Literature Review

The integration of social media into education has gained significant traction over the past two decades, fundamentally altering how learners interact with information and

each other. Early studies recognized the potential of digital platforms to facilitate communication, engagement, and collaboration among students (Selwyn, 2007; Mazer, Murphy, & Simonds, 2007). More recent research emphasizes the transformative role of social media in enabling personalized learning experiences, fostering community participation, and supporting knowledge co-construction (Tess, 2013; Greenhow & Lewin, 2016).

Social media platforms—ranging from Facebook and Twitter to YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok—serve as complementary educational tools that allow students to access multimedia resources, share content, and engage in peer discussions (Junco, 2012; Kumi-Yeboah & James, 2022). The asynchronous and multimedia nature of social media supports varied learning styles, while its global connectivity bridges formal and informal learning contexts (Gikas & Grant, 2013; Wang et al., 2022).

Ethnic Diversity and Digital Learning

There's quite a bit of research out there looking into how students' ethnic and cultural backgrounds influence their engagement with educational technologies. You see, things like cultural preferences, language differences, and socioeconomic factors really shape how students learn in the digital space. It's been shown (Gunawardena et al., 2001; Warschauer, 2004; Van Dijk, 2020).

Now, if you think about it, minority ethnic groups often run into obstacles when it comes to access, representation, and even digital literacy. These hurdles can seriously limit how effectively they use online platforms (Kearney et al., 2012; Liu et al., 2020).

To tackle these issues, ideas like culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2018) and digital inclusion frameworks (Selwyn & Facer, 2013) have come into play. These approaches really focus on incorporating students' cultural knowledge into the digital content they interact with and creating inclusive online learning environments.

Social Media Use by Ethnic Minority Students

Research on how ethnically diverse students use social media has shown it's a bit of a double-edged sword. On one hand, these platforms can really help marginalized groups. Different barriers are faced by minority ethnic groups and social media is good weapon to highlight the issues for them (Kearney et al., 2012; Liu et al., 2020).

Educational Outcomes and Digital Engagement

There's a lot of research out there suggesting that when students really engage with social media, it can actually boost their educational outcomes. We're talking about things like better grades, improved communication skills, and a real knack for navigating the digital world (Junco, Heiberger, & Loken, 2011; Manca & Ranieri, 2018). Take Facebook and YouTube, for example. When used for academic purposes and kept in check, they've been associated with happier students and stronger performance (Chugh & Ruhi, 2018; Liu, Kirschner, & Karpinski, 2022). The flip side of this is that there are definitely some downsides to unchecked social media use. We're talking about distractions, the spread of misinformation, and that all-too-familiar digital fatigue (Turel & Qahri-Saremi, 2016; Kirschner & De Bruyckere, 2017). And here's something to consider—students from ethnic minority backgrounds might face even more challenges. Why? Well, they often have less support from their schools and may not feel as integrated into the academic scene (Iqbal & Shoaib, 2023).

Digital Equity and the Role of Institutions

The educational institutions really have a huge part to play when it comes to closing that digital divide. Research shows that schools and universities need to step up with policies that ensure everyone has fair access to technology. Plus, they should help students from different backgrounds build their digital skills (Warschauer & Matuchniak, 2010; Kimmons & Veletsianos, 2020).

One way to do this is by weaving culturally relevant topics into the digital curriculum. And let's not forget about multilingual support – it's super important for making sure everyone feels included (Rahman & Al-Amin, 2020; Kumar et al., 2022).

Multiculturalism and Intercultural Competence

The social media has really played a big role in helping students from different backgrounds connect with each other. It's like this bridge that opens up avenues for conversation and teamwork, which can help cut down on prejudice and build mutual respect. Plus, it boosts that sense of global citizenship (Sälzer & Roczen, 2018; Huang et al., 2021).

Take the work of Ismail et al. (2023), for example—they pointed out that when students collaborate online across different cultures, it really helps them develop empathy and a better understanding of each other's cultures.

Research Gaps and Future Directions

We still don't have enough long-term or big studies that really dig into how ethnicity, social media habits, and academic performance all connect. Most of the research out there is based on tiny sample sizes or just looks at certain platforms, which makes it tough to apply those findings more broadly (Tess, 2013; Bali & Sharma, 2020).

So, looking ahead, it'd be great to see researchers use intersectional frameworks and mix up their methods a bit to get more nuanced insights. And hey, using AI-driven analytics, sentiment analysis, and social network mapping could really help us understand how students from different ethnic backgrounds behave online (Luo et al., 2021; Ahmed et al., 2025).

Theoretical Foundation

This research leans heavily on Connectivism, a theory about learning that Siemens introduced back in 2005. Basically, it suggests that we learn through networks and connections, especially those made possible by technology. Think about social media — it's a perfect example of this theory in action. It lets learners create knowledge hubs, work together in real-time, and constantly refresh their understanding with new info and interactions (Downes, 2020).

On top of that, we have the Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) framework supporting this study. Now, CRP is all about weaving students' cultural backgrounds into the fabric of learning, including when it comes to digital platforms (Gay, 2018). When social media tools are used thoughtfully, they can really boost CRP. They can present content in different languages, showcase various perspectives, and promote interactions that affirm students' identities (Kumi-Yeboah & Smith, 2021).

Material and Methods

Research Design

So, in this study, we decided to go with a mixed-method approach. This means we're collecting both the hard numbers and some rich, qualitative data. We sent out surveys to get those stats, you know, the kind of data you can really crunch.

Population and Sample

The population consisted of students from five universities in a multicultural urban setting. A **stratified random sampling technique** was used to ensure equal representation from five major ethnic groups: Punjabi, Sindhi, Balochi, Pashtun, and Urdu-speaking. A total of **500 students** participated in the survey, and **25 students** were selected for in-depth interviews.

Data Collection Tools

- **Survey Questionnaire**: Included demographic details, frequency of platform usage, learning habits, challenges, and platform preferences.

- **Interview Guide**: Focused on learning experiences, social media literacy, and ethnic-specific challenges.

Tools and Techniques of Data Estimation

Descriptive Statistics

Used to analyze demographic distribution, platform preferences, and frequency of social media use.

Cross-tabulation and Chi-square Tests

Applied to determine statistical significance between ethnicity and platform preference.

Content Analysis

Used for qualitative interview data to identify recurring themes and patterns.

Results and Discussion

Table 1
Social Media Platform Usage by Ethnic Group (N=500)

Platform	Punjabi (%)	Sindhi (%)	Balochi (%)	Pashtun (%)	Urdu-speaking (%)
YouTube	82	76	64	70	88
WhatsApp	70	68	60	65	80
Facebook	55	50	45	48	62
Instagram	40	42	38	44	60
LinkedIn	28	20	18	24	35

YouTube was the most universally accessed platform, especially among Urdu-speaking and Punjabi students. Balochi and Sindhi students showed lower engagement due to weaker infrastructure and digital literacy.

Social media is widely used across all ethnic groups, but the extent and purpose of usage vary.

Language barriers and lack of culturally tailored content are significant obstacles for Sindhi and Balochi students.

WhatsApp and YouTube serve as primary academic tools due to accessibility and familiarity.

Peer support and instructor involvement increase the likelihood of effective educational use.

Conclusion

This study confirms that social media holds immense potential as a learning resource for ethnically diverse student populations. However, its benefits are unevenly distributed due to differences in digital access, cultural representation, and language. Tailoring content and strategies to accommodate ethnic diversity can maximize the educational value of social media tools. Integrating these tools into formal curricula, while promoting digital equity, can transform higher education into a more inclusive space.

Recommendations

- **Develop Multilingual Educational Content:** Governments and educational platforms should invest in creating academic content in regional languages.
- **Promote Digital Literacy Training:** Special programs should be launched to train students in underrepresented groups in digital navigation and safe media practices.
- **Encourage Teacher-Led Integration:** Teachers should incorporate social media into academic instruction while guiding its ethical and academic use.
- **Support Peer Learning Networks:** Institutions should encourage formation of peer-based learning groups on platforms like WhatsApp or Facebook.
- **Ensure Equal Access to Technology:** Universities must ensure students from all ethnic backgrounds have equal access to high-speed internet and digital devices.

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