

Utilizing Social Media for Accessing Academic e-Resources in Higher Education

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Abstract:

Social media is a great innovation of the 20th century. Different types of social media, such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn, help higher education students gather information, collaborate, and share knowledge. The primary purpose of this study is to determine the current status of accessing e-resources through social media in higher education, based on demographic variables, including gender, type of institution, and level of education. To collect data from participants, a scale was developed, and 529 higher education students' data were collected with the help of an online survey. The findings of the study show no significant difference between male and female students and government and self-financed higher education students. This study also found that based on the level of education, there is a clear difference among UG, PG, B.Ed., M.Ed., and Scholars or doctoral students. Mostly, research scholars and M.Ed. students access e-resources through social media, and they think it is a prominent source of academic e-resources.

Keywords: social media, e-resources, higher education, gender, types of institutions, levels of education.

1. Introduction

One of the greatest innovations in technology is the internet (Ajuwon, 2003). Since the innovation of the internet, society has evolved very quickly with its help. We live in a society where information is very important, which is why we call the present society an 'information-based society' (Khongtim, 2006; Mulimani & Gudimani, 2008). To adjust to this evolving society, up-to-date information is needed. The internet and its various sources help us adapt to this information-based society, and students' roles are not limited to passive consumers; moreover, they play the role of active creators of new ideas, thoughts, etc (Klamma, et al. 2007). For this reason, Kemp (1976) noted, "Indeed, information has been described as the fifth need of man ranking after air, water, food, and shelter". With the help of this innovation, more information is available in various media, and users can access this information via not only traditional and printed media but also social media to acquire various types of information (Kim, et al., 2011). In this century, one of the significant facts is the emergence of ICT and its extensive use in the field of education (Thanuskodi, 2012). At present, students are much more active in technical fields, and they easily use ICT for personal, professional, and academic purposes (Dumpit & Fernandez, 2017). McLoughlin & Lee (2008) mentioned that students are "active

producers of knowledge” and they are also responsible for their learning with the help of ICT. This individualized new era of technological advancement is called Web 2.0 (Alghizzawi et al., 2019; Bingham & Conner, 2010; Bryant, 2006; Liu, 2010). It facilitates information sharing, user-centered design, and collaboration (Power & Phillips-Wren, 2004). Social media is one of the most significant parts of this process.

Social media is an internet-based technology and a form of electronic communication designed for people to communicate with each other (Adelakun et al. 2023; Avcı et al., 2015; Bingham & Conner, 2010; Sponcil & Gitimu, 2013). It creates an online community where users share information, ideas, virtual communication, personal messages, and exchange content (Avcı et al. 2015; Hosen et al., 2021). In the 21st century, social media has become an indispensable part of human life. Kemp (2025) reported that 5.24 billion users are active on social media. Recently, social media has become very popular among the young generation because this generation's young pupils easily communicate with each other through this medium (Ezeah, Asogwa, & Obiorah, 2013; McHaney & Sachs, 2016). It has become one of the prominent sources of information gathering (Alghizzawi, et al. 2019; Agichtein, et al. 2011; Castillo, et al. 2008; Koukaras, et al. 2020). It is one type of electronic resource; it is used not only for interacting with each other but also for collecting information and expanding knowledge (Sivakumar et al., 2023). It helps students create their communities, collaborate, and promote a peer-learning environment (Alwagait, et al. 2014; Bingham & Conner, 2010). Electronic resources not only benefit students but also support teachers (Bartosik-Purgat et al., 2016). At present, e-resources are one of the main mediums for access to academic information (Sudhier & Seethalekshmi, 2011). It helps to expand access, increase usability and effectiveness, and establish new ways for individuals to use the information to be more productive in their endeavors (Negahban & Talawar, 2009).

People commonly misconception that only social networking sites are known as social media. However, social media is not limited to only social networking sites; the areas of social media are broad. Gundecha & Liu (2014) identified nine types of social media. These include social networking sites (Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn), blogging (Huffington Post, Business Insider, Engadget), microblogging (Twitter, Tumblr, Plurk), wikis (Wikipedia, Wikitravel, Wikihow), social news (Digg, Slashdot, Reddit), social bookmarking (Delicious, StumbleUpon), media sharing (YouTube, Flickr), opinion, reviews, and ratings (Epinions, Yelp, Cnet), and Answers (Yahoo! Answers, Wiki Answers). All these sites are used for social and educational purposes. In the era of social media, we do not gather only information; rather, users contribute various informative innovations and ideas (Liu, 2010). Aichner & Jacob (2015), Anandhan et al. (2018) & Koukaras et al. (2020) mentioned similar opinions on the classification of social media. On the basis of their discussions, a diagram is furnished below to illustrate the classification of social media in **Figure 1**. One of the great things in the 21st century is access to different electronic resources for educational purposes (Mulimani & Gudimani, 2008). Electronic resources are electronic representations of information (Sudhier & Seethalekshmi, 2011). For the collection of different education-related information, job news, preparation for competitive examinations, self-paced learning, self-evaluations, writing reports, and journals, students used different e-resources. Electronic resources are a great source of information; they provide new and updated information, and this information is much faster than that of any other medium (Singh, 2019). For the development of ICT, students are not limited only to the traditional library system for the improvement of knowledge; now, they are more interested in the use of e-resources (Swain, 2010). To

define e-resources, Saye (2001) proposed that “electronic resources are the resources that are generated through some electronic medium and made available to a wide range of viewers both on-site and off-site via some electronic transferring machine or internet.” Veena (2016) also defined “electronic resources as the electronic version of information, stored electronically and made accessible through electronic systems and computer networks, which can be accessed from any place, at any time, without time and geographical limit”.

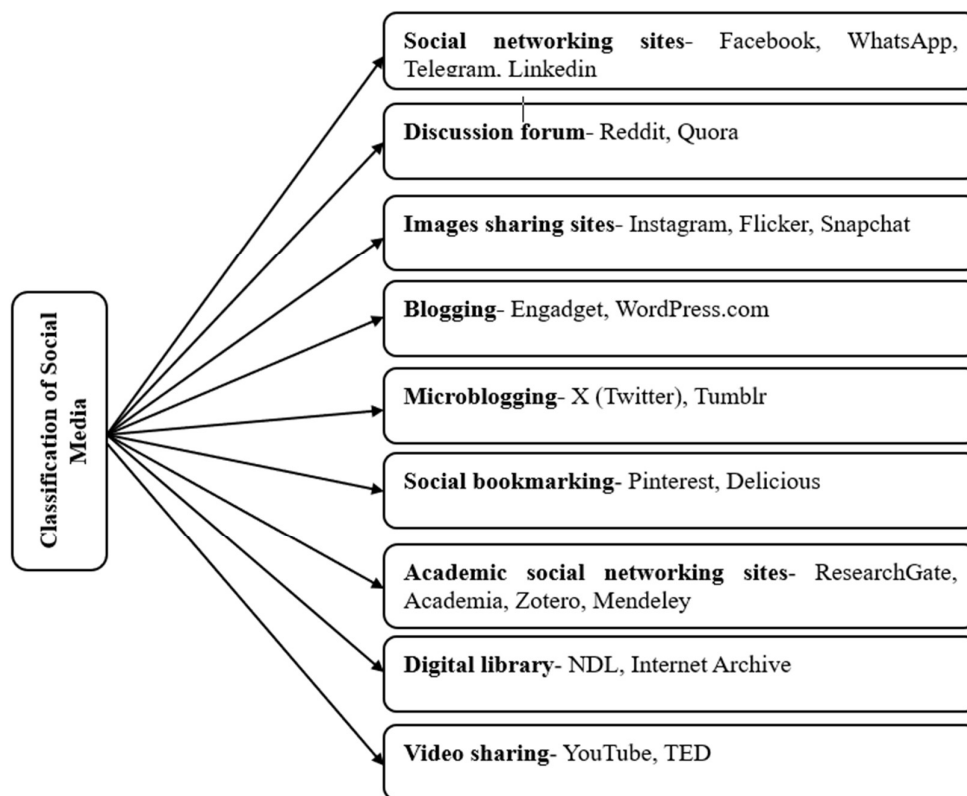


Figure 1: Classification of social media

2. Scope of the review

2.1 Types of e-resources:

Soni et al. (2018) reported that with the help of the advent of new information and communication technology (ICT), various electronic resources have been developed, such as e-journals, e-books, emails, e-patents, e-databases, e-standards, e-theses, e-chats, etc. Electronic resources are an integral part of modern-day institutions and libraries. Sudhier & Seethalekshmi (2011) and Thanuskodi (2012) reported that many e-resources are available in different forms at different sites. They mention some available resources- e-books, digital libraries, e-journals, e-tutors, e-discussions, e-news, online tests, etc. It delivers information in the form of full-text databases, e-journals, image collections, and multimedia in the form of CDs, tapes, the internet, web technology, etc. Dayakar (2018) noted that the internet is a vast and heterogeneous source of information and includes e-books, e-journals, e-mail, interlinked hypertext documents, online help centers, expert views, and file transfer protocols.

2.2 Social media as a source of academic information:

A mixed-method investigation was conducted by Delello et al. (2015), who worked on a multidisciplinary approach [education, human resources development (HRD), and marketing]. Their study revealed that across the three disciplines, students use social media in their classroom setting, and students become active participants. In classroom teaching, teachers also use several forms of social media. This study also revealed that social media helps students engage in and collaborate, and generates different creative ideas and thoughts. Kim et al. (2014) noted that social media has become a popular source of information. Different social media platforms, such as Wikipedia and YouTube, are emerging sources of information. They also mentioned that higher education students frequently use Wikipedia for knowledge gathering. Swain's (2010) opinion on the reliability of sources is that students use social media as a toolbox of ideas. Present-day students are strongly encouraged to trust e-resources as authentic sources of information. Students feel that e-resources are one of the great sources of success in their studies and a better way to substitute traditional print services.

2.3 Usefulness of e-resources:

Ashraf et al. (2021) mentioned that social media is an important source of open learning. It is beneficial for both students and teachers because it helps students share knowledge, collaborate, and understand concepts. The proper use of internet resources and social media is a source of learning and is essential for scholars. It also promotes group learning collaboratively. Pekkala & van Zoonen (2022) cited that social media is an open learning source in the field of education. It is an integral part of intellectual work, and students continuously post study-related materials on social media, which is considered a reliable source of information that is important to every community, such as students, employees, and customers. Samson (2014) conducted a study on e-resources used by the University of Montana's students and faculty. The investigator reported that students used e-resources at a higher-than-expected rate. Senior students used e-resources more frequently than junior undergraduate students did. This study also revealed that full-time or senior professors used e-resources more than assistant professors, associate professors, lecturers, and instructors did. Nisha & Ali (2012) found that students are very much aware of e-journals. They use e-journals mainly for their research purposes, and sometimes they are also used for their upgradation of knowledge, and article publishing purposes; some students prefer to complete their assignments and seminar presentations. Swain (2010) mentioned that some students obtain certain benefits from e-resources such as quick browsing, compound access, retrieval speed, sharing, printing, downloading, and comprehensive information coverage. He also stated that access to e-resources is very easy compared with traditional print services. Kaur & Verma (2009) commented on the use and impact of e-journals and reported that students are very much aware of the use of e-journals. IIT students access academic resources from their departments and hostels rather than directly from the library. They found out that there is a decrease in the tendency of students to use the library directly.

2.4 Challenges in using e-resources:

Thanuskodi (2012) posited that students faced various challenges when they accessed e-resources—a sufficient amount of subject-specific articles was not available on different sites, students did not have much proper knowledge to access e-resources, there was a lack of proper guidance from professionals, and it was time-consuming, with some e-journals are too much expensive. Nisha & Ali (2012) mentioned that the lack of proper internet facilities is a challenge to accessing resources. Chandel &

Saikia (2012) mention the variation between online and offline subscription prices. There are no available standard pricing models for e-resources.

2.5 Gender variation in social media use:

Alnjadat et al. (2019) cited that social media is active among higher education students and impacts their daily activities. They mentioned that students spend an average of 2-3 hours on social media. Male students are more engaged in social media than their female counterparts are, and female students perform better academically than their male counterparts do. Ruleman (2012) mentioned that female students mostly use the internet for social and academic purposes.

3. Objectives and Hypotheses

3.1 Objectives:

The objectives of this study are as follows:

O1: To investigate students' dependency level on social media as an academic resource.

O2: To study higher education students' (gender, type of institution, and level of education) attitudes toward access to e-resources through social media.

3.2 Hypotheses

Keeping the above-stated objectives in mind, the investigators undertook the following hypotheses--

H₀₁: There is no significant difference between male and female students' attitudes toward e-resources used for their academic purposes.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in students' attitudes toward e-resources used for their academic purposes between government institutions and self-financed institutions

H₀₃: There is no significant difference among students concerning their levels of education--UG, PG, B.Ed., M.Ed., and M.Phil./PhD. or scholars.

4. Methods

4.1 Survey design and participants

This study aimed to investigate the role of social media in higher education students' academics. The nature of this study is a cross-sectional survey design. At a single point in time, all data were collected with the help of a convenience sampling technique. In this survey, investigators conducted an online survey all over West Bengal, India. To collect data from participants, the investigators circulated a Google form with the help of social media groups (WhatsApp) and all the participants participated in this survey voluntarily. The data were collected from government and private higher education institutions' students. The data were collected from November 2023 to February 2024. The inclusion criterion for this study was the age of the participants 18 years and above and all participants had social media accounts. The data were collected from undergraduate (UG), postgraduate (PG), bachelor of education (B.Ed.), master of education (M.Ed.), and scholar (M.Phil. and PhD) of the government and self-financed higher educational institutions. Finally, 529 participants' data were collected.

4.2 Tools

The investigators developed a 25-item semi-structured questionnaire. In this scale, four (4) dimensions were considered, namely- sources of academic information (6 items), usefulness of e-resources (9 items), reliable sources of information (5 items), and challenges in using e-resources (5 items). This scale is a 5-point Likert scale, including 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'neutral', 'disagree', and 'strongly disagree'. Positive items follow the strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1) sequence and negative items follow from strongly disagree (5) to strongly agree (1). The questionnaire is called the "Social Media & Academic e-Resources Scale," and it is a combination of 17 positive items and 7 negative items.

4.3 Data analysis

We used descriptive and parametric statistics, such as t-tests, one-way ANOVAs, and post-hoc tests. All the data were tabulated in Microsoft Excel and analysed in IBM SPSS version 25.

5. Results

5.1 Descriptive statistics

In this study, three (3) demographic variables were included based on the needs of the study. The three demographic variables are gender (male & female), levels of education (UG, PG, B.Ed., M.Ed., M.Phil., and PhD. or scholar), and finally types of institution (government and self-financed institution students). A total of 529 college and university-level students participated in this study. Among the 529 participants, 208 (39.32%) were male, and 321 (60.68%) were female students 386 students were from government institutions (72.96%), 143 students were from self-financed institutions (27.03%), and finally, students from different levels, including 113 undergraduates (21.36%), 186 post-graduates (35.16%), 148 B.Ed. (27.97%), 59 M.Ed. (11.15%), and 23 M.Phil. and PhD. level students (4.34%). The above-mentioned statistics and some other details, like mean, skewness and kurtosis, are given in *Table 1*.

Table 1: Characteristics of participants according to access to e-resources through social media

Demographic Variables	Categories	N	Percentage (%)	Mean	Skewness	Kurtosis
Gender	Male	208	39.32	94.99	-.067	-.441
	Female	321	60.68	94.26	.161	-.147
Types of institutions	Govt	386	72.96	97.46	-.053	-.210
	Self-financed	143	27.03	94.78	.324	-.634
	UG	113	21.36	93.86	-.376	-.565
	PG	186	35.16	93.97	-.115	-.720

Levels of education	B.Ed.	148	27.97	94.19	-.138	-.837
	M.Ed.	59	11.15	96.45	-.442	-.214
	Scholar (M.Phil. & PhD)	23	4.34	99.91	-.609	-.024
Total=529						

5.2 Inferential statistics and interpretations

In this study, three hypotheses were formulated on the basis of research objectives. In this section, hypotheses were tested with the help of inferential statistics, such as the independent sample t-test, One-way ANOVA, and post-hoc tests. In the section below, all the tested hypotheses are discussed.

To test the mean difference between male and female students' attitudes, independent sample t-tests were used. The mean and standard deviation of male and female students are 94.99 and 3.46 and 94.26 and 3.09, respectively. The calculated t-value is 2.51. The hypothesis is that there is no significant mean difference between male and female students' attitudes toward e-resources used for their academic purposes. The hypothesis is rejected at the 0.05 level of significance because the p-value of 0.01 is less than the 0.05 level of significance ($0.05 \geq .01$), and the degree of freedom is (df) 527. So, it shows that there is a significant difference between male and female students' attitudes toward e-resource use through social media. The male students' mean score (94.99) is higher than that of female students (94.26), and the value of the difference is 0.72. Here, the difference is very low. All the statistical values are shown in **Table 2**.

Table 2 shows the t-test results between the male and female students' mean differences

Level	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	df	Level of significance (two-tailed)	Mean difference
Male	94.99	3.15	2.51	527	.01	.72
Female	94.26	3.52				

To test the mean difference between govt and self-financed institution students, an independent sample t-test was employed. The mean and standard deviation of govt institution students are 94.46 and 3.15, respectively, and those of self-financed institution students are 94.78 and 3.52, respectively. The calculated t-value is -1. The hypothesis for this situation is that there is no significant difference in the attitudes of the students towards e-resources used for their academic purposes between government and self-financed institutions. Here, the hypothesis is not rejected at a 0.05 significance level, because the p-value is 0.32, which is greater than the 0.05 level of significance ($.32 \geq 0.05$), and the df is 527. In this situation, govt and self-financed institution students, both use social media equally for academic purposes. The self-financed institution's mean score is slightly higher than that of the government institution's students, with a difference of 0.32. All the statistical values are shown in **Table 3**.

Table 3 shows the *t*-test results between the government and self-finance institution students' mean differences

Level	Mean	Std. Deviation	t value	df	Level of significance (two-tailed)	Mean difference
Govt institute	94.46	3.15	-1	527	.32	-.32
Self-financed institute	94.78	3.52				

Here, one-way ANOVA is employed to check for significant differences among students in terms of education level. Here, five groups are formed: UG, PG, B.Ed. M.Ed., and scholars (M.Phil. & PhD.). The means of the five groups are 93.86, 93.98, 94.19, 96.46, and 99.91, respectively. The statistics show that significant differences exist among them. The value of the sum of squares between groups is 1008.21, df is 4, and the mean square is 252.05. The sum of squares within groups is 4598.71, df is 524, the mean square is 8.78, and the F value is 28.71. After considering all the values, it is clear that the null hypothesis is rejected at the 0.05 level of significance. The calculated value of ANOVA is .00, which is less than the 0.05 level of significance ($.05 \geq .00$). The one-way ANOVA results indicate that a significant mean difference exists among the groups. All the statistical values are shown in **Table 4**.

Table 4 shows the ANOVA results across levels of education

ANOVA					
Levels	Sum of Squares (SS)	df	Mean Square (MS)	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1008.21	4	252.05	28.71	.00
Within Groups	4598.71	524	8.78		
Total	5606.922	528			

Previously, one-way ANOVA revealed a significant difference among the groups of different levels of students. To determine the differences among the groups, the investigators used post-hoc tests. The result is not significant at the 0.05 level of significance. The mean values of UG, PG, and B.Ed. students are equal or nearly equal. The group of scholars has the highest mean value of 99.91, whereas UG students have the lowest mean height value of 93.87. The mean values of the other groups are PG, B.Ed., and M.Ed. students, who are 93.98, 94.19, and 96.46, respectively. The range of this difference is 6.04. All the statistical values are shown in **Table 5**. Here, M.Ed. and scholar mean scores are very high compared with their counterparts.

Table 5 shows the post-hoc test results across levels of education

Tukey B				
Level of Education	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05		
		1	2	3
UG	113	93.87		
PG	186	93.98		
B.Ed.	148	94.19		
M.Ed.	59		96.46	
Scholars	23			99.91

6. Discussions

Our study examined the role of social media in accessing academic e-resources. The main purpose is to examine how much social media helps access e-resources on the basis of students' gender, types of institution, and levels of education. In this study, a total of three hypotheses were formulated on the basis of the literature review. In this section, we discuss all the hypotheses and check the results with previously conducted research. The first hypothesis measures the difference between male and female students. The hypothesis is rejected and clearly shows that male students' mean score is higher than that of female students. This result is similar to the work of Alnjadat et al. (2019), but Ruleman's (2012) work is not familiar with this work. Here, we can say that a mixed type of result is shown. Through the literature review, there are no articles were found that show any difference between government and self-financed higher education students' use of e-resources through social media. This study revealed no difference between government and self-financed students in the use of e-resources. It is clear that e-resources are very useful for everyone; there is no debate. This is why this study revealed no difference between government and self-financed higher education. On the basis of the third hypothesis, this study found that there is a significant difference among students with different levels of education. These findings support Samson's (2014) work; the investigator's study revealed that research scholars or post-doctoral students use e-resources through social media. This study revealed that M.Ed. and research scholars or post-doctoral students use social media for academic purposes. The findings of Ashraf et al. (2021) also support this study's findings. They mentioned that scholars collect various types of information from social media. In recent times, higher education students, specifically postgraduate students, such as B.Ed. M.Ed. and doctoral students get information and participate in significant academic activities, such as job recruitment, research projects, seminars, workshops, etc. Identifying this type of result from students is one of the principal purposes of this study. Social media is a prominent academic resource and a reliable resource. We know that some information available on social media is not authentic, but at a higher level of education, students are capable enough to check and verify the authenticity of the information.

7. Conclusion

At the end of the study, we found that in higher education, the knowledge explosion is very common in the 21st century. E-resources can help us to survive in the era of knowledge explosion, and social media is a way to collect that information. We can get information, share information, and collaborate in academic settings with the help of social media, and we can promote it in a positive way. Importantly, when we collect data from social media, our responsibility is to cross-verify authenticity and validity. In India, there is a lack of media literacy. To overcome this problem, higher education institutions and national-level educational bodies can organize different national-level seminars, workshops, and awareness programs.

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