

## DISTANCE EDUCATION AND SOCIAL MEDIA LEARNING: UNDERGRADUATE PERCEPTIONS

Azlan Abdul Aziz <sup>1</sup>  
Zainal Fikri Zamzuri <sup>2</sup>  
Syamsul Ariffin Yahaya <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Computer and Mathematical Sciences, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Melaka Kampus Jasin, 77300 Merlimau, Melaka, Malaysia.

Email: azlan225@uitm.edu.my

<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Computer and Mathematical Sciences, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Melaka Kampus Jasin, 77300 Merlimau, Melaka, Malaysia.

Email: zfikri@uitm.edu.my

<sup>3</sup> Faculty of Computer and Mathematical Sciences, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Melaka Kampus Jasin, 77300 Merlimau, Melaka, Malaysia

Email: syamsulariffin@uitm.edu.my

### Article history

**Received date** : 1-3-2022

**Revised date** : 2-3-2022

**Accepted date** : 25-6-2022

**Published date** : 1-8-2022

### To cite this document:

Abdul Aziz, A., Zamzuri, Z. F., & Yahaya, S. A. (2022). Distance Education and Social Media Learning: Undergraduate Perceptions. *Journal of Islamic, Social, Economics and Development (JISED)*, 7(46), 306 - 316.

---

**Abstract:** *The proliferation of social media in today's setting has also permeated into the education realm. Social media technology on various platforms has presented another alternative tool for adult learners to learn and improve in their studies. The fast technological advancement and expansion have allowed educational practitioners, instructors, trainers, and learners to utilize the multitude of technology-supported learning tools to ease the teaching and learning process. These social media platforms have been touted to have huge benefits and potential for adult learning in the distance education environment. However, to understand the benefits, this study intends to shed some light on how adult learners perceive social media platforms and their potential use in the learning process and outcomes. Little is known about their social media knowledge and expertise, or their interest in using these platforms for learning, collaboration, and interaction. The available technology does not ensure success unless it is properly designed and implemented. It is to avoid the risk of being technologically driven and not pedagogically driven as it is supposed to be. The result indicates that the adult learners are very much open to the various social media platforms but they are inclined towards the more accustomed ones and not without proper considerations.*

**Keywords:** *adult learner, distance education, heutagogy, social media, technology.*

---

### Introduction

With the fast expansion of the Internet and the World Wide Web, online learning is becoming an increasingly essential modality of education, allowing learners to engage regardless of geographic location, time, or place. Online learning activities are referred to by a variety of terms, including “e-learning, web-based learning and training, Internet-based training, distributed learning, digital collaboration, and remote learning” (Alsaadat, 2018). Through the use of document-sharing tools and groupware and asynchronous and synchronous

communication technologies, online learning environments promote social negotiation and cooperation. The millennium has provided a profusion of emerging, enabling, and engaging technologies, such as social media, which is regarded as an effective platform for connecting people, communication, and collaboration among its users. As an enabling and engaging tool, social media is associated with a collection of interchangeable terms such as “social networking communications, social networking sites, social networking tools, blogs, and Web 2.0” to describe the multifaceted settings (Sarwar et al., 2019). This fast advancement of information and communication technologies has assimilated and expanded into the current academic setting involving the distance education environment and its community.

The adult learners in this digital age are exposed to a collection of social media and web-based technologies that allow them to spread and exchange fresh ideas, views, and information in a more dynamic and virtual setting or online. These social media technologies enable learners, even those with limited digital skills, to actively design their own learning experience rather than passively consume content. As such, it aligns well with heutagogy (self-determined learning) which places the responsibility to learn in the hands of the learner. Hootsuite Digital 2021 in (Edumadze & Demuyakor, 2022) indicated that by the end of 2021 half of the world population is using social media and the average spending time on social media is estimated to be 144 minutes per day. This certainly provides further emphasis that the education realm should be receptive towards the inclusion and use of social media in the classroom. Multiple findings pointed out the potential benefits of social media platforms as the technology enabler for both the traditional and non-traditional education context.

Various researches have supported the findings that social media use among distance learners is of great benefits and convenience and supports the learning process and outcomes (Alsaadat, 2018),(Sarwar et al., 2019),(Ansari et al., 2020). As such, social media is considered to provide excellent educational e-learning opportunities for academic collaboration and discussion, sharing of content, digital interaction, communication, learning, and self-exploration. However, other researches depict the cautionary side of social media when there is a related decreasing interest among adult learners’ learning processes manifested in poor performance leading to dropout [5,6]. Therefore, this study aims to determine the adult learners’ perception and usage of social media in their educational activities within a distance education setting.

## **Literature Review**

This study investigates the adult learners’ perception of social media learning, in an undergraduate non-computing program (distance education setting). To understand the extent of the possible effects that social media platforms have on learning activities, it is best to discover the insights or responses and how susceptible these distance education students are to social media and its use in learning. The Malaysian government totally supports online learning for higher education as detailed in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2021 (Higher Education). As such the use of social media is “expected to play a pivotal role in realizing the government's goals in the case of higher education” (Moghavvemi et al., 2018).

## **Social Media**

Technological innovation and a heavily reliant on the Internet, with the explosion of social media has brought revolutionary changes in social communication and network. Social media provides a cheap, fast, and convenient way of communicating among its users and easy access to obtaining information. Mobile technology further fuels the growth of widespread encroachment as an essential platform for social connectivity. It has evolved into a ubiquitous

platform for the user's social interaction, communication and becoming the fabric of our daily lives and activities. For this study, the types of social media platforms included are from some of the commonly used in education such as Blog (weblogs or online journals), Facebook (social network), Google+ (social network), Instagram (photo-sharing), Skype (VoIP), Twitter (microblogs), Telegram (instant messaging), YouTube (video-sharing services), WhatsApp (instant messaging) (Alsaadat, 2018),(Reinhardt, 2019)-(Mahdiuon et al., 2019) and others if indicated by the respondent. These are considered as the common social media when the term social media is mentioned.

These social media platforms have contributed effectively to the students' learning activities based on the varied features that each platform affords depending on its underlying context be it collaborative learning, interactions, information exchanges, negotiations, sharing of resources, and many more (Sarwar et al., 2019).

### **Social Media Learning**

The inclusion of mobile social media into the education realm is relatively new (Ansari et al., 2020). Mobile social media learning refers to the connection of mobile learners who learn via social media on mobile devices (Alsaadat, 2018). Active use of social media learning is on the rise. As a result, educators and instructors must select a suitable application based on their students' needs, as well as examine many aspects of distance learning, such as material delivery, task and assignment distribution, learning facilities, students' readiness to participate in virtual meetings, and assessment that could benefit the students.

While social media is largely designed as social networking platforms, there are evidence that indicate that the meaningful use of social media has a positive impact on the students' academic performance (Mushtaq & Benraghda, 2018). An increasing body of research has proven the advantages of incorporating social media into educational settings. There are documented benefits and positive outcomes of integrating social media in education settings (Alsaadat, 2018),(Edumadze & Demuyakor, 2022),(Zachos et al., 2018),(Greenhow & Galvin, 2020),(Mushtaq & Benraghda, 2018). Some relatively success story on the specific social media platform in the classroom include blog (Garcia et al., 2019), FaceBook (Su & Chen, 2020),(Sibuea et al., 2020), Twitter (Gleason & Manca, 2019), YouTube (Moghavvemi et al., 2018), Telegram (Mahdiuon et al., 2019), WhatsApp (Dahdal, 2020).

However, the incorporation of the social media platforms into education should be done with great caution while taking into consideration the surrounding factors such as digital literacy, security, training, encouragement (Al-Aufi & Crystal, 2015), cultural and pedagogical issues including the reluctance of some faculties to embrace and support the use of social media (Rehm et al., 2019),(Manca & Ranieri, 2016), student support guidelines (Al-Qaysi et al., 2019), privacy (Greenhow & Galvin, 2020),(Krutka et al., 2019), the learning task-tool suitability factor, the internet coverage, and students-tool experiences, to name a few. Due attention should be given to the implementation of social media in the classroom (Ansari et al., 2020). If the social media presence in the learning process is not properly executed then the advantages and the pedagogical affordances it offers may diminish, becoming disruptive and detrimental to the learners learning outcomes (Sarwar et al., 2019),(Edumadze & Demuyakor, 2022),(Abbas et al., 2019),(Greenhow & Galvin, 2020). It is also crucial to consider the socio-technical features of different social media platforms to suit the pedagogical and instructional tasks.

## Research Methodology

To identify the perception of the adult learners on the social media use for learning activities, data were collected through an offline survey administered to students from a public university in the Klang Valley. The items in the questionnaire were measured on a five-point Likert scale with the anchor as indicated (refer to Table I). The respondents were asked to fill in the questionnaire regarding statements or questions on social media learning and how the identified social media platforms helped them in their distance education learning activities. It focused on the aspects of identifying the kind of social media platform used, the platforms that helped them the most in learning, and the characteristics of a reliable and useful social media platform concerning supporting learning and its interactions.

**Table 1: The scoring of Likert scale**

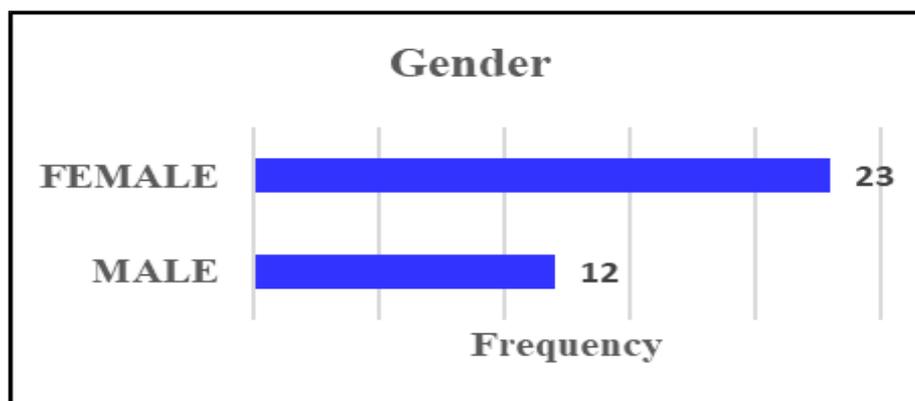
No	Option	Description	Score
1	SD	Strongly Disagree	1
2	D	Disagree	2
3	SAg	Slightly Agree	3
4	A	Agree	4
5	SA	Strongly Agree	5

## Procedure and Measurement

A sample of 35 first-year male and female non-traditional undergraduate students was collected through a convenience sampling method from a public university in Klang Valley. Their age ranges from 19-to 26 years old. These adult learners were from a non-computing program from a political sciences faculty. The questionnaire enquired on the student's perception of the use of social media platforms regarding learning, based on their varied collective general experience. The perception is not based on a properly structured and organized inclusion of any identified social media platform that has been used within a specific course in the distance education program. Rather the data collected are from the myriad exchanges between the students and the social media platforms they have used non-formally in the event of learning activities and processes from sharing of resources and instructions, watching a related video, information retrieval, collaboration, and communication, and other self-directed learning strategies. In essence, there was no specific learning content in a course to be studied concerning the social media platforms. The data were then collected, measured, and analyzed using descriptive statistics involving frequency count, simple percentage, standard deviation and mean.

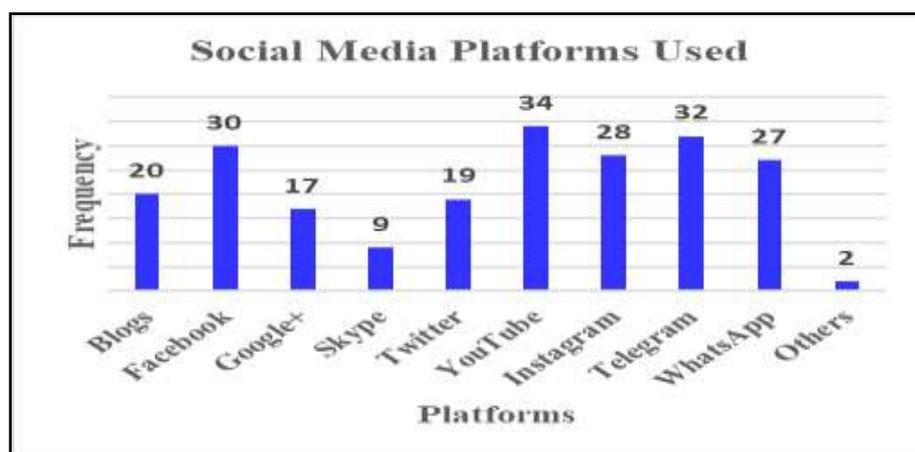
## Results

Figure 1 below shows the gender of the respondents. Of the 35 respondents who took part in the study, the majority of them, 23 (65.7%) were female while 12 (34.3%) were male. All of the respondents are quite familiar with various social media platforms for both social and learning purposes.



**Figure 1: Gender distribution.**

These respondents also identified the various social media platforms that they are familiar with, used for social interaction as well as used casually in their learning tasks and activities. Almost all of the respondents are familiar with YouTube 34 (97%), followed by Telegram 32 (91%), Facebook 30 (86%), Instagram 28 (80%), and WhatsApp 27 (80%) (refer Figure. 2). The high result on YouTube confirms that many students, in general, rely on YouTube to find information and learn how to resolve academic problems, and get answers to questions that they might have. The nature of the rich video content also helps to grab students' attention, engaging and memorable.



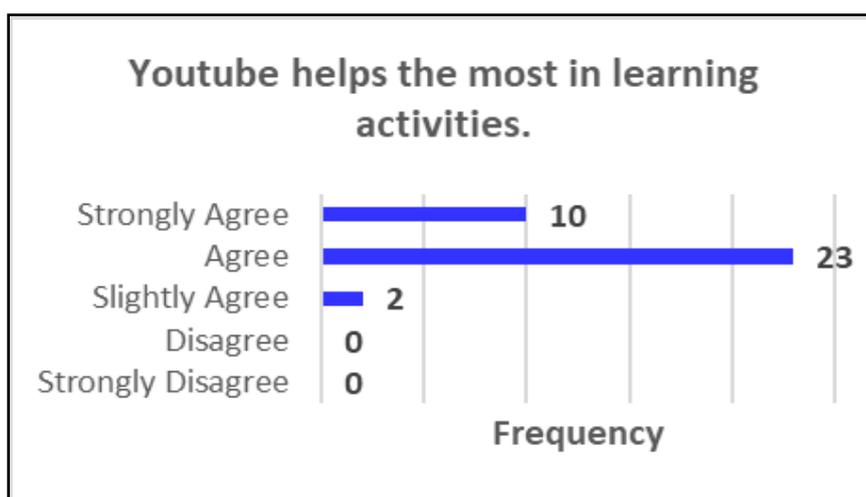
**Figure 2: Social Media platforms used.**

Telegram, with its convenience and a focus on speed and security, is highly regarded by the students. The provision and sharing of materials are almost instantaneous and students can be creative in sharing their ideas and thoughts. However, the result may be a bit biased as some lecturers handle class communication with the use of Telegram.

Facebook, which is known more for social interaction also has the potential of offering the students a convenience of learning. It is used to support the adult learners' class-related activities and works as another electronic alternative source to upgrade their knowledge.

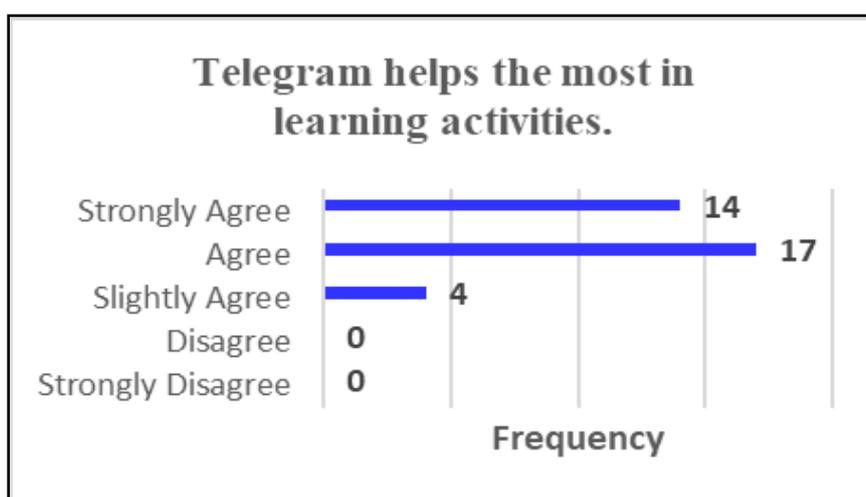
The other familiarly used social media platforms are listed in descending order as follows – Instagram 80%, WhatsApp 77.1%, blogs 57.1%, Twitter 54.3%, Google+ 48.6%, and Skype 25.7%.

Based on the responses, there is a connection in terms of the kinds of social media platforms that adult learners use in general and the ones that they use in assisting their learning activities. YouTube still ranks the highest as the platform or tool that helps the most in the adult learners learning activities with their assignments and other related academic work. 23 (65.7%) students selected Agree while 10 (28.6%) students, selected strongly agree to the statement that ‘YouTube helps the most in completing assignments and in doing related works involving learning activities.’ The total percentage for that is 94.3%. It is evident that YouTube plays an essential role in providing tutorials and videos for adult learners to learn new things and expand their knowledge skills thus making it a great medium in educating adult learners.



**Figure 3: Youtube.**

Another social media platform that plays a helpful role is Telegram (refer to Figure. 4). It is ranked at number two as a platform that assists and enables the adult learners to receive lessons via text or voice messages. A total of 17 (48.6%) and 14 (40%) students, a total of 88.6%, selected Agree and Strongly Agree respectively to the statement ‘Telegram helps the most in completing assignments and in doing related works involving learning activities.’ This is besides the prospect of uploading and sharing of photos and videos even in the event of being geographically separated or isolated that frequently reduces the crucial instructor-learner interaction and communication.



**Figure 4: Telegram.**

Another platform that comes third in rank is WhatsApp. A total of 18 (51.4%) students selected Agree and another 12 (34.3%) students selected Strongly Agree to the statement that ‘WhatsApp helps the most in completing assignments and in doing related works involving learning activities.’ It is a low technology that provides simple facilities in assisting and communicating in a fairly fast response. This platform is one of the many applications that is used by many all over the globe.



Figure 5: WhatsApp.

The other platforms are ranked as follows in Table 2 regarding the adult learners’ perception of how these platforms are considered helpful in their learning activities. The result is based on the respondents’ feedback.

Table 2: Frequency and Percentage On Platforms Evaluation.

Platforms	Rank	SD	D	SAg	A	SA
Facebook	4	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	8 (22.9%)	14 (40%)	13 (37.1%)
Instagram	5	0 (0.0%)	2 (5.7%)	9 (25.7%)	16 (45.7%)	8 (22.9%)
Blog	6	3 (8.6%)	4 (11.4%)	5 (14.3%)	18 (51.4%)	5 (14.3%)
Google+	7	2 (5.7%)	8 (22.9%)	12 (34.4%)	7 (20%)	7 (17.1%)
Skype	8	3 (8.6%)	11 (31.4%)	16 (45.7%)	5 (14.3%)	0 (0.0%)
Twitter	9	6 (17.2%)	11 (31.4%)	9 (25.7%)	5 (14.3%)	4 (11.4%)

SD-Slightly Disagree, D-Disagree, SAg- Slightly Agree, A-Agree, SA-Strongly Agree.

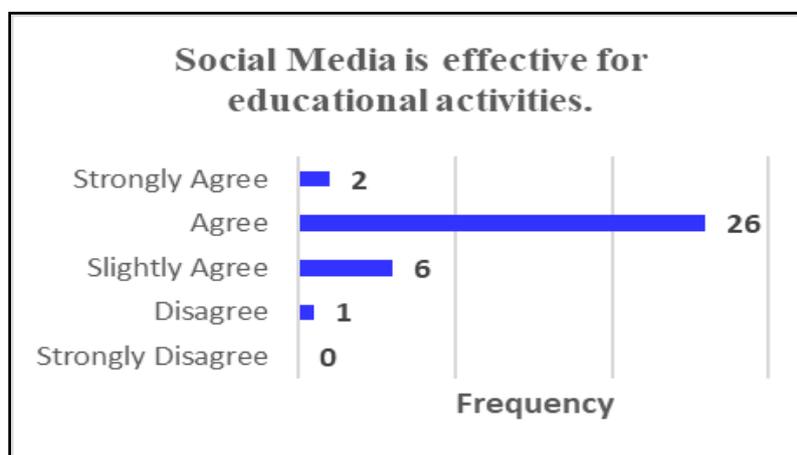
Of all the platforms listed, Telegram has the highest mean score, followed by YouTube and WhatsApp (refer to Table III). This indicates that the fast and rather direct communication, practical and functional manner of Telegram makes it worthwhile as a social media learning tool. Some of the features that Telegram affords such as sharing of materials or video content, a single channel for group communication, supports collaborative interaction, ability to modify

and delete messages easily, use of Bots, and requires small storage for downloading make it a suitable e-learning tool for distance education.

**Table 3: Descriptive Results On Platforms Evaluation.**

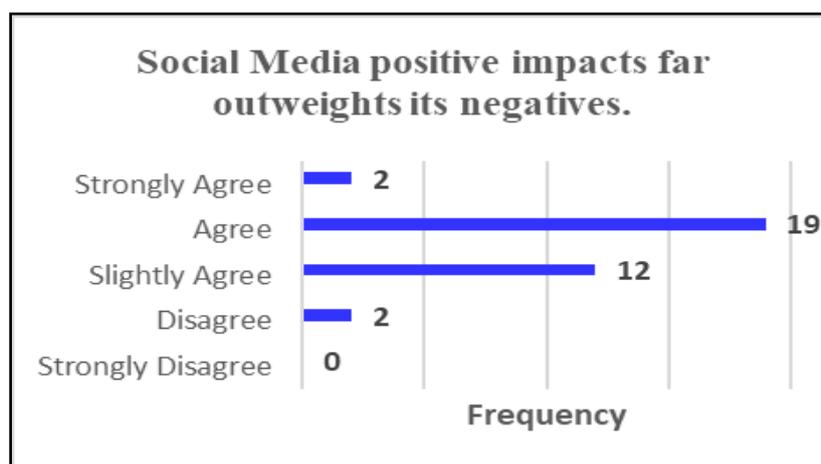
PLATFORMS	N	MEAN	STD. DEVIATION
Telegram	35	4.29	0.67
YouTube	35	4.23	0.55
WhatsApp	35	4.20	0.68

The respondents were asked about their perceptions of social media platforms' effectiveness for educational purposes (refer to Figure. 6). The feedback shows that they are receptive towards the use of social media to assist as a learning tool as long as they are properly identified and designed with the appropriate task and proper guidelines are given before extensive use.



**Figure 6: Social Media is effective for educational activities.**

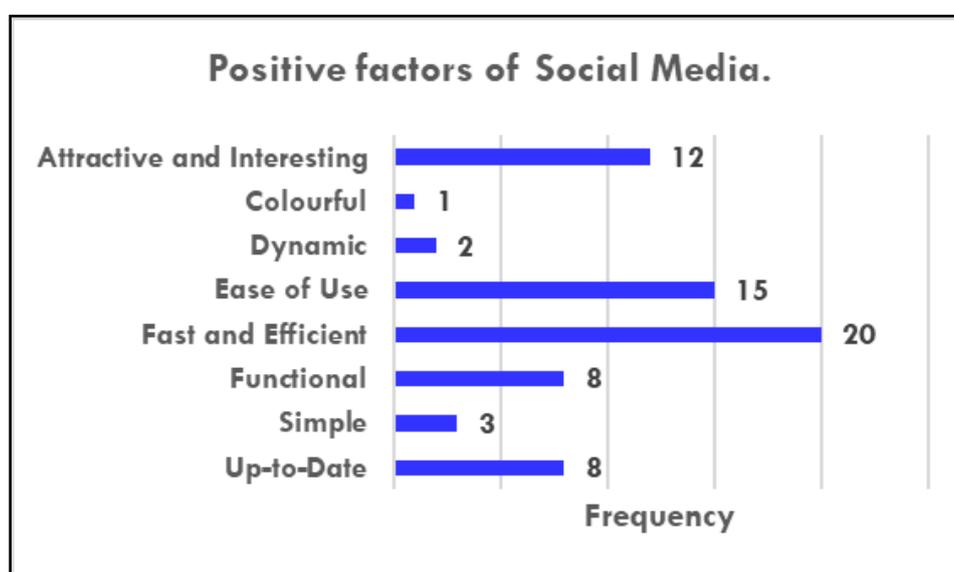
The use of social media for learning is quite well-received by the respondents based on their feedback. Almost all respondents, 33 of them (94.2%) believe that the use of social media for learning has a positive impact on them and that they enjoy the comfort, ease, and potential it provides. This is also because the social media identified is used in accordance with the task assigned. The main drawback is the Internet coverage or data plan.



**Figure 7: Social Media has a positive impact.**

The adult learners were also asked about the features or factors of social media that are considered significant to turn it into a positive platform or tool for learning purposes. These features or factors are combinatorial in the essence that they are not prevalent within one single social media platform but rather these features or factors are found collectively in multiple social media platforms.

The top three positive factors of social media identified by the respondents are fast and efficient, ease of use, and attractive and interesting. These factors can be described as a sign that the students are open and receptive towards the integration of social media in their learning endeavors. It is believed that when the students are willing to embrace the use of social media then hopefully, they are can fully enjoy the potentials that social media offers regarding their learning advances.



**Figure 8: Positive factors of Social Media.**

### Limitations

There are certain limitations to this study. A positive outlook on this is that these limitations serve to provide the basis for future research. First, it is conducted within a single higher education institution involving a specific group through the conducive sampling approach. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized to reflect other or larger educational contexts. Second, the number of respondents was small and the study only retrieved data regarding the adult learner's general perception of social media use, thus it did not represent the actual use of social media platforms in a more structured and organized learning context. Third, this study also ignored the social media addiction factor. However, these limitations do not in any way, impede the potential of social media platforms for supporting learning activities or as a possible resourceful educational platform while augmenting any existing Learning Management Systems (LMS).

### Conclusion

In conclusion, this study presents the perception of adult learners in a distance education program on the use of social media platforms in learning activities. This study was conducted with the participation of 33 students in a non-computing undergraduate course at a local public university in the Klang Valley. It concludes that in general, these distance education students are positive and receptive towards the use of social media in undertaking their learning

processes. At the same time, it can be said that they have the knowledge to select the appropriate social media platform or tool that is relevant to the nature of their learning tasks. This provides a glimpse of how the students view learning activities through social media, which most of the time is used for social interactions and networking. It only scratches the surface of the underlying academic facets. Nevertheless, the incorporation of social media to support and complement learning in distance education settings must be done appropriately and adequately to achieve optimal outcomes and avoid unwanted pitfalls that could disrupt the learning process and its outcomes. Then only the implementation of social media can be said to have supported the learning activities goals in a holistic and andragogically or pedagogically meaningful manner to the advantage of the students.

### Acknowledgment

Thank you to all parties who have assisted and are involved in this study.

### References

- Abbas, J., Aman, J., Nurunnabi, M., & Bano, S. (2019). The impact of social media on learning behaviour for sustainable education: Evidence of students from selected universities in Pakistan. *Sustainability*, 11(6), 1683.
- Al-Aufi, A., & Crystal, F. (2015). Impact of social networking tools on scholarly communication: A cross-institutional study. *The Electronic Library*, 33(2), 224–241.
- Al-Qaysi, N., Mohamad-Nordin, N., & Al-Emran, M. (2019). What leads to social learning? Students' attitudes towards using social media applications in Omani higher education. *Education and Information Technologies*, 25, 2157-2174.
- Alsaadat, K. (2018). The Impact of Social Media Technologies on Adult Learning. *International Journal of Electrical and Computer Engineering (IJECE)*.
- Ansari, J.A.N., Khan, N.A. (2020). Exploring the role of social media in collaborative learning the new domain of learning. *Smart Learning Environments*. Vol 7(9)
- Dahdal, S. (2020). Using the WhatsApp Social Media Application for Active Learning. *Journal of Educational Technology Systems*, 49(2), 239–249.
- Edumadze, J., & Demuyakor, J. (2022). Social Media and Higher Education: What are the Motivation for Social Media use by University Faculty Members in Ghana?.
- Garcia, E., Moizer, J., Wilkins, S., & Haddoud, M. Y. (2019). Student learning in higher education through blogging in the classroom. *Computers & Education*, 136, 61-74.
- Gleason, B., & Manca, S. (2019). Curriculum and instruction: pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning with Twitter in higher education. *On the Horizon*.
- Greenhow, C., & Galvin, S. (2020). Teaching with social media: Evidence-based strategies for making remote higher education less remote. *Information and Learning Sciences*.
- Krutka, D. G., Manca, S., Galvin, S. M., Greenhow, C., Koehler, M. J., & Askari, E. (2019). Teaching "Against" Social Media: Confronting Problems of Profit in the Curriculum. *Teachers College Record*, 121(14), 1–42.
- Mahdiun, R., Salimi, G., & Raeisy, L. (2019). Effect of social media on academic engagement and performance: Perspective of graduate students. *Education and Information Technologies*, 25, 2427-2446.
- Manca, S., & Ranieri, M. (2016). Facebook and the others. Potentials and obstacles of Social Media for teaching in higher education. *Comput. Educ.*, 95, 216-230.
- Moghavvemi, S., Sulaiman, A., Jaafar, N. I., & Kasem, N. (2018). Social media as a complementary learning tool for teaching and learning: The case of youtube. *The International Journal of Management Education*, 16(1), 37-42.

- Mushtaq, A. J., & Benraghda, A. (2018). The effects of social media on the undergraduate students' academic performances. *Library Philosophy and Practice*, 4(1).
- Rehm, M., Manca, S., Brandon, D. L., & Greenhow, C. (2019). Beyond Disciplinary Boundaries: Mapping Educational Science in the Discourse on Social Media. *Teachers College Record*, 121(14), 1–24.
- Reinhardt, J. (2019). Social media in second and foreign language teaching and learning: Blogs, wikis, and social networking. *Language Teaching*, 52, 1 - 39.
- Sarwar, B., Zulfiqar, S., Aziz, S. and Chandia, K.E. (2019). Usage of Social Media Tools for Collaborative Learning: The Effect on Learning Success With the Moderating Role of Cyberbullying. *Journal of Educational Computing Research* 2019, Vol. 57(1) 246–279
- Sibuea, M. F. L., Sembiring, M. A., & Agus, R. T. A. (2020). Efektivitas pembelajaran daring berbasis media sosial facebook dalam meningkatkan hasil belajar. *Journal of science and social research*, 3(1), 73-77.
- Su, Y., & Chen, H. (2020). Social Facebook With Big Six Approaches for Improved Students' Learning Performance and Behavior: A Case Study of a Project Innovation and Implementation Course. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11.
- Zachos, G., Paraskevopoulou-Kollia, E. A., & Anagnostopoulos, I. (2018). Social media use in higher education: A review. *Education Sciences*, 8(4), 194.