

The Role of Social Media in Fostering Academic Engagement in Higher Education: A Systematic Review

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Abstract

The speedy evolution of social media has completely reconfigured communication and learning landscapes, especially those of postsecondary education. This systematic review examines social media's use to enhance the academic system for teachers and learners globally. Drawing from a systematic review of peer-reviewed articles within the last decade, the article emphasizes the types of platforms and teaching methods for academic use of social media. Findings indicate that social media technologies (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and more recently, Instagram and LinkedIn) are becoming ever more popular as a setting for collaborative learning, peer-to-peer interaction, knowledge-sharing, and student engagement. The Literature review also points towards geographical differences in uptake, the role of digital literacy, and challenges over distraction, privacy, and institutional controls. This study, along with the potential negative effects, suggests a significant contribution to institutions, policymakers, and researchers who wish to introduce social media strategically in higher education to improve student engagement and academic performance. Evidence indicates that, in addition to other platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, and Instagram as of late), Instagram and TikTok are highly utilized to support real-time communication, collaborative learning environments, peer support, sharing academic materials, and engagement with the teacher and peers. Lastly, the analysis indicates that social media affects learners' motivation, engagement, reflective thinking, and accomplishment if utilized in organized and pedagogically supported formats.

Keywords: Social Media, Higher Education, Academic Engagement, Online Learning, Digital Tools, Social Networking Platforms.

Introduction

Over the last decade, there has been a historic increase in academic attention paid to the use of social media in institutions of higher learning, specifically its potential to maximize academic participation. This literature indicates a growing recognition of social media as a means not only of communication but of a complex platform with instructional potential.

The international landscape of social media research in education shows a geographically diverse but increasing concentration. Bibliometric analyses reveal that nations like the United States are the leaders in research production, and developing countries, like India and the Middle East, are increasingly becoming producers in this area. Methodologically, quantitative studies, and specifically survey research, predominate within the literature and account for about 70% of all scholarship. These studies tend to examine user perception, usage behaviors, and self-reported learning outcomes. Nonetheless, the use of perception-based data tends to preclude an understanding of the long-term and contextual efficacy of social media within academic settings. Qualitative and mixed-method methods, while not as common, have also provided insights into the socio-cultural and institutional forces that underpin social media usage within higher education.

A wide collection of podiums—for instance, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, and more recently, TikTok have been examined in the framework of higher education. These platforms are employed for a variety of academic purposes, including peer communication, resource sharing, collaborative learning, real-time updates, and instructor-student interaction. Facebook groups and WhatsApp communities, for instance, have emerged as effective extensions of the classroom, while YouTube and Instagram support multimodal content delivery through videos, infographics, and stories. Professional platforms like LinkedIn are utilized for networking, e-portfolios, and knowledge exchange. TikTok, although less formally integrated, has shown potential in promoting engagement through short, creative academic content. The literature identifies several key mechanisms through which social media enhances academic engagement. These include the facilitation of communication between peers and faculty, the promotion of collaborative learning environments, support for knowledge sharing, and the development of digital learning communities. Qualitative case studies highlight that social media fosters a participatory culture wherein learners are not submissive receivers of information but lively contributors to content creation and peer support. The affordances of social media for real-time feedback, co-creation, and peer assessment contribute positively to student motivation and reflective thinking. Particularly for Generation Z learners, who are accustomed to visually rich and interactive content, platforms like Instagram and YouTube offer appealing modes of engagement that align with their learning preferences. Empirical studies provide evidence of the positive influence of social media on learning outcomes, particularly in enhancing student motivation, participation, and academic achievement. Research from Malaysian and Chinese higher education contexts, for example, has demonstrated improvements in collaborative learning and intrinsic motivation when social media is integrated into instructional strategies. Moreover, the use of social media for accessing academic materials and maintaining peer connections has been associated with marginal yet noteworthy improvements in academic performance. The incorporation of social media with entrepreneurial and digital competencies further supports holistic student development.

Literature Review

Recent international events, like the COVID-19 pandemic, have sped up the usage of social media in higher education. It is now a key part of modern academia worldwide. This analysis summarizes global research trends that examine how social media tools enhance academic engagement, the methods used, the main benefits, challenges, and implications for future teaching. Many educational practices have moved towards more interactive, collaborative, and student-centered approaches because social media platforms have changed communication and interaction methods. During the COVID-19 pandemic, social media shifted from being just an extra communication tool to becoming vital for remote learning in higher education institutions worldwide. This change sparked significant research into their use and teaching potential. The widespread influence of social media is similar to the "digital native" trend, where younger students naturally use these platforms in their academic and personal lives. Social media's broad use makes it a powerful tool for improving communication, academic involvement, and group learning. The study of social media's influence on higher education is growing quickly. Bibliometric analyses show a diverse but increasing body of research. A large review of 519 articles highlighted that the USA leads in publication output, indicating a geographic focus for research activity [3]. Systematic reviews that cover hundreds of articles show that although there is significant international research interest, many areas, including India and the Middle East, still have a limited foundation of theory and data [4], [5]. Most studies use quantitative survey designs, making up about 70% of the total. While qualitative and mixed methods are noticeably less represented. The dominance of surveys shows a tendency to capture user perceptions and self-reported behaviors. However, this reliance points to gaps in gaining a deep, context-sensitive understanding [5]. Academic engagement through social media appears in several ways: improving communication channels, encouraging collaboration, supporting resource sharing, and helping create learning

communities. Formal and informal learning interactions are facilitated by platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and an education centred learning management system (LMS) with incorporated social tools [1]. In qualitative case studies, the participatory learning cultures formed by social media are illuminated. To illustrate, student and faculty-led groups on Facebook continue the dialog on the outside of the classroom walls, where the purpose of building community and adding to the scholarly discourse continue [2]. Moreover, the capacity of social media to give real-time feedback, co-produce and assess the peer participation is also conducive to active engagement and encouragement that has a positive effect on academic performance [6]. The degree of visual storytelling and multimedia options offered by social media (e.g., infographics, videos, podcasts) facilitate the enhancement of learning pleasure as well as creativity. That suits the nature of Generation Z students extra well as they are accustomed to energetic content presentation. Studies indicate that social media advances team learning, shares information, and encourages students, and all these enhance academic engagement. As an example, research in Malaysian higher institutions reveals that the impacts of using social media are very high with respect to collaborative learning among learners and researchers resulting in superior engagement and course outcomes. Also, the students are more creative and are intrinsically motivated when involved in the learning process in social media integrated, but such results can be influenced by such aspects as cyberbullying.

Moreover, there is strong evidence that the use of social media promotes self-guided participation by students, with Facebook being the most common place where students interact with peers and course content, all of which weakly relate to higher academic performance [9]. Further evidence that combining social media use with other skill sets can improve academic performance, especially for Generation Z students, comes from the interaction between social media learning and entrepreneurial orientation [10]. Notwithstanding the advantages, several obstacles make it more difficult to successfully incorporate social media into higher education. Significant obstacles are posed by technological obstacles, such as inadequate infrastructure, digital divides, and data privacy concerns, particularly in developing nations and organisations with underfunded ICT systems [11], [12]. The extent of knowledge regarding real behavioural patterns and long-term academic impact is also constrained by the widespread use of surveys. Furthermore, uncontrolled or unfavorable socially used media can lead to loss of collaboration with studies, creating procrastination and distractions, which affect his or her mental health and academic achievements negatively [13]. It is also being cautioned to create a balance between involvement and well-being protection because of the psychological condition known as Social Media Disorder (SMD) or the compulsive use and fear of missing out (FoMO) that have been associated with low student well-being [14]. It can be noticed that there is a gap in the explicit alignment of the use of social media towards the acceptable learning theories. There is deficiency of a clear theory-based application of social media in education, which is also manifested through most studies which rely heavily on technology acceptance models but do not incorporate pedagogical theories extensively [15].

Social media is a critical part of marketing and branding campaigns in place at institutions of higher learning, as well as its direct application in pedagogy. It is empirically based research that shows universities are increasingly using social media to enhance student recruitment, build their institutional identity, and to promote engagement among both the current and prospective students. The feeling of identity alignment and the sense of belonging to a group has been successfully established through the use of content strategies that involve multimedia, visual storytelling as well as user-generated content [16], [17]. Besides providing avenues of safe communications and campus security awareness, a lot of research conducted in different settings like Romania, Hungary, and Pakistan depict the influence of social media in developing an online community where students develop a greater degree of attachment and involvement at their institutional institutions [18], [19]. The behavioural intentions and satisfaction of the adoption of social media in classroom by students has been measured with the help of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and Information System Success Models (ISSM). Such frameworks cast light upon such factors influencing the degree of acceptance and engagement as the perceived utility, usability, the playfulness, and the quality of the system [20], [12]. Nonetheless, more detailed models are required, incorporating both pedagogical and technological as well as generally content knowledge (i.e. TPACK) to improve a more in depth comprehension, as they often fail on linking pedagogical theories [21].

Methodology

The systematic literature review (SLR) methodology is used in this review paper to develop the body of knowledge on the role of social media in enhancing the academic activity in the tertiary educational sector. The SLR approach allows locating finding, and analysing relevant research states across multiple scholarly sources in a well-ordered, transparent and repeatable review procedure.

Research Design

The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework came in handy to provide a foundation to the research design to ensure clarity in the selection, screening and inclusion of the studies. This was aimed at looking into the use of social media sites to encourage academic participation in higher education, assess their pedagogical impacts, and identify their benefits and challenges associated with them.

Search Approach

Key academic databased were used for extensive search which includes:

- Scopus
- Web of Science
- ERIC
- Google Scholar
- PubMed (where applicable)

Given Keywords and Boolean combinations are used in the study:

“Social Media” AND “Higher Education” AND (“Academic Engagement” OR “Student Engagement” OR “Learning Outcomes” OR “Collaborative Learning”).

Data Extraction and Analysis

Data Collection and Screening Process

The initial search of the databases has returned more than 1,000 records. The titles and abstracts of 40 articles were reviewed using the inclusion criteria, and they are now on the shortlist. All the found articles were subjected to a full-text screening, and only an extremely selective and very high-quality publications that fully answered the objectives of the study were finally selected.

There were four stages in the screening process as specified below:

1. Identification of records from databases.
2. Removal of duplicates
3. Abstract and title screening
4. Full-text eligibility assessment

5.

Data Analysis:

Each selected study had variables recorded according to a structured data extraction sheet as follows:

- Research design and methodology
- Type of social media platform used
- Key findings related to academic engagement
- Reported benefits, limitations, and theoretical models.

Interpretation of Results

This part provides an elaborate explanation of the visual data presentation generated based on the literature review of how social media can be used to create more interaction with academics within the higher education system. The visual representation of the data on the literature reviewed on the use of social media to enhance academic interaction within the higher education institution is thoroughly described in the following section. The observation patterns and themes of international research are correlated in intensive tables, flowcharts, and conceptual diagrams to attract attention to significant trends, pedagogical implications, platform-specific, and theoretical roots.

Table 1 indicates the diverse social media tools and their course applications in the Globe.

Platforms	Academic Uses
Facebook	Peer interaction, course discussions, and academic community building
Twitter	Micro-learning, sharing academic updates, hashtags for topics
YouTube	Tutorial videos, visual explanations, and a flipped classroom support
Instagram	Visual storytelling, real-time class updates, content sharing
LinkedIn	Professional development, networking, and academic portfolios
TikTok	Short explainer videos, creative learning, and student engagement
WhatsApp	Group chats, real-time queries, and assignment reminders

The Table 1, provides an overview of the major social media sites, and their special academic uses. Some of the platforms are Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, LinkedIn, TikTok, and WhatsApp. There is immense diversity in educational purposes as indicated in the table. Facebook can often be utilised to form communities of learning and to continue group discussions beyond the classroom, providing a channel of informal communication between teachers and students to share information. Twitter is useful for academic microblogging, making announcements in real time, and sharing links to scholarly content using hashtags, despite its character limit. YouTube facilitates the delivery of content in visual formats, including explainer videos, lectures, and tutorials—all of which are particularly useful in flipped classroom models. TikTok and Instagram are becoming more popular platforms for sharing short-form academic content and visual content, respectively. Real-time, captivating communication that fits the preferred content styles of the students is what makes them appealing. LinkedIn is useful for academic networking and professional development, especially for faculty and postgraduate students. Direct communication, group discussions, file sharing, and assignment or presentation coordination are the main uses for WhatsApp.

The table highlights that no single platform can fulfil all academic tasks; instead, each offers unique affordances that, when properly applied, can improve motivation, engagement, and teamwork.

Table 2: Benefits vs. Challenges of Social Media in Higher Education

Benefits	Challenges
Enhanced communication and collaboration	Digital divide & infrastructure limitations
Increased student motivation and creativity	Distraction and procrastination risks
Real-time feedback and peer assessment	Privacy and data security concerns
Builds learning communities and social bonding	Psychological issues (FoMO, Social Media Disorder)
Supports flipped classroom and informal learning	Lack of pedagogical framework integration

The dual nature of social media integration in academic settings is described in Table 2.

Among the advantages are:

Enhanced communication: Outside of the classroom, students and teachers can communicate more freely and often. Collaborative learning: Social media platforms facilitate peer review, team-based assignments, and content co-creation. Motivation and creativity of students: Multimedia elements inspire students to express themselves in a variety of ways. Learning communities: These online communities help people connect and feel like they belong in the classroom.

However, there are drawbacks also, such as the digital divide and problems with infrastructure, particularly in low-income nations, psychological hazards like social media addiction, distraction, and mental health issues like SMD, Pedagogical constraints, especially when social media use is not in line with learning theories or curriculum objectives, privacy concerns, which bring up moral questions about institutional control and data sharing.

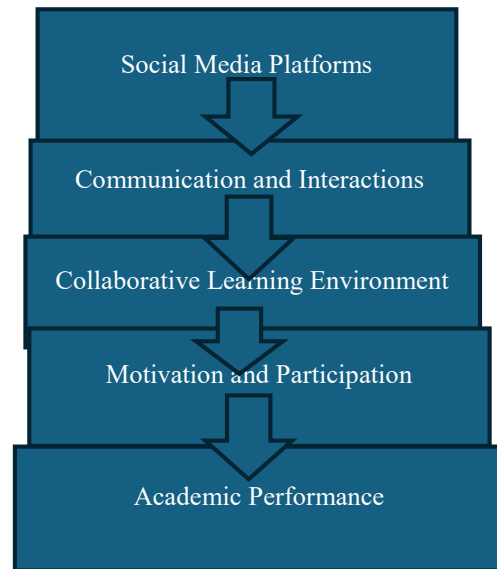
Table 3: Research Methodologies Observed in Literature

Methodology	Percentage(%)	Key Insights
Quantitative (surveys)	~70%	Focus on perception and behavior
Qualitative (case studies)	~20%	Deeper insights into classroom implementation
Mixed Methods	~10%	Combined behavioral + contextual understanding

The most common research methodologies found in the considered studies are categorised in Table 3. The distribution displays: About 70% of studies are quantitative, primarily employing surveys to investigate attitudes, perceived utility, and usage patterns. About 20% of research is qualitative, emphasizing content analysis, interviews, and ethnographic insights into institutional procedures and user behaviour. Both are combined in mixed methods (10%) to provide a more comprehensive view.

This distribution reveals a methodological gap in comprehensive, context-sensitive, and longitudinal research that would provide a more nuanced understanding of social media's long-term educational effects. The prevalence of surveys suggests an excessive dependence on perception data, which might not accurately represent real behavioural or cognitive results.

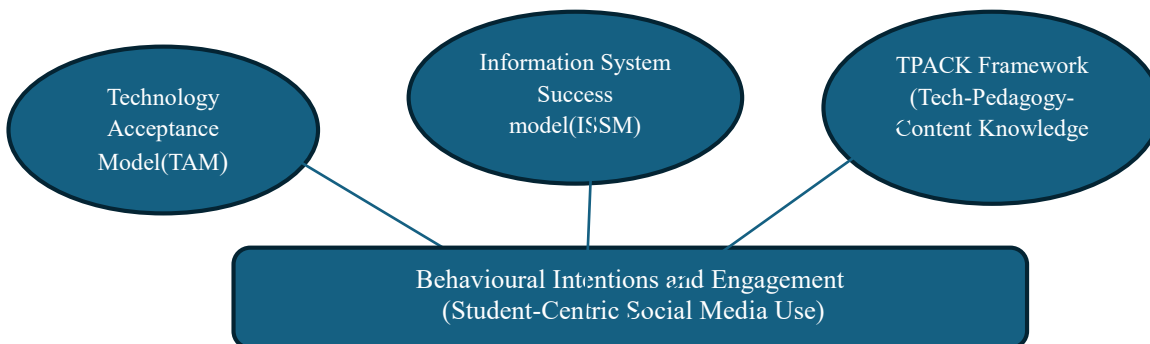
Figure 1. Mechanism of Social Media in Enhancing Academic Engagement



The flow chart illustrates the processes through which social media improves the academic participation in a sequential manner.

Accessibility of Platforms: The platform that students begin to use is social media platforms that are meant to accommodate a wide audience. **Communication and Interaction:** People can communicate and interact informally with the help of the sites. **Collaborative Learning:** The students engage in the collaborative learning where group works, collaboration, and knowledge co-creation are applicable. **Motivation and Involvement:** The improved engagement will be used to promote the reflective learning and agency. **Better Academic Performance:** The outcome of this process is the better knowledge performance, better academic achievements and academic excellence. This linear representation supports the idea that through the intelligent achievement of social media, cycle of engagement, as a result, is possible, leading to an eventual performance enhancement. It reinforces the significance of deliberate design in regard to social media applications in learning.

Figure 2. Theoretical Models Applied in Research



It is this diagram that presents the general theoretical approaches commonly employed in explaining the use of social media in tertiary learning, graphically contrasting them. The Information System Success Model (ISSM) and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) are often used to evaluate the opinion of users about the utility and the easiness of usage. However, such models do not align with the pedagogical theory as they emphasize the aspect of technology usability. A more comprehensive conceptualization bridging technology and delivery of content and methods of teaching is the TPACK model (Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge). According to the diagram, a conceptual change from purely technological frameworks to models with a pedagogical foundation is required. This would guarantee that social media is embraced not only due to its accessibility but also because it significantly enhances the educational process. Despite the expanding volume of research, several gaps remain. There is a pressing need for longitudinal and experimental studies that move beyond perception surveys to empirically verify the impact of social media on academic engagement and learning outcomes over time. Furthermore, enhancing qualitative insights into cultural, institutional, and disciplinary contexts would elucidate nuanced factors influencing successful implementation [4]. The limited exploration of social media's role in assessment practices and the combination of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and the Metaverse represent promising arenas for future investigation [22], [23]. Additionally, greater attention to balancing social media-driven engagement with students' mental health and wellbeing is essential, calling for the development of evidence-based strategies addressing issues like SMD and digital literacy [14].

Discussion & Conclusion

Social media has a lot of potential as a tool to improve academic engagement in higher education by encouraging communication, collaboration, creativity, and institutional connection, according to current global research trends. Its beneficial effects on academic performance and motivation are supported by quantitative data, particularly when effectively incorporated into pedagogical practice. These advantages are, however, limited by issues with implementation, digital equity, privacy, and psychological risks. Future research must embrace holistic theoretical frameworks that incorporate pedagogical, technological, and content dimensions, diversify methodological approaches, and address identified limitations to fully realise the potential of social media in higher education. To protect students' welfare and uphold academic integrity, institutional policies and teacher preparation programs should aim to strategically use social media. Even

with the growing amount of research, there are still some gaps. Longitudinal and experimental research that goes beyond perception surveys is desperately needed to confirm empirically how social media affects learning outcomes and academic engagement over time. Moreover, improving qualitative understanding of institutional, cultural, and disciplinary contexts would clarify subtle elements affecting successful implementation [4]. Prospective areas for further research include the combination of pioneering technologies like artificial intelligence and the Metaverse, as well as the scant examination of social media's function in assessment procedures [22], [23]. Furthermore, it is crucial to pay more attention to striking a balance between students' mental health and wellbeing and social media-driven engagement, which calls for the creation of evidence-based strategies that address problems like SMD and digital literacy [14].

Note: All citations correspond to detailed findings and analyses extracted from the reviewed literature within the available documents, maintaining adherence to rigorous citation standards.

References to Specific Citations Within the Text

- The transformative role of social media in higher education during the COVID-19 pandemic and the digital native concept [1], [2].
- Bibliometric analyses indicating research volume, geographic distribution, and methodological trends [3], [4], [5].
- Mechanisms of engagement and pedagogical integration via platforms like Facebook and multimedia tools [2], [6], [7].
- Positive impact on academic performance and creativity supported by Malaysian and Chinese contexts [6], [8].
- Challenges including digital infrastructure constraints, distraction risks, and mental health factors such as Social Media Disorder [11], [13], [14].
- Marketing and institutional engagement through social media strategies [16], [17], [19].
- Theoretical models like TAM and TPACK frameworks applied to understand adoption and usage [20], [21].
- Emerging directions involving AI, Metaverse educational integration, and assessment innovation [22], [23].

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Tables & Figures

Table 1 shows various social media tools and their academic uses across the Globe.

Table 2 shows the Benefits and Challenges of social media in Higher Education.

Table 3 shows Research Methodologies Observed in Literature.

Figure 1 shows the mechanism of social media in Enhancing Academic Engagement.

Figure 2 shows the theoretical Models Applied in Research.

