



21st Century Learners' Social Media Utilization: An Interplay of Communication Theories

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ABSTRACT

This study focused on how students utilized social media platforms in terms of sites, frequency, time, and length of utilization. The study was conducted at a higher education institution in the Philippines, with a sample size of 60 purposively selected participants. It employed a mixed quantitative-qualitative approach using both questionnaires and in-depth interviews to gather comprehensive data. The study's results revealed that the top three social media platforms in terms of site utilization were Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram. Participants reported visiting their social media accounts several times a day and spending an average of three to six hours per week on these platforms. On average, they are subscribed to their social media platforms for one to three years. Vignettes from the interview and communication theories were employed to explain, strengthen, substantiate, and validate the study's results, enhancing the analysis of the findings. The study concluded that students have been actively engaged with social media platforms for a considerable period and are likely to continue using them. They frequently accessed their accounts to perform web-based tasks for various purposes, indicating a persistent inclination to use social media for multiple functions in the future. This research contributes to the literature on social media's new perspectives in education. It provides a basis for an enriched curriculum integrated with modern media technologies. Such educational advancements can better prepare students to navigate and make the most of social media in their academic and professional pursuits.

Keywords: 21st century learners, social media platforms, time spent, frequency of utilization, length of utilization, communications theories

Introduction

Social media is indispensable in today's volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous modern world society. Several social media websites, such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, Instagram, and others, permit media consumers to share, create, search, collaborate, and organize content while simultaneously offering a platform for virtual self-presentation and self-disclosure (Gonzales & Hancock 2011; Hall et al., 2013; Hamid et al., 2013). Social media, through networking sites, offers a wide array of utilities and implications on how people can cope with the demands and challenges of time.

The communication landscape in the twenty-first century has rapidly evolved due to the proliferation of social media platforms (Page et al., 2022). Social media has significantly revolutionized numerous aspects of people's lives, interactions, decision-making processes, relationship-building, and the creation of meaning in their experiences (Gruzd et al., 2016; Kelley et al., 2012; Quan-Haase & Young, 2010; Tripathi & Verma, 2018; Van Dijck, 2012; Yang, 2022).

Social media platforms represent a significant paradigm shift in the communication process. In the past, sharing knowledge about how to do something required limited and conventional options like email, floppy disks, or possibly writeable compact discs. However, times have changed. Nowadays, with just a flick of a finger, people can effortlessly share content through vlogs, videos, photos, and other similar means using social media platforms.

An individual's daily routine is not complete without at least a quick visit to social media websites to check for updates and notifications (Madakam & Tripathi, 2021). By their very nature, social media platforms serve to educate, inform, entertain, and empower the audience, offering a unique spreading effect that the mainstream media often lacks. This potential has been aptly described as social media's "unstoppable power" (Osahenye, 2011, p. 52). With their pervasive influence, social media has become a powerful force shaping communication and connecting people across the globe.

A substantial body of literature has already delved into various positive aspects of social media, particularly its influence on university students' communication, interaction, and socialization within the context of academic learning. Desmal (2017) conducted a study that demonstrated how social media could positively impact students' academic performance. Likewise, another research conducted by Al-Rahmi and Othman (2013) concluded that social media, when used with proper control and time management, can enhance students' academic experience. Ainin et al. (2015) discovered a correlation between Facebook usage and students' academic success, indicating that the greater the utilization, the better the learners perceive their

academic performance. These findings highlight the potential of social media as a valuable tool in the educational landscape and emphasize the importance of responsible and strategic usage to maximize its benefits for students' learning and achievements.

According to Stathopoulou et al. (2019), students have acknowledged the value of integrating social media into the curriculum, emphasizing its benefits in enhancing collaborative and organizational abilities and facilitating profound learning experiences and engagement. Kim et al. (2016) found that students' usage of social media and smartphones positively influenced their participation in social activities and behaviors, which, in turn, was associated with an increased sense of belonging. Furthermore, Helou & Rahim (2014) confirmed that a majority of the respondents agreed that social networking sites have a positive impact on their academic performance. These studies collectively underscore the significant role of social media in enhancing students' learning experiences, fostering social connections, and positively influencing their academic journey.

On the contrary, an extensive body of literature has highlighted the adverse effects of social media on students. Raut & Patil (2016) emphasized addiction as the primary adverse effect of social media on students, which further hampers their concentration on studies, active participation in sports, and genuine life communication. Akram & Kumar (2017) found that social media usage resulted in reduced learning and research capabilities, diminished human contact, weakened language proficiency and creative writing skills, time wastage, lower grades, and a loss of motivation among students. According to Kelly et al. (2018), excessive social media use also takes a toll on students' mental and physical health, leading to issues such as online bullying, poor sleep, low self-esteem, and negative body image. These factors, in turn, have been associated with higher levels of depressive symptoms. The collective evidence underscores the importance of promoting responsible social media usage among students to mitigate the potential negative impacts on their well-being and academic performance.

Wang et al. (2011) discovered a negative aspect of college students' use of social media, which had an impact on their grades. Additionally, Mahadi et al. (2016) concluded that social media negatively influenced students' manners. In particular, students struggled with showing remorse for their errors, tended to express annoyance on social media instead of addressing the offender directly, and often spoke out without considering the potential repercussions of their words and actions. These findings shed light on the potential pitfalls of social media usage among students and highlight the importance of promoting responsible behavior and digital etiquette. Encouraging students to exercise empathy, thoughtful communication, and reflection on their online actions can help foster a more positive and respectful online environment for everyone.

Social networking sites should not lead to more negative consequences than beneficial ones. Parents and guardians play a crucial role in ensuring their children's responsible use of social media platforms. They should take responsibility for monitoring the amount of time their children spend online and the quality of content they consume. Parents can help promote a safer and more positive digital experience for young users by actively supervising their children's online activities.

Students can explore areas of interest and utilize social media platforms in academic and instructional capacities as various ideas are disseminated across these platforms. However, teachers also play a crucial role in helping students comprehend the potential detrimental impacts of social media on their overall well-being. It is essential for students to be aware of the potential harm that excessive exposure to social media sites can cause in the long run. By striking a balance and promoting responsible use, students can maximize the benefits of social media while safeguarding their physical and mental health.

Given this reality and the array of advantages and drawbacks that social media presents, communication scholars, researchers, policymakers, and teachers must collectively find ways to optimize this technological advancement for ethical, meaningful, and productive social interactions and connections, particularly among students in the context of education. By harnessing the potential of social media responsibly, fostering digital literacy, and promoting positive online behavior, we can create a conducive environment that enriches students' learning experiences while ensuring their safety and well-being in the digital age.

Teachers with a working knowledge of social media and a deep understanding of students' social media usage and behavior are of paramount importance, as they play a crucial role in guiding students' consumption. From an educational perspective, it is widely acknowledged that students and teachers are the most important stakeholders in utilizing social media to supplement and facilitate the teaching and learning process. By actively engaging with social media platforms, educators can create innovative and effective learning opportunities, foster collaboration, and enhance communication within the academic community. Their expertise in navigating these digital spaces can help ensure that students utilize social media responsibly and productively for their educational growth and development.

Given the potential impact of social media features on education and students' lives, this study delved into critical aspects of social media usage, including sites, frequency, time, and length of utilization. Additionally, the study explored underlying communication theories that shed light on students' social media behavior. The practical relevance of this research lies in its capacity to advocate for social media as a valuable learning tool. This study can inform the creation of targeted policies, guidelines, and initiatives by providing policymakers, educational institutions, and other stakeholders with data on students' social media usage and behavior. Ultimately, it seeks to harness the positive aspects of social media to enhance the learning experience and foster responsible digital citizenship among students.

Knowing how students utilize social media, enhancing instruction, recalibrating the curriculum, and training teachers on social media integration in education will be adopted and implemented. This research also aims to contribute to the expanding literature on new perspectives in social media, particularly in research and education. These fresh perspectives will serve as a foundation for formulating a curriculum enriched and integrated with social media, enabling educators to leverage these platforms for enhanced learning experiences effectively.

This study investigated the consumption patterns of social media platforms among higher education students, focusing on the sites they use, the frequency of their visits, the time they spend on these platforms, and the duration of their utilization. The primary objectives of this research were to address the

following research questions: (1) *which social media sites are most commonly used by the students?*, (2) *how frequently do the students visit social media platforms?*, (3) *how much time do the students allocate to using social media platforms?*, and (4) *how many years have the students been utilizing social media platforms?* In essence, this study aims to explore the students' behavior and interaction with social media, shedding light on the various aspects of their usage patterns. By understanding these patterns, educational stakeholders can gain valuable insights into how social media is integrated into the lives of higher education students and its impact on their academic and personal experiences.

Research Methodology

Design

In order to achieve the objectives of this study, a sequential quantitative-qualitative approach to data gathering and analysis was employed (Andrew & Halcomb, 2007; Creswell & Clark, 2017). The study began with a quantitative approach, where the participants' responses to the questionnaire were analyzed using basic statistical treatments such as frequency counts, simple percentages, and rankings. These quantitative findings were then presented through figures in the data presentation.

Following the quantitative phase, a qualitative approach was adopted to delve further into the participants' responses from the conducted interviews. This qualitative phase aimed to substantiate, strengthen, and validate the earlier quantitative findings by providing a deeper understanding of the meaning of the experiences that the participants had without relying on statistical treatments. In the discussion, vignettes of the participants' statements were included to capture the essence of their experiences and provide more context to the data.

By employing both quantitative and qualitative methods sequentially, this study aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the students' social media usage patterns and behaviors, enriching the analysis, and providing a more robust interpretation of the data.

Locale

The study took place at a higher education institution in the Philippines. This research locale was selected based on convenience, proximity, and the researcher's familiarity with the area. The research environment was carefully chosen to provide a safe, secure, and comfortable space for the study participants to complete the questionnaire and engage in interviews throughout the designated time frame.

Participants

The participants in this study were students from three departments of the selected school. To qualify as participants, they needed to be Digital Natives, meaning they grew up surrounded by and proficient in using technological tools and advancements. These individuals were exposed to various electronic devices, such as mobile phones, computers, video games, video cameras, and digital music players (Prensky, 2001). They are considered the product of the widespread adoption of digital technologies in the lives of young people born in the final two decades of the 20th century, contributing to the emergence of a new digital culture.

However, this study set a baseline age requirement, limiting participation to those born in 1990 or later and currently enrolled as bonafide students in the research locale. The participants were expected to have frequent access to information through the Internet, social media platforms, and other sources. They were required to possess well-developed Information and Communications Technology (ICT) skills and be avid social media consumers. Actively engaging with various platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, among others, was necessary for inclusion in the study. Participants were required to spend several hours a week utilizing social media platforms. Participants were also selected based on their English proficiency and capacity to participate in and maintain conversations in the language actively. Only those who met the minimum criteria for social media engagement in terms of sites, frequency, time, length of utilization, and age requirements were eligible to participate in the study.

Sampling Design

This study employed the purposive sampling technique, also known as purposeful, selective, judgmental, or subjective sampling, wherein the researcher carefully selects participants from the sampling frame to fulfill the study's specific objectives and desired features (Crossman, 2018). Purposive sampling involves deliberately examining the entire population for individuals with specific attributes, experiences, knowledge, skills, and exposure to certain events (Black, 2010).

In this sampling technique, the researcher identifies the key characteristics and criteria necessary for the study and then seeks out willing prospective participants who can provide the required information based on their knowledge or experiences (Bernard, 2002; Lewis & Sheppard, 2006). The researcher began with a specific set of traits in mind that he intended to investigate and then actively sought study subjects who possessed the full range of the desired characteristics.

By using purposive sampling, the study ensured that participants were selected based on their relevance to the research goals and the specific aspects being explored. This approach allowed for targeted data collection and enhanced the study's ability to gain meaningful insights from individuals who possessed the needed knowledge and experiences related to the study's focus.

Research Instrument

This research study utilized a combination of questionnaires and in-depth interviews for data collection. Recognizing that questionnaires may have limitations and gaps that interviews can supplement, the researcher deemed it necessary to employ both methods (Braun et al., 2021; Kern, 2018). In-depth interviews offered dense and rich data that questionnaires alone might not have reasonably provided.

The questionnaire was divided into two parts. The first part focused on demographic profiling, where participants voluntarily self-reported their gender, age, study level, and field of study for statistical and research purposes only. The second part explored how participants utilized social media platforms in terms of sites, frequency, time, and length of utilization. All questionnaire contents were written in English and crafted straightforwardly to minimize confusion among participants. The questionnaire was self-completed, and the interview conducted by the researcher offered additional support and clarification.

During the in-depth interviews, the researcher clarified and verified the questionnaire responses and delved into participants' underlying reasons for their answers. Vignettes derived from the interviews were presented in the discussion to provide a deeper analysis of the data. Triangulation and expert review were employed to ensure the reliability and validity of the instruments. Both the questionnaire and interview schedule were pilot tested, and based on the feedback received, necessary adjustments and refinements were made before initiating the data collection process.

The researcher utilized various tools to aid in the data collection process, including an audio recorder, a video recorder, a pen, and a log book. Research assistants were also employed to capture participants' responses accurately and efficiently. These tools and methods were employed to ensure comprehensive data collection for the study.

Data-gathering Procedure

A request letter seeking approval from the school president was drafted to conduct the research. Once the letter was signed, the researcher collaborated with the respective college deans to distribute the questionnaire to the research participants. With the assistance of research assistants, the actual distribution of the questionnaire was efficiently managed. Participants were informed that answering the questionnaire would take approximately 20 minutes, while the interview would require another 20 minutes of their time. The researcher's presence during the survey was deemed crucial to provide guidance and clarification regarding the given questions, ensuring a smooth and effective data collection process.

Both paper-based and web-based questionnaires were utilized in the study. Participants were invited to voluntarily take part in the research by completing the questionnaire and participating in an interview. All data collection processes were thoughtfully scheduled at the end of class schedules to avoid any disruptions to classes. Participants who preferred to fill out the questionnaire in the presence of the researcher were given the option to complete the web-based version using Google forms.

For both paper-based and web-based surveys, the researcher provided clear instructions, which included explaining the nature and purpose of the study, providing an estimated response time, assuring the confidentiality of collected data, emphasizing the voluntary nature of participation, allowing participants to decline to answer certain questions, and reiterating their right to withdraw from the study at any point.

Participants were informed that the current study was independent of any courses they were taking, and their decision not to participate would not impact their course grades in any way. Finally, participants were assured that their data would be collected and summarized for analysis, respecting their privacy and anonymity throughout the research process.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were meticulously addressed throughout the research process. The study was thoughtfully designed, reviewed, and conducted to uphold the highest quality and integrity. Participants were fully informed of the study's objectives, how the findings would be utilized, and whether their involvement had any potential negative consequences. They were assured that their participation was voluntary, and they were free to withdraw from the study at any time without facing any pressure or consequences.

In order to protect the participants' privacy and confidentiality, no identifiable data or information was made available to or obtained by anyone other than the researcher. The data collected were appropriately acknowledged and credited to all contributors to this research, ensuring due recognition for their valuable input. By adhering to these ethical principles, this study was conducted with the utmost respect for the participants' rights and welfare, ensuring transparency, informed consent, and privacy protection throughout the research process.

Results and Discussion

Sites Utilization

This section unveils the social media platform preferences of the 60 research participants. They were asked to identify their top three most preferred social media platforms, where they actively used and engaged in various online activities.

Specifically, *Figure 1* projects the research participants' social media platform preferences.

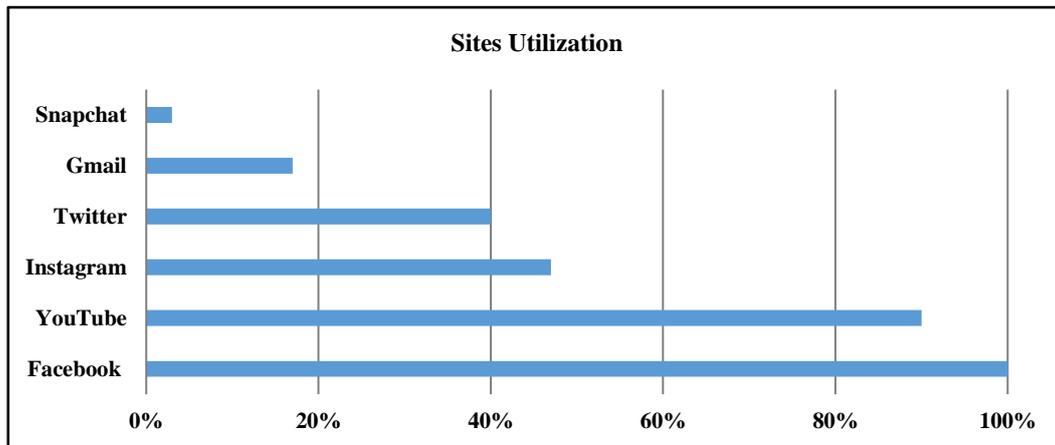


Figure 1. Social Media Sites Utilization of the Participants

The results revealed that *Facebook* emerged as the most popular social media platform utilized by the participants, securing the number one spot. *YouTube* followed closely in the second position, while *Instagram* garnered the third spot. Notably, the research participants engaged with multiple social media platforms, which can be attributed to the diverse features, services, and purposes that these platforms offer.

One of the appealing aspects of social media is its cost-effectiveness (Ainin et al., 2015; Bandyopadhyay, 2016; Kirtiç & Karahan, 2011). Participants do not need to spend money sending text messages when they can message anyone for free on Facebook. Similarly, they can avoid wasting money on phone calls by utilizing social media platforms that offer free calling and video call features, such as Facebook Messenger.

The participants' preferences for specific social media platforms demonstrate each platform's varying functionalities and advantages, leading to active engagement across multiple platforms to meet their communication and networking needs. Sharing photos, videos, blogs, vlogs, and other media content instantly with thousands of online friends for immediate reactions and engagement makes social media so appealing to the participants. It is a virtual hub where they can find everything they need, from the latest news and updates from friends to information about travel destinations, all in one place.

Social media offers a unique platform for its users to interact both anonymously and non-anonymously in the online world (Correa et al., 2021; Mondal et al., 2020; Rost et al., 2016). It allows the participants to explore their social identity, discover who they are, and even experiment with rebranding or reinventing their image online. This aspect of social media gives them the freedom to express themselves in ways that may not be as easily achievable in the physical world.

Social media provides an unparalleled opportunity for self-expression, connection, and exploration, making it an essential part of the users' online experiences (Davis, 2014; Montgomery & Chester, 2009). The diverse range of functionalities and interactions available on social media platforms makes it a versatile and dynamic space for the participants for fostering connections and shaping online identities.

This claim can be supported by *Participant 18*, *Participant 27*, *Participant 33*, *Participant 43*, and *Participant 50* who stated that:

P18: "I have accounts on Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat. For me, Facebook is a real-life saver. It has everything I need. I want to use it in sharing my photos and my other posts."

P27: "Maybe, I have accounts in almost all social media accounts. I used these platforms for different purposes. For example, if I want to listen to music, I go to YouTube."

P33: "I am into social media. I like Facebook and YouTube, but using YouTube cost so much data, so I always use Facebook because of its some free and light features."

P43: "I have several social media accounts currently used depending on my target goal, if I just want to communicate with my family members and friends, I think the best social media platform to use is Facebook. But If I want to listen to music or watch videos for me to be entertained, I go to YouTube."

P50: "Social media is connected to our lives already. Within my group of friends, all of us are into social media and we have accounts on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter. But we are most active on Facebook."

Facebook stands out as the most famous and actively used social media platform among the research participants in this study. Its historical global popularity has significantly influenced students' lives (Habes et al., 2018; Kaya & Bicen, 2016; Sánchez et al., 2014). Several factors contribute to Facebook's popularity among students. Firstly, it was one of the earliest social media platforms to gain widespread adoption, and many students became early adopters. This early adoption led to a network effect, as more students joined Facebook to connect with their peers, friends, and family.

This contention is validated by the statements of *Participant 28*, *Participant 47*, *Participant 50*, and *Participant 58* respectively:

P28: "Facebook is the best; I think it is undefeated. I heard in the TV news that Philippines is the number one Facebook user country in the world."

P47: "Most teenagers use Facebook. Facebook is my number one social media. Even if you ask ordinary people anywhere, they will always choose Facebook as their number one social media platform."

P50: "Facebook is the best for me. I think it is my first social media ever. I can use Facebook for so many purposes. Like sharing gossips with my close friends or communicating with my family."

P58: "Facebook is the most commonly used social media platform because almost everyone is using Facebook even very young individuals right now are using Facebook. It is used by almost everyone from all walks of life."

Facebook goes beyond being a platform for posting photos and sharing information; it also fosters constant user interaction through its Messenger feature, enabling connections regardless of location. Its popularity among the participants can be attributed to its accessibility on smartphones and other mobile devices, allowing them to connect effortlessly with people worldwide.

Moreover, students find Facebook useful for academic purposes. In instances where they forget to jot down notes or miss homework and school tasks, social media comes to their aid by providing a convenient way to catch up with classmates and friends. They can quickly ask questions and stay informed about what they have missed in their classes. Facebook's flexibility allows users to choose whom to connect with and when to engage. Young people are more likely to join and actively participate in a network of peers and individuals of similar ages and interests. At the same time, they may not be as interested in spending time on platforms dominated by older family members and parents.

This can be affirmed by the statements of *Participant 5*, *Participant 8*, *Participant 14*, *Participant 17*, *Participant 29*, and *Participant 31* respectively.

P5: "I think Facebook is good for young people. I stalk people through Facebook. I stalked my boyfriend's activities online. If he is telling the truth or if he is cheating on me. I spy on him secretly. I also check on my friends' posts."

P8: "I used Facebook to connect with relatives abroad, in the U.S.A., Dubai, and Japan. I use Facebook messenger if I want to communicate with them. I can do this by just using my cellphone. Fast and easy!"

P14: "As of now, I have 4,000 plus friends in my first Facebook account. I have two Facebook accounts, but the other one is not so active anymore. It continues to grow lately because I kept on adding or inviting friends, and I also kept accepting friend requests. Sometimes, I ignore or deny some friend requests based on their appearance, age, or personality."

P17: "Of all social media I have used maybe only Facebook has the best features among them. It is more relatable especially for young people like us. I also use it if I want to ask questions to my classmates or sometimes to my instructors. I use it for my studies."

P29: "I bought an android cellphone for me to access my Facebook account. Facebook has everything I need like messaging, sharing photos, and other features but moreover you can use it in a more useful way like sharing notes with your classmates in messenger"

P31: "I found a lot of friends through Facebook and other social media but primarily in Facebook. I met my first boyfriend on Facebook two years ago. Some of my online friends became my real friends but some just remained online friends. I can also block people I do not like in Facebook."

Since its launch, Facebook has remained the top choice for Filipino social media consumers (Redkite Digital Marketing, 2022). It continues to be a prevailing trend and has solidified its position as a staple commodity in the Philippines due to its user-friendly interface and widespread accessibility. One of the key factors contributing to its popularity is its easy accessibility, even among individuals from underprivileged socioeconomic backgrounds.

In the Philippines, Facebook can be utilized for free, albeit with certain restrictions. However, any user can fully enjoy the platform's networking potential with a stable wired internet, Wi-Fi, or mobile data connection. Facebook's features and services are designed to be user-friendly, making it appealing and straightforward to use. The platform is intended for building connections with people, and although it has evolved to include additional features, it still accomplishes its core purpose. Despite some changes to the platform, media consumers, particularly young people, continue to adore Facebook for its ability to foster connections and interactions. Its enduring popularity is a testament to its enduring value and significance in the realm of social media in the Philippines.

In comparison to other social media platforms, Facebook tends to avoid making major and significant changes or enhancements to its features. This approach offers valuable lessons for thriving in a competitive online market: maintaining a system that works well and being mindful of upgrades and enhancements that may require time for media consumers to adjust. Introducing upgraded features can be futile if users are not accustomed to them and need time to adapt. This could lead users to switch to other social media platforms that offer more user-friendly experiences.

The majority of social networking site users fall within the age range of 18 to 24 years old (Statistica, 2021). As this age group is known for its active and outgoing nature, Facebook's features are ideally suited to ignite and highlight these behaviors. The Filipino culture is known for its high-spiritedness, as evidenced by the proliferation of funny memes shared in photos and videos circulating online, especially on social media platforms. Additionally, Filipinos demonstrate their professionalism and dedication by using Facebook for business-related functions, such as meetings and conferences. Facebook's approach to maintaining a stable and user-friendly platform has contributed to its enduring popularity among diverse user demographics, including the dynamic and spirited Filipino community.

Social media serves as a platform for expressing political opinions, promoting social initiatives, and engaging in activism (Bode, 2016; Bond et al., 2012; Bonilla & Rosa, 2015; Brown et al., 2012). Filipinos are known for their outspoken, kind, and hospitable nature, and Facebook provides an excellent venue for showcasing these attitudes. The popularity of Facebook in the Philippines can be attributed to its user-friendly interface, which appeals to the general public, and its ability to adapt to diverse social cultures.

The discussion above can be affirmed by *Participant 1, Participant 10, Participant 26, Participant 31, Participant 37, Participant 43, and Participant 56* who stated that:

P1: "Facebook contains everything. In fact, you can get news and information from it. You can also express your thoughts and opinions freely in Facebook as long as it does not violate its community standards."

P10: "I am so outspoken and straightforward. I have so many things to talk about. People label me talkative and opinionated because I really want to talk and express myself. That is why my social media accounts are my outlet to express what is on my mind."

P26: "Social media platforms can be used at work such as virtual meetings and discussions. It can be used as a tool to disseminate information, good or bad propaganda, political campaigns, advertisements, and other things."

P31: "Social media can also be used to spread positivity like sharing positive quotes. It can also be used for entertainment such as watching funny videos, watching movies, funny memes, listening to music and so many things."

P37: "It is so easy to navigate in Facebook. This application upgrades its features, if necessary, but always makes sure that the users will get to use to the new features easily. They always feed what their users need from sharing, networking communicating, among other features."

P43: "The more we use social media, the more they feed us what we want. It is like adding more fuel to the fire to ignite more. I think young people like me can no longer live without social media."

P56: "It is very easy and convenient to use Facebook. If it is your first time using it, you will learn it quickly and easily and you will love it forever. You can do so many things in Facebook."

The popularity and global growth of social media have drawn the attention of media communication researchers (Gordon et al., 2019; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2015; Khang et al., 2012; Stephen & Galak, 2012; Trusov et al., 2009; Ziyadin et al., 2019). Among the dedicated users of social networking sites, teenagers and young adults seamlessly integrate updating their accounts into their daily routines. While social media entails risks, it also presents valuable opportunities for students, such as acquiring knowledge and leaving a positive digital footprint. Through social media, students engage in group learning, foster interconnectedness, and enhance their global comprehension by accessing diverse perspectives and resources. Moreover, students can develop digital literacy, technical skills, and communication abilities, preparing for future job requirements and fortifying their relationships with others (Akram & Kumar, 2017).

Additionally, social media can have positive effects on mental health by breaking down barriers and creating connections for individuals who may feel isolated or have disabilities (Naslund et al., 2016; Seabrook et al., 2016;). It facilitates maintaining relationships with friends and family, regardless of distance and provides a platform for seeking help and offering support. Moreover, social media empowers young people to advocate for social causes and make a difference in the world. Students can build a solid online reputation by showcasing their accomplishments and talents and creating a valuable online portfolio for future opportunities.

Regarding site utilization, the findings can be supported by the *Media Dependency Theory* (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976), which centers on the relationship between media and audiences. This relationship includes the fulfillment of one party's desires and goals through the utilization of the resources of the other party. This theory posits that individuals and societies develop a dependence on media for information, entertainment, and social interaction. The media plays a crucial role in shaping people's perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors, and individuals become increasingly reliant on media to fulfill their needs. In the study, it refers to the relationship between social media platforms and the research participants as media users and consumers.

This theory explains the participants' usage of and dependence on social media. Participants use social media for a wide range of purposes. Just a few of these include creating connections, entertainment, and information. Social media will grow more significant to them as they rely more on it to meet their demands. Social media may have more power and influence due to people's dependency on it.

Research participants benefit from the features of the different social media platforms, such as video calling, messaging, and posting. The participants developed a dependency on social media platforms to gratify a variety of their needs. These needs can range from needing to answer their assignments or comply with their school-related tasks to pass their courses to needing entertainment, fun, and a break or escape from school life.

The media dependency theory can be connected in several ways when examining students' use of different social media platforms. When it comes to information seeking and knowledge acquisition, students often rely on social media platforms as sources of information and knowledge. They may turn to platforms like Facebook, Twitter, or Reddit to stay updated on current events, access educational resources, or seek answers to their academic queries. This dependency on social media as an information source aligns with the media dependency theory's emphasis on media as a primary information provider.

Social media platforms offer students the opportunity to connect and interact with peers, friends, and individuals who share common interests. These platforms facilitate social relationships, allowing students to stay in touch, exchange ideas, and engage in discussions. The media dependency theory suggests that individuals depend on media for social interaction, which is evident in students' reliance on social media platforms for their social needs.

These platforms provide various forms of entertainment, such as videos, memes, games, and other engaging content. Students may turn to these platforms for relaxation, escapism, or simply to pass the time. This reliance on social media for entertainment aligns with the media dependency theory's notion that individuals depend on media for leisure and diversion.

Social media platforms allow students to shape and present their personal identities to a broader audience. Students use social media to express themselves and establish their online presence through profile customization, status updates, sharing preferences, and content creation. This aspect aligns with the media dependency theory's idea that media can influence individuals' self-perception and the formation of their identities.

Social media can also impact students' decision-making processes. They may rely on recommendations, reviews, and opinions shared on platforms like Instagram, YouTube, or Twitter to make purchasing decisions, choose academic programs, or form opinions on various matters. This reliance on social media for decision-making reflects the media dependency theory's emphasis on the media's role in shaping attitudes and behaviors.

Participants are dependent on social media because it can satisfy their needs or because social media can provide for their needs. Almost all participants use Facebook because it lets them interact with their friends and loved ones. It keeps them updated on the latest news on their favorite celebrities and can let them watch trending, funny, and inspirational videos that other platforms cannot provide.

The media dependency theory helps people understand how students rely on social media platforms for information, social interaction, entertainment, personal expression, and decision-making. It highlights the complex interplay between individuals and media, emphasizing the role of media in shaping students' perceptions, needs, and behaviors.

The participants' site utilization can also be anchored on *Agenda Setting Theory*, which Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw established in the early 1970s to dispel the myth that media effects are direct results and influences of media consumption. It was assumed before that more exposure to media would lead to massive effects. Little consideration was given to the mechanisms employed by which the media exposure was attained.

According to the agenda-setting theory, mere exposure to media content is not enough to be processed and accepted; instead, it must be made salient or necessary to the media user (Matei, 2008). This theory posits that the media, through its selection and presentation of news and information, wields power to influence the salience and importance of issues in the public's mind. In essence, the media does not just dictate what people should think about; it also shapes how people should think about those issues.

The agenda-setting theory can be connected in several ways regarding students' use of different social media platforms. Social media platforms play a significant role in shaping the information landscape for students. The content students encounter on these platforms, whether news articles, videos, or user-generated posts, can influence their awareness of different issues. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, or Instagram curate and prioritize content based on algorithms and user engagement, amplifying specific topics and creating a sense of importance or relevance among students.

Social media platforms employ algorithms that determine what content is shown to users based on their interests, preferences, and engagement history. These algorithms can inadvertently influence the issues students are exposed to and, consequently, what they consider essential. The algorithmic curation of platform content can shape students' perceptions and priorities, possibly steering their attention toward certain subjects while marginalizing others.

Several social media sites have facilitated the rapid spread of information and the emergence of viral trends and online activism. Students can quickly become aware of and engage in popular movements or social causes through platforms like Twitter or Instagram. The ability of social media to amplify specific issues and create a sense of urgency can influence students' attention and participation, potentially shaping their perceptions and behaviors.

These platforms enable students to create and share their content, which can contribute to the agenda-setting process. Students can use platforms like YouTube, Snapchat, and, recently, TikTok to share their experiences, opinions, and perspectives on various issues. User-generated content can influence the agenda by providing alternative viewpoints, highlighting overlooked topics, or challenging mainstream narratives.

The strength of agenda-setting theory resides in its capacity to provide a persuasive justification for socially essential topics and to anticipate the subjects that will be of particular interest to people exposed to similar amounts of media. Agenda setting is still used today despite being created in a vastly different media environment. The theoretical framework is still valuable to many who adapt or expand it to examine the complicated modern media ecosystem.

Whatever social media platforms the students are using, it should be noted that each platform is unique and distinct from the others. Some features can be found from a specific platform, while others obtain some. Media consumers should choose social media platforms to help them perform their daily tasks and use them to their advantage.

Frequency of Utilization

This section examines the frequency of social media platform utilization among the research participants. The participants were asked to rate the number of times they visit and engage in online activities on their social media platforms.

Specifically, *Figure 2* presents the social media platform frequency of utilization among the research participants.

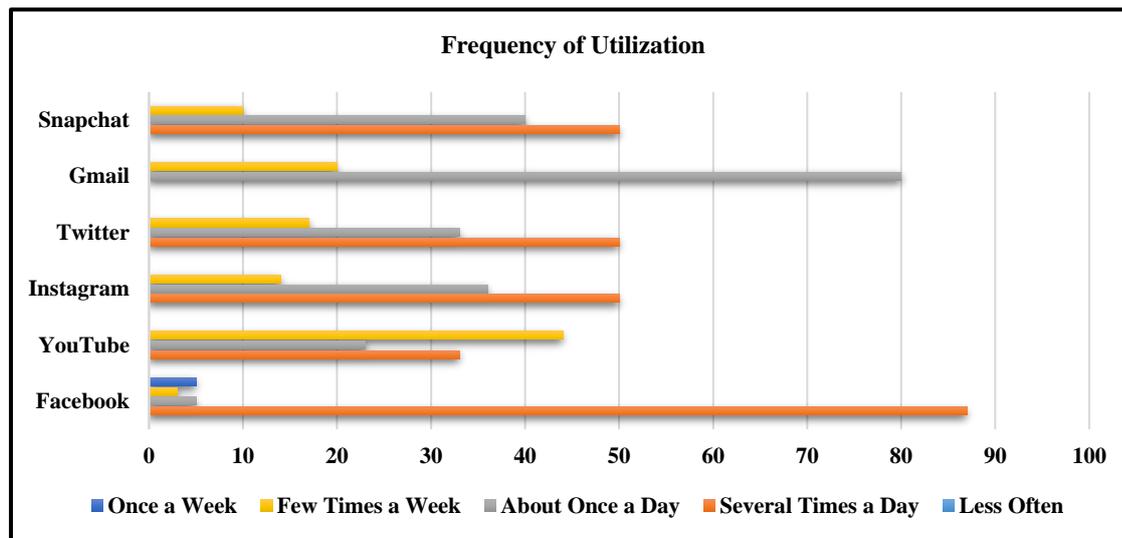


Figure 2. Frequency of Social Media Platform Utilization

As depicted in *Figure 2*, *Facebook* not only emerged as the most popular social media platform among the participants, as discussed in the previous analysis, but it also stood out as the platform with the highest frequency of visits and utilization. On average, research participants visit and use their preferred social media platforms several times a day.

According to the *Digital 2022* report from social media management firm *Hootsuite* and creative agency *We Are Social*, Filipinos have once again demonstrated their propensity to spend extended hours online, whether for work, education, entertainment, social media, or a combination of these activities (Kemp, 2022). The Philippines ranks second on the list of countries whose citizens spend the most time on the internet and social media. Previously, the country held the top spot, but last year, South Africa surpassed the Philippines, with its citizens found to have spent an average of 10 hours and 46 minutes using the internet (Baclig, 2022).

Frequent visits to various social media platforms can be likened to addiction (Ahmed & Khalid, 2014). Participants perceive themselves as active users and consistent visitors to their different social media platform accounts. Checking their favorite social media accounts has become an integral part of their daily routines, alongside their usual student-related tasks and preparations for school. For these participants, using social media platforms, particularly *Facebook*, has become a daily habit, and they feel their day is incomplete without logging into their accounts. They prioritize staying connected on social media, making it an essential part of their daily lives.

The contention above can be supported by the statements of *Participant 16*, *Participant 20*, *Participant 39*, *Participant 44*, and *Participant 48* correspondingly:

P16: "I am somewhat addicted to *Facebook*, *YouTube*, *Instagram*, *Twitter* because I feel that my day is not complete if I cannot visit my social media accounts. On a daily basis, I use to visit my accounts three to five times."

P20: "I will not let a day passed without visiting my *Facebook* account and if I have exhausted myself in using *Facebook* I will go to *Instagram* and *YouTube* to watch photos and videos."

P39: "Every day I always use *Facebook* followed by *YouTube* and *Instagram* and then, *Snapchat* which I rarely use."

P44: "Social media is part of my life already. So, it is normal for me to visit these sites frequently, anytime, and anywhere."

P48: "For me social media is useful to people. I do not see any reasons why I should not use them. They give more positive things than negative ones to people especially to us Filipinos."

The research participants' frequency of visiting and utilizing social media platforms may be influenced by various factors, including interpersonal utility, perceived ease of use, the desire to escape from reality, internet experience, and age (digital natives). These factors are interrelated and contribute to the frequency of visits to social media platforms among the research participants in the study.

In this digital era, media consumers are intrigued by how social media platforms will continue to evolve. The pressing question is how these platforms will innovate to appeal to the lucrative audience, particularly millennials and Generation Z. Social media platforms have witnessed significant innovations in recent years. For instance, *Twitter* introduced #280characters, while *Instagram* allowed multi-photo posts, and both platforms incorporated Augmented Reality (AR) and ever-evolving photo filters. Furthermore, media users now engage with fleeting content like ephemeral stories and videos, which are popular features on certain social media platforms. These continuous innovations serve as one of the compelling reasons why participants frequently visit and engage with their social media accounts.

The discussion above is strengthened by the statements of *Participant 7*, *Participant 14*, *Participant 32*, and *Participant 56* respectively:

P7: "I am excited for the upcoming new features of Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. I know that every year these social media are improving and innovating their platforms for their users. In my case, I always relax after my long day of work while having coffee and browsing my social media accounts."

P14: "I always visit my social media accounts frequently because I want to check the Facebook stories or short videos of the celebrities that I follow. I also want to post my own stories. Social media is my break from my work and busy schedules."

P32: "I was not born yesterday so; I can use any technology like social media in my life. If you need something you just have to connect to the internet and search for it."

P56: "I have so many reasons why I used social media such as having nice experience and feeling exploring any possibilities in the virtual world like social media sites."

Social media literate audiences are the target of marketers, advertisers, and content providers who are all chasing this target population of digital natives whose behaviors potentially forestall the next wave of media consumption (Appel et al., 2020). This is why social media constantly updates its features to cater to the target audience's needs. Social media networks are constantly improving their analytics to allow users to experience more personalized usage, resulting in frequent visits to social media sites. Notably, most internet users get fed up with social media platforms where some content are not appealing to their interests and taste.

Facebook is working on its algorithms to trace the users' passion, interests, tastes, browsing habits, and social media behavior to ensure that users will continue to visit its site frequently. As a result, users can enjoy a more personalized way of creating content right now. The fear of missing out is another possible reason why participants frequently visit social media platforms using the ephemeral content mentioned above, which is available for a limited time, such as stories and snaps. Users can also record live videos, whereas watching them live only allows interaction with the host.

Celebrities utilize ephemeral content to foster continuous and frequent social media engagement among their followers and fans. Snapchat initially popularized this trend and was later adopted by Instagram and Facebook through their "Stories" feature. While some participants choose to use Facebook to preserve their life memories online, others prefer Snapchat and Stories, which offer the advantage of engaging with friends privately without leaving a permanent trail. This allows them to avoid the risk of having awkward photos or posts resurface years later.

Another example is how hotels, rather than relying solely on traditional advertisements, can attract an internet-savvy audience through stories on platforms like Snapchat, Facebook, and Instagram. Instead of merely promoting their hotel on social media, they can create engaging advertisements that offer users a virtual tour of the hotel. By watching these advertisements, social media users can get a glimpse of what the hotel offers and be enticed to visit in person. This innovative approach allows hotels to showcase their facilities and amenities more interactively and captivantly, capturing the attention of potential guests in the digital age.

The contention above can be substantiated by *Participant 4*, *Participant 14*, *Participant 21*, and *Participant 38* who stated that:

P4: "I think social media is always doing their best to cater to the needs of the consumers. They are always trying their best to update their features."

P14: "Social media platforms are in competition with each other. When one social media has new updates the other one will also update afterwards. No one should be behind the race for the best social media platform."

P21: "Once a social media platform noticed that you are into something, for example, you are into makeups and you have been searching for makeup related post lately, then that social media that you are using will feed you more makeup related posts and stuff online."

P38: "Facebook is always the top social media. It captures the taste of social media users in all walks of life. It is not just for rich or famous people, but I think for all people."

The findings on the frequency of utilization can be anchored on *Domestication Theory*, developed by Silverstone, Hirsch, and Morley in the 1980s which examines how new communication technologies become integrated into the everyday lives of individuals and families, becoming domesticated within the home environment. It focuses on how these technologies are appropriated, adapted, and normalized within domestic settings.

This theory can be connected to the frequency or number of times students visit and use social media sites. According to this theory, communication technologies become domesticated and normalized within individuals' daily routines (Berker, 2005; Haddon, 2017; Hynes & Richardson, 2009). As students incorporate social media into their lives, it becomes a habitual part of their communication practices. The frequency with which students visit and use social media sites can be attributed to this normalization process, where checking social media becomes an automatic behavior in their daily lives.

Social media facilitates the maintenance of social bonds and connections, an essential aspect of domestication. Students often use social media to stay in connected with their close friends, family, and peers, and the frequency of their visits to these platforms is influenced by their desire to remain connected to their social networks.

Students personalize their online spaces on social media to reflect their interests, identity, and social preferences. As a result, they may feel compelled to visit social media sites frequently to update their profiles, share content, and engage with others to curate their online persona, thereby reinforcing the domestication of these platforms. Emotions play a significant role in the domestication process. The emotional connection that students develop with social media can impact the frequency of their visits. Positive emotions, such as excitement over receiving likes or comments, or negative emotions, like anxiety over missing out on updates, can drive students to check social media frequently.

Social pressure and the *Fear of Missing Out* (FOMO) can also contribute to the frequency of social media usage (Abel, 2016; Alabri, 2022; Tandon, 2021; Rozgonjuk, 2020). Students should stay constantly connected to their social circles to avoid missing out on important information or events, reflecting how social media becomes deeply embedded in their daily routines through domestication.

Domestication theory emphasizes how communication technologies become integrated into household information consumption and entertainment practices. Similarly, students may use social media platforms as a primary source of news, information, and entertainment, leading to frequent visits to stay updated and engaged.

All things considered, domestication theory can help explain the frequency with which students visit and use social media sites. The normalization of social media within their daily routines, integration into social bonds, personalization of online spaces, emotional engagement, social pressures, and information consumption all contribute to the domestication process and shape the frequency of their interactions with social media platforms.

Time Spent

Time spent utilizing social media refers to the number of hours research participants dedicate to logging into their various social networking sites each week. Figure 3 presents the data displaying the amount of time spent by the research participants on social media platforms.

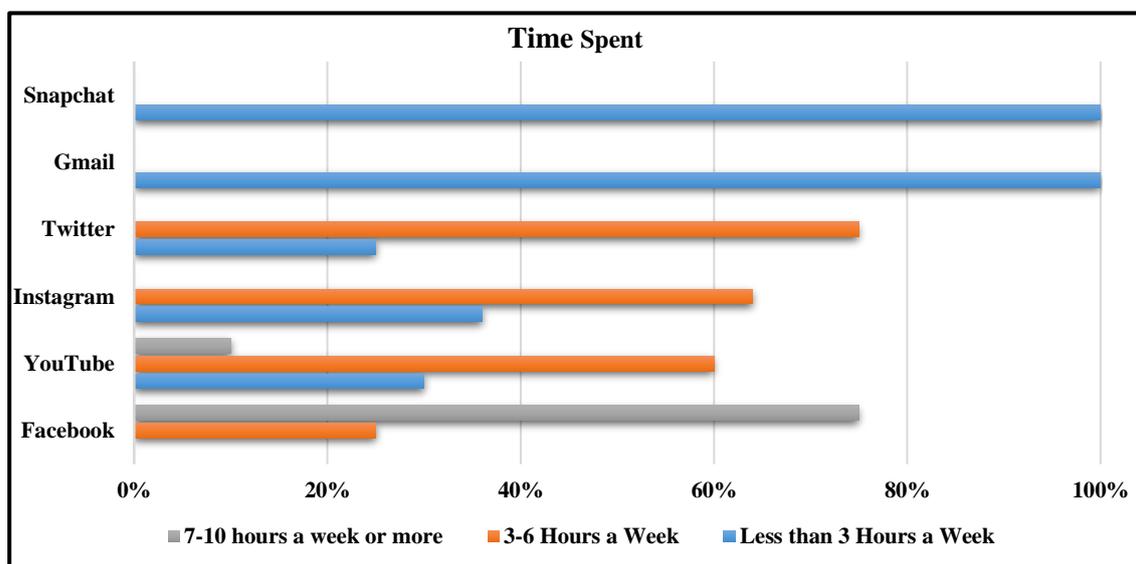


Figure 3. Time Spent on Social Media Platforms

Based on Figure 3, it is observed that most participants use their preferred social media platforms, such as *YouTube*, *Instagram*, and *Twitter*, for an average of 3-6 hours per week. However, participants spend an average of 7 to 10 hours or more per week on *Facebook*.

Nowadays, people, especially young ones, spend more time engaging in online social networking than having face-to-face conversations (Subramanian, 2017; Yavich et al., 2019). Social media consumers dedicate considerable time to various social media platforms. Students, in particular, spend significant time on social media due to the convenience and accessibility it offers for social interactions with peers, diverse content for entertainment, access to information and knowledge, opportunities for self-expression and identity formation, social validation, networking for professional development, emotional gratification, and the fear of missing out on important events and trends.

In fact, Facebook has recently introduced a new feature called "*Your Time on Facebook*." This feature allows users to track how much time they spend on various activities within the platform, such as reacting to posts, scrolling through the news feed, watching videos, and viewing photos on Instagram. Users can monitor their daily or weekly usage patterns on Facebook through this special feature, including options for muting notifications and enhancing user-friendliness. Social media is a platform for sharing news, information, comments, and self-expression. Much of the research participants' time is dedicated to engaging in these activities on their subscribed social media platforms.

The discussion above can be validated by the responses of *Participant 5*, *Participant 9*, *Participant 21*, *Participant 37*, *Participant 45*, and *Participant 51* correspondingly.

P5: *"I would prefer to communicate through social media rather than in person. My whole time sometimes will be spent communicating with my friends through Facebook. We talk about so many things on earth."*

P9: *"Sometimes I set aside my assignments and projects because I enjoy using Facebook, YouTube, and sometimes Instagram. Instead of doing my school tasks, I spend much time on social media."*

P21: *"Talking about social media time, sometimes I forget to comb my hair because I always use Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter especially if no classes. It is just so relaxing to use the features of social media."*

P37: *"I do not know what is on Facebook and other social media that makes it addictive. If there are drug addicts, there is also a social media addict and that is me. I always forget to do some important things because of spending much time in social media."*

P45: *"If ever I feel bored at home or school, I usually open Facebook and Instagram or listen to music from YouTube".*

P51: *"I experienced that my grades dropped because I lost my focus on my studies because I am always using social media. This is not good, I know. But social media is already part of my life."*

Social media platforms are designed with super user-friendly interfaces, featuring flashy buttons and swiping mechanics that continually entice people to engage with them. However, unmonitored and unrestricted exposure to social media or excessive screen time can lead to significant problems. Some experts liken addiction to social media platforms to drug addiction. In many cases, habit loops are intentionally integrated into these platforms, leading users to indulge in social media in ways similar to gambling, drinking, smoking, and other harmful habits.

Moreover, spending an enormous amount of time on social media can drastically reduce the spectrum of boredom, making social media a good past time and causing individuals to stay glued to their screens for extended periods (Hollenbaugh & Ferris, 2014; Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011; Smock et al., 2011; Wadsley, 2022; Whiting & Williams, 2013). This excessive usage can numb people to the feelings and emotions of those physically interacting with them, as they become more accustomed to engaging with virtual profiles on the World Wide Web rather than real individuals. This detachment from real-life interactions can adversely affect social skills and emotional connections.

People often dwell on the negative aspects of the real and virtual world when they delve into the comment sections of popular social media pages or participate in online groups or pages on platforms like Facebook (Fox & Moreland, 2015; Lievonen et al., 2023). The anonymity of social media allows people to make negative comments about others that they would never dare to say face-to-face. This detachment from real-life interactions can lead to a significant dilemma, as this negative attitude may spill over into their fundamental interactions with family members, workmates, classmates, and friends.

In order to mitigate this issue, it is essential to reduce such negative behavior on social media and encourage real-life talks and conversations that foster broader perspectives and awareness about social realities. Engaging in meaningful discussions and open dialogue with others can help people develop empathy, understanding, and empathy, leading to more positive and constructive interactions both online and offline. Individuals must recognize the impact of their words and actions, even on social media, and strive to create a more compassionate and understanding online community.

Spending excessive time on social media can have detrimental effects on people's productivity, particularly in their academic or work-related tasks (Yu et al., 2018). School-related assignments, projects, and research are crucial for students' academic success. However, the constant interruptions from social media notifications or online game invitations on platforms like Facebook can divert their attention and hinder their ability to focus on their studies. This can lead to a decline in their productivity and output quality.

To address this issue, some schools, especially in basic education institutions, have implemented measures to block access to social media platforms on their servers, helping students stay more focused during study hours. Furthermore, excessive reliance on social media and screen time can lead to a sedentary lifestyle, as people become static and neglect physical activities. Encouraging outdoor activities and exercise can help individuals burn fat, relax, and stay physically active, contributing to better overall well-being.

Another vital aspect to consider is how social media can deceive people (Shu et al., 2017). Users often present their best selves on social media, showcasing only the positive aspects of their lives. This can create a false sense of inadequacy or comparison, leading individuals to overlook their own strengths and suffer from low self-esteem. It is crucial for people to remember that social media may not always reflect the complete reality of others' lives and to focus on their journey and self-growth.

While social media platforms offer numerous benefits, individuals must balance their online and offline lives, maintain their productivity, and safeguard their mental and physical well-being. Being mindful of their social media usage and promoting a healthy lifestyle will contribute to a more fulfilling and balanced life.

The contention above can be validated by *Participant 11, Participant 24, Participant 26, Participant 33, and Participant 48* who stated that:

P11: *"It is all because of social media and internet that people are becoming too lazy. They prefer to stay at home doing nothing else but scroll up and down on their phones or play online games."*

P24: *"There are so many pretentious people in the online world. In social media they are pretty but in reality, they are ugly. They will look beautiful because of the filter they are using. It is okay for as long as it can boost their self-esteem."*

P26: *"Since you frequently see pretty faces in social media, you will be insecure, and you will become conscious of how you look physically."*

P33: "Every time my post receives likes and reactions, I feel like I am in heaven because of too much happiness."

P48 "Before I stopped school because I was addicted to computer games but right now, I am hooked with social media."

It should be emphasized that companies that manufacture gadgets and tools, such as mobile devices, often design these products to engage users and encourage prolonged usage, leading to significant time spent on social media. As a result, individuals, including students, can find themselves excessively immersed in social media, potentially affecting their productivity and well-being.

To address this issue, media consumers can take advantage of certain applications to help them manage their screen time. For example, there are applications available that allow users to track the amount of time they spend on social media platforms daily. By using such an application, students can become more aware of their social media usage and proactively balance their time between social media and academic responsibilities.

Furthermore, there are applications like "Self-control" that can serve as a useful tool for students. This application has a feature that allows users to block access to specific social media platforms simultaneously for a designated period. By employing this application, students can limit their social media usage and prevent themselves from getting carried away by constant distractions. This helps them maintain their focus on their studies and tasks without being consumed by excessive social media engagement.

It is essential for all media consumers, including students, to recognize that spending excessive time on social media platforms can be detrimental to their overall well-being. Students can foster a healthier balance between virtual and real-world engagements by implementing these applications and becoming more mindful of their social media habits, improving productivity and a more balanced lifestyle.

People's extensive usage of social media platforms can be attributed to their desire to build and reinforce their identity in the virtual world (Orsatti & Riemer, 2015). Social media offers a platform for users to seek confirmation and validation through likes, reactions, and engagement with their online persona. By expressing their opinions, emotions, and self-expression, users receive validation for their viewpoints, making their social media "wall" akin to a mirror reflecting their personality and life views. The continuous pursuit of this validation and the positive feelings that arise from receiving affirmations can lead to users spending significant amounts of time on social media.

For some individuals, excessive time spent on social media may distract and hinder other essential functions like personal, academic, or work-related tasks (Moqbel & Kock, 2018; Ng, 2016). However, it is important to note that the potential waste of time on social media only occurs when the platform is not used appropriately. For instance, engaging in one or two posts a day and moderating interactions can be sufficient for most social media users, as opposed to spending countless hours on the platform without purpose.

By being mindful of their social media usage and setting boundaries, users can avoid falling into unproductive patterns and ensure that their time on social media remains a beneficial and enjoyable experience. Balancing social media engagement with other responsibilities and activities is critical to maximizing the benefits of these platforms without sacrificing valuable time and productivity.

The rapid advancement of technology has transformed social media into a prominent platform for news and information, providing users with easy access to real-time updates on current events (Bradshaw et al., 2020; Hermida et al., 2012; Paulussen & Harder, 2014). This accessibility allows busy individuals to stay informed despite their hectic schedules, eliminating the need to check traditional media outlets such as radio, television, and print. A simple scroll through their Facebook and Twitter feeds satisfies their information needs, which contributes to people spending significant amounts of time on social media.

For celebrity enthusiasts, social media offers a convenient way to follow and stay updated on their favorite celebrities' lives and activities (Azzman et al., 2019; Bennett, 2016; Kim & Kim, 2020; Zhuang, 2018). Moreover, these platforms make staying connected with friends and significant others effortless. The ease of checking in on people is significant in why individuals spend more time on social media lately.

From a business perspective, social media platforms offer a cost-effective means of marketing and entrepreneurship (Hassan et al., 2015; Odoom et al., 2017; Pakura & Rudeloff, 2023). Companies no longer need to invest large sums of money in traditional advertising to reach their target customers. Social media enables brands to leverage their online presence to drive sales and effectively promote their products and services.

The multifaceted nature of social media, encompassing news reporting, celebrity updates, social connections, and business opportunities, contributes to the allure of spending extensive time on these platforms. However, individuals need to strike a balance and use social media mindfully and purposefully to avoid excessive usage that might detract from other aspects of their lives.

The discussion above can be supported by the statements of *Participant 3*, *Participant 7*, *Participant 41*, and *Participant 52* respectively.

P3: "Social media has many uses aside from communicating with your friends and family like watching news on Facebook or YouTube."

P7: "You can follow your favorite celebrities in Instagram or Twitter and be updated of their recent life developments or any news about their personal and showbiz life."

P41: "I sometimes post on social media to ask for self-validation through my friends likes, reactions, and comments. This is really true especially if I have a new dress or I am in a new place or in a fancy restaurant."

P52: "It feels so good when your posts or photos receive so many likes and reactions. I think using social media is good, but everything should be in moderation. We still have so many school tasks to do and besides our life is not just limited in the virtual world."

These findings on time spent by student participants on social media platforms can be supported by *Uses and Gratification Theory*, which is pioneered by Elihu Katz in 1970s. This theory is concerned with establishing the linkages between the research participants' motivations for allocating much time to social media platforms. Research participants access their social media platform accounts bringing with them their several needs and desires, which eventually will structure how consumers receive social media.

This theory posits that individuals actively choose and use media to fulfill specific needs or gratifications (Han et al., 2015; Kearney, 2018; Wu et al., 2016). It focuses on understanding why and how people consume media and what psychological and social conditions they seek to satisfy through media usage. The following points come into play when connecting the uses and gratifications theory to the time spent by students visiting and using social media sites.

Students may spend significant time on social media sites seeking entertainment and social interactions (Allen et al., 2014; Ryan et al., 2011). Social media platforms offer diverse content, such as videos, memes, and interactive features, that fulfill their need for entertainment. Additionally, these platforms facilitate social interactions with friends, peers, and like-minded individuals, satisfying their desire for social connection and communication. Social media can serve as a valuable source of information and knowledge for students. They may spend time visiting social media sites to stay updated on current events, academic topics, or industry-related news, fulfilling their need for information and intellectual stimulation.

Social media allows students to present themselves and express their identity online. They may spend time carefully curating their profiles, sharing content, and engaging in activities that reflect their interests, values, and aspirations, thereby gratifying their need for self-expression and identity exploration. Students might use social media as a means of escapism and emotional gratification. They may turn to social media during moments of stress or boredom to distract themselves and find comfort in engaging with entertaining or relatable content.

Social media usage can also be driven by the need for social comparison and validation (Gerson et al., 2016; Stapleton, 2017). Students may spend time observing others' activities and achievements, comparing themselves to peers, and seeking validation through likes, comments, and followers, thus fulfilling their desire for social acceptance and recognition. For some students, professional networking and career development may motivate social media usage. They may spend time on platforms like LinkedIn to connect with professionals, seek job opportunities, and build a professional online presence, fulfilling their need for career advancement.

The uses and gratifications theory explains why students spend time visiting and using social media sites. Their media usage is driven by their desire to fulfill various needs, such as entertainment, social interaction, information seeking, self-expression, emotional gratification, social validation, networking, and professional development. Understanding these underlying motivations helps to shed light on the reasons behind the time and effort students invest in their social media activities.

Length of Utilization

Social media platforms have existed for several years and have become an integral part of people's lives. It is crucial to understand why individuals have remained engaged with these platforms over time and continue to subscribe to them for several years.

This section of the analysis explores the duration or the number of years the research participants have utilized social media platforms. The findings are presented in *Figure 4*.

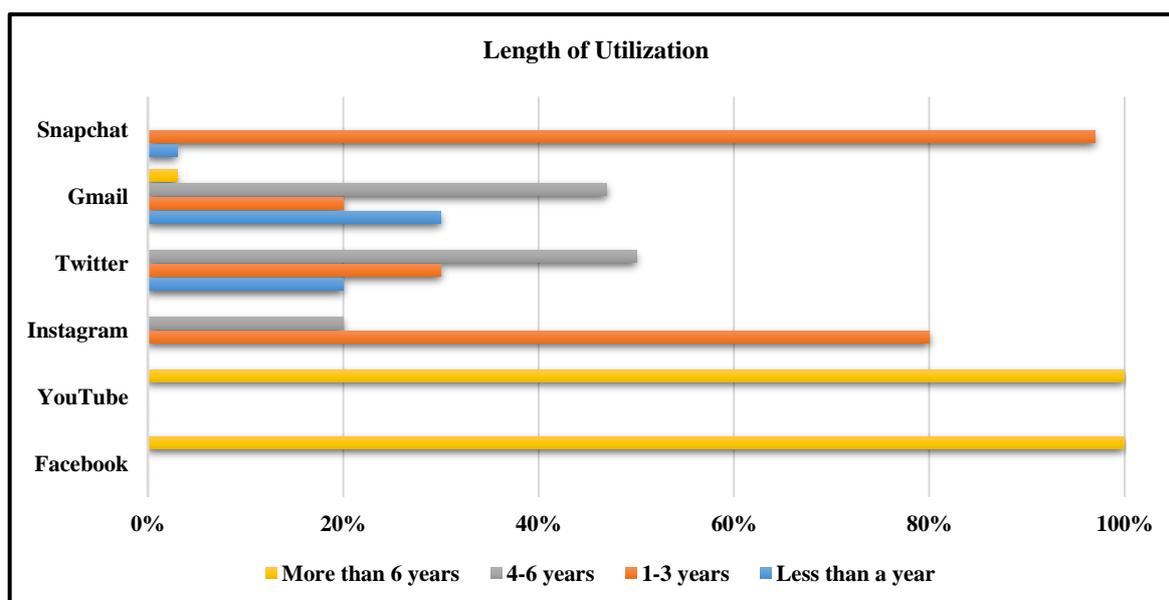


Figure 4. Length of Social Media Platform Utilization

On average, the research participants have been using their preferred social media platforms for several years. Notably, most of the participants have utilized *Facebook* and *YouTube* for over 6 years, *Instagram* for 1-3 years, and *Twitter* for 4-6 years.

A social media platform can be considered successful if it provides a thriving avenue for brands, businesses, content creators, and users to benefit from leveraging it (Bilgin, 2018; Latiff & Safiee, 2015; Tritama & Tarigan, 2016). The consistent projection of new social media content relies heavily on hardworking content creators seeking compensation for their efforts and output, whether in monetary or other forms. The longevity of social media's presence on the World Wide Web is directly influenced by its users, and in return, social media significantly influences its users.

Currently, platforms like *Instagram* and *Facebook* do not directly compensate media content contributors or creators. Instead, creators must seek compensation through third parties. Both *Instagram* and *Facebook* primarily rely on advertising revenue as their main source of income. They generate revenue from businesses and advertisers who pay to promote their products and services through sponsored posts and ads (e.g. Constantine, 2020). This absence of direct rewards for content creators on certain social media platforms can lead to a decline in the quality of content produced. When content quality suffers, subscribers may leave, and ultimately, the social media platform risks becoming obsolete and fading away naturally.

Media users are the life-support of various social media platforms. Offering compensation to contributors contributes to their happiness and loyalty to the platform. It motivates creators to produce their best content, fostering a competitive edge among platforms. By providing creators with rewards, platforms encourage them to strive for excellence. A successful social media platform creates a symbiotic relationship, ensuring that all parties involved, including brands, content creators, and users, reap the benefits of their engagement. Rewarding content creators elevates the overall quality of content and strengthens the platform's position and relevance in the ever-evolving landscape of social media.

The discussion above can be affirmed by *Participant 11*, *Participant 14*, *Participant 26*, *Participant 30*, and *Participant 47* who stated that:

P11: "Social media are still existing because we are still here as users of its services. We are the reason of their existence in the World Wide Web and without us they will be gone."

P14: "I only use Facebook before but when I discovered Instagram and Twitter that these platforms are also offering unique features, then, I subscribed to it."

P26: "The trend right now is social media users are not using Facebook and Instagram more frequently because these platforms are not giving them much premium. The target of the users right now is YouTube because this platform pays for content creators as long as their policies and guidelines are being followed. But I think social media are constantly evolving, and their policies and features may change over time."

P30: "If there is a new social media, I join right away and that is the reason why I have been with them for a long period of time already. When Facebook, Instagram and others arrived, I joined right away."

P47: "It is my goal to upload videos in YouTube and increase the number of my followers and subscribers so that I can earn income from it. The same thing goes for any social media platform that I can gain money."

Social media platforms have undoubtedly revolutionized the way people interact and connect with each other. Among them, *Facebook* has emerged as an undeniable powerhouse, profoundly impacting social media consumers worldwide. Its journey from humble beginnings to its current status as a dominant platform is a testament to its exceptional success.

Over time, *Facebook* has continuously evolved, incorporating numerous innovative features and making interface adjustments to enhance user experience. By lifting registration restrictions and introducing user-friendly functionalities, the platform has successfully attracted users from all walks of life. The convenience of its features has endeared it to millions, resulting in a loyal user base that has remained devoted for years.

One of the keys to *Facebook's* longevity and supremacy lies in its ability to adapt and embrace change. It has quickly acquired successful applications and integrated them seamlessly into its ecosystem, solidifying its position as the top social media platform. This strategic approach of cloning or acquiring competitors has allowed *Facebook* to set trends and maintain its status as an industry leader.

Beyond *Facebook's* success, the social media landscape is teeming with a multitude of platforms, each vying for attention and engagement. Companies have recognized the immense potential of social media for advertising, promotions, and brand exposure. The ubiquitous presence of social media icons on popular websites, including *Facebook*, *Twitter*, and *Instagram*, is a testament to their widespread impact.

As social media continues to evolve, platforms must remain innovative to stay relevant amidst stiff competition. The key lies in understanding the needs and preferences of users and consistently delivering exceptional user experiences. Each platform must strive to create a unique identity, offering features and functionalities that resonate with its target audience.

Facebook's success story serves as an inspiration for all social media platforms. The journey from a small startup to a global behemoth demonstrates the transformative power of innovation and adaptability. In order to thrive in this ever-changing landscape, social media platforms must chart their own course, continually evolving and delivering value to their users. By doing so, they can etch their names as trailblazers in the fascinating world of social media.

People who follow social media accounts are regularly exposed to status updates, news, and various interactions, serving as constant reminders of the account holder's presence (Chen et al., 2020). *Twitter*, in particular, offers users the flexibility to utilize programs like *TweetDeck* for tweet monitoring and scheduling. Leveraging *Twitter* can be remarkably innovative and compelling to engage with media consumers. However, its success is contingent

on several factors, including the industry, specific circumstances, and consistent maintenance with a well-defined strategy, especially in the face of demanding market constraints.

Maintaining a robust online presence across multiple social media platforms can be challenging. Companies must carefully assess how to allocate their time and resources to maximize brand awareness and maintain a positive online and offline reputation. Taking a conservative and well-thought-out approach can prepare these companies for the future of social media or any new emerging media trends. Such foresight ensures they are ready to adapt to the "next big thing."

For search engine marketing companies and their clients, these factors are crucial considerations when deciding the timing and extent of marketing efforts. Being mindful of these elements allows them to target their audience and optimize their marketing strategies effectively.

Social media platforms provide valuable opportunities to connect with consumers and enhance brand visibility (Chu, 2016; Kwon & Sung, 2011). However, success relies on the right industry fit, well-maintained strategies, and adaptability to evolving market dynamics. By thoughtfully navigating the social media landscape, companies can solidify their position and thrive in the ever-changing world of media consumption.

Social media platforms have flourished over the years by continuously pushing out upgrades to enhance their features. These updates often stir up a commotion among users as they adapt to the changes. Take Facebook, for instance, introducing features like the news feed, timeline, and cover photo. Social media platforms are eager to evolve and are more than willing to initiate developments and test changes to satisfy customers. Their ultimate goal is to retain users for the long term.

One of the reasons why social media platforms have become addictive is their fascinating features (Montag et al., 2019). From the news feed and messaging/chat to voice and video calls, liking, following, subscribing, and the marketplace, these elements make social media platforms an integral part of users' lives. As social media users age, their attachment to their favorite platforms also matures.

In order to cater to users' needs, many platforms swiftly transitioned to mobile, as users increasingly rely on smartphones and tablets to access the internet. To embrace this challenge, social media platforms ensure they remain relevant to their tech-savvy audience. They strive to avoid becoming mere fleeting fads and instead aim to establish a lasting online presence for years.

The success of social media platforms lies in their adaptability and continuous improvement. By catering to user preferences and embracing technological advancements, these platforms forge strong connections with their audience, making them an indispensable part of modern life. As they evolve and stand the test of time, social media platforms continue to shape how people communicate and connect in the digital age.

The discussion above can be supported by *Participant 6, Participant 13, Participant 23, Participant 34, Participant 39, Participant 47, and Participant 60* who stated that:

P6: "I am a Facebook user for quite a long time already. Maybe because of Facebook's ease and convenience of use, millions of people have subscribed to this platform. People will stay with Facebook maybe forever. I will also continue to use Facebook."

P13: "The different features make social media platforms as good tools for social awareness by sharing news and information making people to be loyal to social media. Social media should be adaptive to the demands of time and its consumers."

P23: "People already switched to social media or internet from using television or radio. Social media is what we all need and of course a cellphone for us to access it. I will stay with my social media websites."

P34: "Social media users stay for a long time because it is useful to them. Maybe they will continue to use social media for the next few years."

P39: "Each social media website should innovate its website in order to be competitive and useful for people. People only stay if the website is useful for them or if the website is free as long as you have an internet connection you can use it."

P47: "I have been using Facebook for straight eight years and I want to continue using it in the future. Social media makes my life easier and more comfortable."

P60: "Social media changed the landscape of media and communication. People switched to social media from traditional media because of its features. Subscribers will stay and continue using the social media features as long as they find it beneficial for them."

The *Social Marketing Theory* by Philip Kotler and Gerald Zaltman proposed in 1971 can explain student participants' findings on the length of utilization of social media platforms. This theory uses marketing techniques to promote socially beneficial behaviors and influence target audiences (Social Marketing Theory, 2018). It involves understanding the target audience's needs, wants, and preferences and tailoring communication strategies to encourage positive behaviors.

Several salient points can be gleaned when connecting this theory to the length of utilization (number of years) of social media sites by students. The first thing is about behavior change and social media adoption. This theory can help explain why students adopt social media and continue to use it over the years. Social media platforms have effectively utilized marketing techniques to appeal to the needs and preferences of young users, making these platforms attractive and compelling to join and use regularly.

When it comes to perceived value and benefits, this theory emphasizes the importance of perceived value and benefits in motivating behavior change (Bajracharya, 2018). Social media platforms have successfully offered perceived value to students by providing entertainment, social connection,

information, and opportunities for self-expression. As students perceive these benefits, they are more likely to continue using social media for an extended period. Social marketing also recognizes the impact of social influence and peer pressure on behavior. Social media platforms have become a significant part of modern social interactions, and students may feel compelled to continue using them to stay connected with their peers and avoid missing out on important social interactions.

Social media platforms often incorporate reinforcement and reward mechanisms, such as likes, comments, and notifications, to encourage users to continue engaging with the platforms. Over time, students may develop habitual behavior of using social media due to the positive reinforcements received through these mechanisms. Social marketing campaigns aim to maintain continuous communication and engagement with the target audience to sustain behavior change (Bernhardt et al., 2012; Shawky et al., 2019). Social media platforms continuously update and introduce new features, content, and experiences, which can contribute to prolonged utilization by students. This theory recognizes the role of social norms and expectations in shaping behavior. As social media usage becomes increasingly prevalent and normative among students, those using these platforms for years may feel pressured to continue using them to fit in with their social circles.

In a nutshell, the social marketing theory helps explain why students continue to utilize social media sites for an extended period. The theory highlights the importance of perceived value, benefits, social influence, reinforcement, ongoing communication, and social norms in maintaining behavior change and sustaining students' engagement with social media platforms.

The findings on the length of utilization can also be anchored on the framework of *Pop Culture* which was initiated by Ray Browne in the 1960s, which examines the influence and impact of popular culture on individuals and society. It focuses on how elements of popular culture, such as music, movies, fashion, and trends, shape people's identities, behaviors, and beliefs (Gupta, 2023).

This framework is linked to social media adoption. Social media platforms have become integral to popular culture, especially among younger generations. As social media gained popularity and became a cultural phenomenon, students were drawn to these platforms due to their prevalence in popular culture and the influence of their peers who were already using them.

Pop culture studies acknowledge that specific trends and behaviors become cultural norms through popular culture. Social media plays a significant role in shaping our interaction with pop culture, as it has become an integral part of it (Chulick, 2021). Online platforms host a plethora of pop culture elements such as memes, trending discussions, and dedicated fan communities, showcasing how pop culture has seamlessly integrated into the digital realm.

Social media usage has been normalized in modern society, including among students, who view these platforms as essential for communication, entertainment, and social interaction. As a result, the length of students' utilization of social media sites may be influenced by their desire to align with cultural norms and stay connected to popular trends. Pop culture often involves the influence of celebrities and social media influencers who use these platforms to engage with their fan base. Students may follow and emulate their favorite celebrities or influencers on social media, leading to prolonged utilization as they seek to stay updated and engage with the content of these prominent figures.

This framework also recognizes that popular culture is characterized by trends and fads that can influence people's choices and behaviors. Students may continue using social media platforms to stay updated with the latest trends and participate in viral challenges, which can contribute to prolonged utilization over the years.

Pop culture plays a significant role in how individuals express themselves and shape their identities (Krumrey, 2022). Social media platforms provide students with a means of self-expression, allowing them to showcase their interests, hobbies, and style, thus fostering a sense of identity and belonging. This aspect can contribute to the length of utilization as students continue to use social media to maintain their online personas and identities. It examines how media representations influence perceptions and behaviors. As social media platforms continue to be represented positively in popular culture, students may be encouraged to maintain their presence on these platforms over the years to align with positive associations and representations.

Overall, pop culture theory can explain why students continue to utilize social media sites for an extended period. The influence of social media on popular culture, the normalization of social media usage, the impact of influencers and celebrities, trends and fads, self-expression, and media representations all contribute to students' ongoing engagement with these platforms over time.

Conclusion

The study concluded that the students had been actively involved in web-based activities across different social media platforms. They frequently visited their social media accounts and spent a fair share of their time performing several tasks in their daily lives in the online world. They have been active users and consumers of social media for quite a few years, and it is assumed that they will continue to use it in the future. The study's results additionally indicated that technology acceptance, ease of use, and perceived benefits influenced students' decisions to persist in using social media.

A balanced approach to social media usage is recommended to mitigate the potential negative consequences of excessive use. These findings offer valuable insights for parents, prompting them to monitor their children's social media activities to safeguard their overall development. Similarly, educators can benefit from these findings to implement suitable measures to protect students from the detrimental effects of excessive social media use.

Specifically, teachers can leverage social media to their advantage by enriching and integrating the curriculum with relevant social media content. By incorporating social media platforms as educational tools, educators can create engaging and interactive learning experiences for their students. This approach caters to the students' familiarity with social media and allows for exploring real-world applications and current events. Additionally, using

social media responsibly and in a controlled educational environment can help students develop digital literacy skills, critical thinking, and responsible online behavior, which is essential in today's technology-driven world.

In future research endeavors, there may be a focus on exploring the potential aspects of social media, such as envisioning applications, technological advancements, and further theoretical elaborations. Researchers in the future could delve into additional factors beyond those examined in this inquiry, seeking to gain deeper insights into media consumers' attitudes toward sustainable social media usage. Additionally, future investigations could explore the effects of specific social networking platforms, including TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, and other similar sites. Moreover, analogous investigations might be conducted to encompass diverse age groups beyond higher education students or examine social media usage in different locations within and outside the Philippines.

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