Enhancing Education In Pakistan: Student Perceptions Of Integrating Social Media Into Bachelor Level Curriculum

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Abstract: *This study aims to critically examine the phenomenon of integrating social media into Pakistan's bachelor-level curriculum, with the goal of deciphering its relevance and potential benefits for higher education in the country. By adopting[1] a qualitative design and a phenomenological approach, the research attempts to provide a thorough interpretation of student attitudes towards the utility of social media in academia. Through the distribution of an open-ended questionnaire among a sample of five undergraduate students, the study seeks to gain various insights into their perceptions and experiences with social media within academia. Through implementing this methodology, the research aims to contribute valuable perspectives on the dynamic confluence between social media and academic learning, thus offering insights that could improve educational practices at the bachelor level in Pakistan. We articulate this inquiry to highlight the multifaceted dimensions of social media integration, explore its potential implications, and facilitate informed discussions on optimizing curriculum design in higher education.*

Keywords: *social media integration, bachelor level curriculum, Pakistan.*

INTRODUCTION

The extensive proliferation of social media platforms has tremendously transformed the dynamics apparent in academia (Fu et al., 2021). As these online platforms include networking sites, video sharing sites, photo sharing sites, bookmarking sites, discussion forums, and wikis (Chugh et al., 2020), they optimize the aspect of learning through interaction (Kolhar et al., 2021). It is convenient to assume that the utilization of social media within academic settings encourages broader conservation as the information provided is supplemented with the attributes of collaboration and decentralization (Vandeyar, 2020). Globally, an approximate 4.9 billion people have been actively participating in social media forums, this thus corresponds to the notion that online networking is a dominant feature in the lives of academic practitioners and scholars. The digitalization of education in higher institutions is inevitable. Social media tools, with their captivating graphical user interfaces, point-and-click media components, and intuitive user experiences (Molinillo et al., 2018), present a sense of convenience that can assist learning. This further reinforces the central belief that easy learning makes academic tasks and projects enjoyable.

The integration of social media into the higher education sector of Pakistan offers a palpable synergy. Universities have realized that web 2.0 tools, particularly Facebook and Twitter,

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encapsulate tremendous potential in forming constructive communication between students and teachers and are considering utilizing these forums with other web 2.0 tools "wiki, blogs and blackboards" in their pedagogical practices (Kear et al., 2010). Social media serves as a networking enabler, marketing and recruitment tool, collaboration, teaching, and learning instrument, as well as an agent responsible for presenting career management and entrepreneurship opportunities (Malik et al., 2020). Ultimately, like any powerful platform or advancement in innovation, social media and networking sites offer both adverse and productive features to the community, and the influence of social media and social networking sites has had a significant impact on students during their transition to adulthood. The constructive impacts of social media usage include the introduction of the public to user-generated data, ideas, and programming at a relatively young age, which has encouraged additional technological advancements and increased knowledge in student communities (Abbas et al., 2019).

An emerging trend in curriculum development in Pakistan is the increasing emphasis on skills-based learning (Sellami, 2018). Educators and policymakers are recognizing the importance of equipping students with the skills they need to succeed in the 21st century, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and digital literacy. The rising trend in curriculum development is the employment of technology to refine teaching and learning. With the rapid expansion of e-culture in Pakistan, there is a growing interest in installing technology into the curriculum (Miqbal, 2022), particularly at the bachelor's level. This includes the implementation of online networking sites to supplement traditional classroom instruction.

Problem Statement: The current state of education in Pakistan faces challenges in terms of engagement and modernization. To address these issues, there is a need to investigate the integration of social media platforms into the bachelor-level curriculum, aiming to enhance educational experiences, produce collaboration, and prepare undergraduate students with relevant digital skills for the transforming global landscape.

Research Objectives: The study seeks to: 1) Evaluate the role of social media in bachelor-level education in Pakistan; and 2) Investigate and gain an in-depth understanding of student perceptions and attitudes towards social media and academic learning.

Research Questions: The main questions for this research are 1) To what extent can social media improve higher education in Pakistan? and 2) What perceptions do undergraduate students hold regarding the integration of social media tools into bachelor level curriculum?

Significance and Scope of Study: Universities in Pakistan primarily emphasize analytical learning, supplemented by extensive research projects. However, sources and information extracted from social media platforms, particularly Facebook or Instagram, are not formally deemed credible enough. On a personal level, using Instagram for academic tasks has enhanced the effectiveness of the practice, allowing for the collection of various references in a shorter timeframe. In today's fast-paced environment, social media has proven to be significantly beneficial. This strengthened the conviction that, despite international recognition of the relevance of online networking tools for higher-level education, Pakistan's undergraduate system's instructional design does not reflect this development. The goal of this study was to determine the potential advantages of using social media tools in curriculum design, particularly at bachelor's levels in Pakistan, and to suggest future directions for the advancement of Pakistan's educational sector.

LITERATURE REVIEW
The consideration of previous, relevant literature is essential for all research disciplines and projects (Snyder, 2019). This is particularly because the literature review serves as a critical methodological tool as it enables the researcher to evaluate theory or evidence in a certain

area or to examine the validity or accuracy of a certain theory or competing theories (Thomas et al., 2023). Typically, a literature review provides a key synthesis of sources relevant to a particular topic, which, as a result, allows the researcher to create agendas, identify research gaps, and also facilitates theory development (Baumeister & Leary, 1997). This literature review is integrative in nature as it provides a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon, allows for the inclusion of diverse designs and theoretical articles (Oermann & Knafl, 2021), and is divided into four distinct sections. The first part introduces relevant conceptual models that demonstrate how social media can be integrated into formal education; the second part investigates how undergraduate curricula in Pakistan can benefit from the installation of online networking tools; the third part explores student perceptions towards social media in academic settings; and the final section of the review highlights prevalent gaps and shortcomings in these studies.

The proliferation of social media websites has also catalysed the emergence of various theoretical frameworks (Trester, 2019). Against the backdrop of academia: Heutagogy and Connectivism hold appropriate relevance in defining how social media can be employed for learning development, and thus should be considered when designing a curriculum that integrates social media platforms.

Blaschke (2012) asserts that educationists have inclined towards a net-centric theory that provides an effective framework for digitally cultured academia (Blaschke, 2012). This model is referred to as Heutagogy, a (student-determined) approach that was developed by Hase and Kenyon (2007) while analysing learning experiences and curricula designed in the Internet era (Hase & Kenyon, 2000). As emphasized by Cochrane et al. (2013), by adopting a heutagogical methodology, students can adopt a diligent role in the acquisition of the skills necessary to use Web 2.0 tools, and this removes the disconnect between theory and practice (Cochrane et al. 2013). Kraus et al. (2021) say that parallel to the intensified rate of transformation in society, alternatively known as the information explosion, we should now be looking at an educational approach where it is the learner himself who determines what and how learning should take place (Kraus et al., 2021).

Another theory related to social media implementation in education is known as connectivism, which is the learning theory of the digital age. Glassner and Back (2020) assert that the theory of connectivism posits that both knowledge and learning have processes (Glassner & Back, 2020). Corbett and Spinello (2020) further state that it is a study that focuses on the role of the social and cultural framework and describes the implementation of new connections and skills to be put into operation in the existing networks (Corbett & Spinello, 2020). According to Mebert et al. (2020), a learner can explore more and learn unambiguously by plugging into different networks through a connectives' approach (Mebert et al., 2020).

In reference to whether Pakistan's education system can truly benefit from social media integration, Ahmed (2016) explains how the employment of social media in classroom settings facilitates learning, student performance, and academic acceleration (Ahmed;2016). Scholars have also concluded that the application of social media platforms, particularly Zoom or Skype, can reduce geographical displacements and thus increase the literacy rate in Pakistan. Research also asserts that social media applications enable global networking, which further enables students to engage with emerging international trends. Rashid and Mukhtar further assert that higher institutions have attempted to improve organizational problem-solving through the use of design, structural paraphernalia, globalized needs, and quality-based systems through technological innovation.

While considering the integration of social media into undergraduate level curriculum it becomes necessary to interpret student perceptions. Social media plays a huge part in students' lives both personal and academic; therefore, if educators make full use of social media and help students grow academically, then it is a win-win situation for both. Alalwan (2022) further stressed that teachers should be looking at social networking forums to enhance students' learning in different ways (Alalwan, 2022). On the other hand, Eickelman and Vennemann (2017) highlight that the majority of teachers and educators are unenthusiastic and relatively slow in adopting technological resources in the classroom

(Eickelmann & Vennemann, 2017). The social media implementation is not limited to teacher and student's usage only; it can also be useful for peer-to-peer interactions. Kelly and Antonio (2016) state Teachers and peers can interact with one another through social networks and can share new strategies and ideas together (Kelly & Antonio, 2016).

Despite there being extensive literature surrounding the phenomenon of integrating social media into education, significant gaps persist that require due attention and investigation. The existing research lacks a thorough investigation of how specific social media platforms, beyond Zoom or Skype, contributed to educational advancements in Pakistan. Furthermore, there are only a few studies that inquire about the challenges and opportunities associated with social media integration within Pakistan's bachelor level education. The existing literature focuses on the perspectives of educators, with limited attention given to the perceptions and attitudes of students who navigate the junction of social media and formal education.

This study aims to fill in these gaps and depict the need for an investigation specific to social media and undergraduate education within Pakistani settings in order to provide insights into the multifaceted dynamics of social media integration in Pakistan's higher education, addressing both technological and pedagogical aspects while considering the diverse perspectives of students and academicians.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a qualitative study and therefore follows a phenomenological paradigm. While a qualitative approach provides the research profound insights surrounding a problem (Emiliussen et al., 2021), the phenomenological approach enables multiple perceptions from different individuals (Fréchette et al., 2020). Thus, this framework was specifically designed to investigate student attitudes towards the phenomenon of including social media tools in undergraduate curriculum.

Purposive sampling was utilised in this research as it lays significant emphasis on the knowledge of the participants as well as the purpose of the study (Campbell et al., 2020). The core objective of this research is to investigate the poignancy of integrating social media into bachelor level curriculum on the basis of student perceptions; this study evaluates student understanding of online-networking platforms and reflects how students feel when using social forums for academic projects. Thus, 5 students enrolled in different bachelor programs were selected for this research. It was anticipated that through selection process would enable the emergence of various opinions thus creating a broader understanding of the problem.

Table 1 provides a visual representation of the sample selected. The sample is categorized under the major/field of study and university names.

Table 1 Sample selection

Participants	Major/Field of Study	Name of University
1	MBBS	Shalamar Medical College (SMDC)
1	DDS	Akhtar Saeed Medical College (ASMC)
1	Visual Communications and Design (VCD)	National College of Art (NCA)
1	International Relations (IR)	Lahore Garrison University (LGU)
1	Information Technology (IT)	University of Engineering Technology (UET)

Data Collection: An online open-ended questionnaire was distributed to the participants of the study. An open-ended questionnaire is a type of survey question that allows respondents to answer in open-text format based on their knowledge, feeling, and understanding of the topic (Pew Research Center, 2021).

DATA ANALYSIS

The data collected in the study was carefully evaluated. Thematic analysis exclusively coded all responses based on relevant patterns. Thematic analysis is a research instrument that is applied to identify and elucidate themes in a data set. It often leads to new understandings and interpretations. The theme development requires organizing codes into meaningful groups to recognize patterns and relationships, thus offering insights into the research question. The prevalent patterns that were identified in the study were:

- Availability of information 5(100%)
- Receiving information at a shorter period 4(80%)
- Learning through networking 4(80%)
- Poor Infrastructure 5(100%)
- Lack of surveillance 3(60%)

By evaluating these themes, the central questions were further addressed.

Q) What perceptions do undergraduate students hold regarding the integration of social media tools into bachelor level curriculum?

It was evident that students frequently utilize social media applications for academic purposes. Most participants were of the view that features such as one-minute video features in forums such as Instagram and YouTube facilitate them to understand a specific topic comprehensively in a shorter period of time. It was further emphasized that these platforms enable them to gain a great deal of information at a faster pace. It was also deduced from the study that students felt that the interactive nature prevalent on these platforms made learning relatively less monotonous and more engaging.

Q.) What are the prevalent challenges in Pakistan that hold potential in deterring the development of a curriculum based on social media tools?

Most participants shared the sentiment of not being able to use these tools at proficient level due to the lack of surveillance provided by higher authorities. They asserted that without ethical considerations and policy guidelines provided by authorities, students are not comfortable to network which decapitates their learning potential. Students thus emphasised that academic institutions should implement surveillance technologies in their libraries and computer labs.

Findings: After carefully examining the data collected and the prevalent themes derived from the study, it was quite evident that students had a significantly positive attitude towards the notion of integrating social media websites into bachelor level curricula. It was discovered in the study that participants had listed YouTube or Instagram as their most frequently used forum for academic purposes. This was particularly due to the existence of features such as shorts and reels that are available on these platforms. Participants emphasized how these one-minute videos provide them with "concise yet to the point"— as one respondent stated—information relevant to a certain topic. This therefore allows information to be available in a relatively shorter time. Participants further stated that they had noticed that after searching a particular topic, relevant information about the topic appeared without them having to actively search for it at a later time. Students believe that this significantly accelerates their academic performance by facilitating a thorough comprehension of the topic.

While sharing a positive outlook relevant to integrating social media into academia, participants were not hesitant to provide a perverse insight. It was unanimously agreed that the poor infrastructure of educational institutions cannot support a technology-based pedagogy and therefore deters the implication of social media in bachelor-level education. A majority of the concerned sample reiterated that a lack of surveillance disables students from using social media comfortably; they thus asserted the need for ethical considerations and policy guidelines to be articulated when integrating social media into formal education.

DISCUSSION

The research into integrating social media tools into the bachelor-level curriculum in Pakistan provides quintessential insights from participants, evoking both positive

perceptions and significant challenges. Particularly, participants expressed optimism about the integration of social media tools, frequently citing platforms such as YouTube and Instagram for academic purposes. The appreciation for short video features on these platforms highlighted their role in delivering concise yet comprehensive information. This positive sentiment suggests that social media tools can enhance the learning experience for students.

A prominent finding was the perceived acceleration of academic performance attributed to the utility of social media tools in academia. Participants commemorated instances where short videos facilitated a more efficient understanding of subjects, contributing to accelerated academic progress. This highlights the prospect of social media transforming traditional pedagogical approaches. However, the study highlighted the significant challenges students face, primarily stemming from the inadequate infrastructure of educational institutions. This leads to crucial questions about the readiness of the education system to supplement a technology-based learning environment. The discussion explores the implications of these challenges for the successful implementation of social media integration.

Participants unanimously expressed concerns about the lack of surveillance impeding their comfortable use of social media tools. Participants stressed the need for ethical considerations and policy guidelines to navigate the integration of social media into formal education. This reveals a critical aspect that institutions must address to create a conducive environment for technological integration.

A comparative analysis with existing literature on social media integration in education enables a holistic perspective. Comprehending how the findings align with or diverge from established knowledge in the field adds depth to the discussion and offers constructive insights. When considering the interpretations derived from the study, it becomes clear that integrating social media tools into the bachelor-level curriculum has the potential to restructure Pakistan's educational landscape. The findings' recommendations can guide policymakers and educational institutions in promoting an environment conducive to leveraging the convenience of social media tools while simultaneously addressing the identified challenges.

CONCLUSION
The primary objective of this research was to emphasize the importance of integrating social media into bachelor-level curricula in Pakistan. The study therefore focused on examining students' perspectives on the phenomenon. The investigation not only provides valuable interpretations of student attitudes, but also encourages a broader conversation about the changing landscape of education in Pakistan and the role of technological mechanisms in shaping its future.

Limitations of Study
1. Although the study provides an in-depth analysis in reference to the integration of social media in Pakistan's bachelor level education, quantitative research may have provided a more thorough understanding through statistical and empirical connotations.
2. The literature review does not encapsulate issues prevalent in contemporary bachelor level curriculum.
3. The open-ended questionnaire is student centric and therefore does not provide a teacher's perception regarding the integration of social media in academic courses.
4. A comparative analysis may have sufficed for this research as it would assist to understand the extent to which Pakistan's education, in terms of curriculum design, lags.

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