

Social Media as an Educational Support for Studying¹

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Abstract

The paper presents the results of an empirical study aimed at determining students' attitudes toward social media as a digital tool in the process of studying. The research used a descriptive research method, and data collection was done using a specially constructed instrument – a rating scale. The research sample was intentional and consisted of 314 undergraduate students from the Faculty of Philosophy in Niš. The results of the study indicate that the majority of respondents express positive attitudes toward the use of social media during their studies. Namely, respondents recognize the potential of these tools for sharing and exchanging educational materials and are aware of their usefulness in supporting cooperative work, especially when it comes to solving tasks at the group level or collaborating on joint projects. Students perceive social media as a platform for active discussion with peers and teachers, as well as for solving academic challenges and problems. The study found no statistically significant differences in relation to independent research variables (years of study, study program, grade point average, length of presence on social media, frequency of access). It is concluded that further research into specific social media platforms is necessary to make a greater contribution to higher education.

Keywords: social networks, students, educational support, studying, higher education.

Introduction

The development of new technologies, increased Internet accessibility and the widespread use of mobile devices are opening new perspectives for overcoming geographical barriers and connecting people from around the world. Social networks play a significant role in this process, transforming communication methods and creating new channels for information sharing and community building. Due to their

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technological characteristics and functionalities (such as photo and video sharing, event creation, etc.), they have become highly popular and applicable in various fields, including education. In the realm of higher education, platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn have been utilized for years, allowing students to stay informed, ask questions, discuss course materials, and share learning resources. This ensures effective and straightforward communication, making information readily available and transparent to all involved in the educational process.

The high applicability of social networks in higher education consistently attracts researchers' attention, as they strive to determine their educational value from various perspectives, including communication, collaboration, and learning, with a particular focus on collaborative learning (Molinillo et al., 2018; Al-Rahmi & Zeki, 2017). In this context, research focusing on students as end-users, exploring the use of social networks as educational tools becomes significant, which was also the guiding idea behind our research.

Theoretical approach

Although social networks were not initially conceived as educational tools, in recent years, they have significantly positioned themselves in the context of academic education. It is believed that when used as digital learning tools, they can change and innovate educational practices, teaching, learning, and the overall academic culture (Manca & Ranieri, 2017). Viewed in this context, social networks today make a unique contribution to academic education in various fields, rightfully becoming an integral part of higher education. However, their implementation requires active pedagogical involvement in terms of meeting certain requirements and standards to ensure adequate implementation and achieve the most favorable learning outcomes. In this context, the application of social networks is largely conditioned and dependent on the actions of teachers as creators and moderators of the learning process, who are expected to accept and timely use these digital tools (Chugh et al., 2021). The issue of social media application has been particularly highlighted during the Covid-19 pandemic, when most higher education institutions utilized online teaching, including various social networks as digital learning tools (Jogezai et al., 2021; Sobaih et al., 2020). A growing number of studies confirm that social media platforms have high potential in the areas of communication, collaboration, sharing, and cooperative learning (Anderson, 2019; Hamadi et al., 2021, 2022; Kim & Kim, 2017; Selwyn, 2012).

In addition to teachers' opinions, it is very important to examine students' attitudes toward the use of social networks in the educational process because students, as end-users, can provide relevant insights into the potentials, usefulness, and usage of these digital tools during their studies. In a study conducted on a sample of 125 university students in northern Italy (Vrontis et al., 2015), students were asked to assess the use of social networks for educational purposes. The findings of this study indicate the importance of using social networks to enhance educational communication, share information, and facilitate interaction between students and

teachers. Furthermore, it is emphasized that the application of social networks should involve mutual agreements and understanding between teachers and students and should be aligned with their attitudes and competencies. Similarly, in an empirical study examining various categories of social media usage among a sample of 308 students in Saudi Arabia, with a focus on online discussion, knowledge and content creation, content sharing, and entertainment (Eid & Al-Jabri, 2016), significant positive relationships were found between these categories, making them suitable for the academic educational environment.

In a study related to the relationship between social networks and sustainable education, it was found that there are both positive and negative factors regarding students' behavior (Abbas et al., 2019). Specifically, in the mentioned study involving a sample of 831 students, risks associated with social media use were identified, including depression, stress, anxiety, and other potential health problems. The obtained findings are certainly significant and can be useful for better understanding the application of social networks in higher education. The primary characteristics of social networks in the studying process, as reported by students, are their usefulness and contribution to easy and fast information sharing. Supporting this, the results of a study conducted in the Philippines (Dumpit & Fernandez, 2017) can be cited. In this study involving a sample of 500 students from private and public universities in the Philippines, students perceived the usefulness and ease of use of social networks as their main characteristics. Additionally, differences were found between private and public universities regarding information and communication technology infrastructure.

An interesting insight is provided by a study conducted to explore the use of Facebook and Twitter in academic libraries (Williams, 2021). In this qualitative study, it was found that students had contradictory feelings regarding the use of Facebook and Twitter in the domain of scientific communication.

Some research studies have focused on examining the use of social networks in various scientific fields, such as medicine or English language learning (Vizcaya-Moreno & Pérez-Cañaveras, 2020). On a sample of 120 students from a higher education institution for nursing education, the most useful and desirable teaching methods based on new media technologies were identified (Vizcaya-Moreno & Pérez-Cañaveras, 2020). The research results indicate that students use social media for learning clinical subjects. Particularly noteworthy are online tutorials or videos, interactive games, and virtual learning environments. The fact that social networks represent an important teaching and learning tool for students of the English language is confirmed by several studies (Ariantini et al., 2021; Novitasari & Addinna, 2022; Rahmawati et al., 2023). For example, in a review study (Ariantini et al., 2021), it was concluded that YouTube, WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter are frequently used as tools for learning the English language. The findings of this study indicate that their use has yielded results in the development of language skills, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and spelling, while also influencing creative and critical thinking.

A number of research studies have been directed toward examining individual social networks and their contribution to the academic education process (Gleason

& Manca, 2020; Obradovic et al., 2017; Pavlović & Obradović, 2015). For example, one case study focused on the use of Twitter in teaching (Gleason & Manca, 2020), specifically using this social network for pedagogical purposes: group discussion, increasing student engagement, expanding interaction, exchanging teaching materials, and more. The findings of this study show that the use of Twitter increased student participation, facilitated conceptual understanding, encouraged presence on social media, and increased interaction with experts from various fields.

The application of social networks during academic education can be particularly important when it comes to preparing students for professional careers, such as media workers or journalists. Supporting this notion are the results of a study conducted on a sample of 162 students from the Department of Journalism at the Faculty of Philosophy in Niš (Pavlović & Obradović, 2015). Specifically, this study examined students' attitudes toward using the YouTube platform for continuous education and acquiring additional skills. Based on the obtained results, a recommendation was made to introduce social networks into the teaching process, which would help students in future professional challenges. This stance is supported by Obradović and colleagues (Obradovic et al., 2017), who point out that social networks are particularly important for certain professions, such as the profession of journalism, and therefore their greater presence is expected in journalism studies. Accordingly, they highlight that Instagram, as a social network and a digital learning tool, is of special importance for journalism students, who are expected to have knowledge and understanding of new media.

Methodological approach

The aim of the research is to examine students' attitudes toward social networks as a form of educational support in the process of studying (communication, collaboration, sharing, cooperative learning, etc.). The study included 314 undergraduate students from the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Niš. Participants' attitudes were analyzed in relation to the following variables:

- *Year of study* (I-IV year),
- *Study program* (Psychology, Pedagogy, Social Policy and Social Work, Communication and Public Relations, and Journalism),
- *Grade point average* (a) 6.00-6.99, b) 7.00-7.99, c) 8.00-8.99, d) 9.00-10.00),
- *Length of presence on social networks* (a) no open profile; b) less than 1 year; c) more than 1 year but less than 5 years; d) more than 5 years but less than 10 years; e) more than 10 years), and
- *Frequency of accessing social networks* (a) never; b) rarely (several times a month), c) sometimes (several times a week), d) often (several times a week), and e) regularly (daily).

In the study, there were 121 first-year students, 73 second-year students, 66 third-year students, and 54 fourth-year students. The majority of students were from

the Psychology program (126), followed by Pedagogy (80). The number of students from the Communication and Public Relations (46) and Journalism (42) programs was almost equal, while the fewest participants were from the Social Policy and Social Work program (20). Within the sample, 286 surveyed students have profiles, while only 27 of them do not have an open profile on social networks. Regarding academic achievement, ten surveyed students have the lowest average grade from 6.00 to 6.99; 78 of them have an average grade from 7.00 to 7.99; 149 students have an average grade from 8.00 to 8.99, and 77 of them have the highest average grade from 9.00 to 10.0. The largest number of respondents have been present on social networks for more than 5 but less than 10 years (205), 87 respondents have been present for more than 10 years, and 22 of them have been present for more than one but less than 5 years. As for the frequency of accessing social networks: 272 respondents access their profiles daily, 32 often, 6 sometimes, and 4 rarely.

The research set the following research objectives:

- To examine students' attitudes toward the use of social networks in university education as educational support in the process of studying.
- To determine if there are statistically significant differences in respondents' answers based on the independent variables of the study.

In line with the objectives, the following research hypotheses were formulated:

- It is assumed that students have positive attitudes regarding the application of social networks in university education as educational support in the process of studying.
- It is assumed that there are no statistically significant differences in respondents' answers based on the independent variables of the study.

A five-point assessment scale specifically constructed for the research purposes was used in the study, consisting of 7 items. The numbers on the assessment scale titled "Students' Attitudes toward the Use of Social Networks in University Education" (SAUSNUE) ranged on a continuum from 1 – complete disagreement, 2 – partial disagreement, 3 – indecision, 4 – partial agreement, to 5 – complete agreement with the stated item. The F-test was applied to determine statistically significant differences in respondents' answers based on the independent variables. The value of the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the given scale is $\alpha = .87$, indicating adequate reliability and internal consistency of the variables.

The research data was collected by distributing written instruments to the respondents and suggesting a timeframe for submitting the completed instruments. They were informed that the study was anonymous and that they could freely answer the questions, and that the research data would be used solely for scientific purposes. Afterward, the respondents individually submitted their completed instruments to the researcher, and later the data was processed using the statistical program SPSS 25.

Analysis and Interpretation of Research Results

Table 1 presents students' (N=314) attitudes toward the use of social networks during their studies. For each attitude, the table includes the average value of student responses (M), the standard deviation from the average response (SD), as well as the degree of agreement/disagreement with the stated attitude.

Table 1: *Students' attitudes toward the use of social networks in university education*

Items	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
Sharing educational materials through social media is beneficial for learning	4.21	0.89	1.3	4.5	10.5	39.5	44.3
The exercise classes at the faculty should be supported by using social networks	3.02	1.25	14.6	20.4	26.4	25.8	12.7
Social networks could significantly contribute to organizing debates and discussions on topics from lecture and exercise classes	3.60	1.07	4.5	10.8	26.1	37.6	21.0
Social networks can contribute to more successful implementation of student group projects and preparation of presentations	4.04	1.01	3.5	4.1	14.6	39.8	37.9
Social networks can facilitate solving academic problems	3.44	1.03	5.7	9.9	32.8	37.6	14.0
Social media can be useful in students' research work	4.07	0.92	2.2	2.9	16.6	42.4	36.0
Social media is a significant tool for online academic group discussions	3.99	0.98	2.2	4.8	20.7	36.6	35.7

By analyzing the average responses of the participants (M) in the study, it can be noted that students generally express agreement (for 5 items) regarding the need for the use of social networks in university education, considering that the majority of respondents' answers to the given statements are concentrated around the number 4, which on the five-point assessment scale denotes the agreement stance.

The majority of respondents expressed agreement (partial 39.5% and complete 44.3%) with the statement that *Sharing educational materials through social media is beneficial for learning*, with 10.5% being undecided, while only a small percentage of respondents disagree (1.3% strongly disagree, 4.5% partially disagree).

Regarding the statement *The exercise classes at the faculty should be supported by using social networks*, students assess somewhat differently compared to the previous one, with 12.7% completely agreeing, 25.8% partially agreeing, 26.4% undecided, while 14.6% disagree and 20.4% partially disagree.

The majority of respondents have positive attitudes toward the statement that social networks could significantly contribute to organizing debates and discussions on lecture and exercise topics (4.5% strongly disagree, 10.8% partially disagree, 26.1% undecided, while others agree with the statement: 37.6% partially agree, 21.0% completely agree).

The highest percentage of respondents has positive attitudes toward the statement that social networks can contribute to the successful completion of student group projects and preparation of presentations – 37.9% completely agree, 39.8% partially agree, 14.6% undecided, with only a small number of respondents disagreeing with the statement (4.1% partially disagree, 3.5% strongly disagree).

The majority of respondents have positive attitudes toward the statement that social networks can facilitate solving academic problems (14.0% completely agree, 37.6% partially agree). Slightly less than a third of the respondents (32.8%) do not have a clear stance on this issue, while a smaller number of respondents expressed disagreement with the statement (5.7% strongly disagree, 9.9% partially disagree).

The majority of respondents have positive attitudes toward the statement that social networks can be useful in student research work – 36.0% completely agree, while 42.4% partially agree, 16.6% are undecided, and only a small number of respondents disagree with the statement (2.9% partially disagree, 2.2% strongly disagree).

Respondents similarly evaluate the statement that social networks are a significant tool for online academic group discussions – the highest percentage of respondents agree (partially 36.6% and completely 35.7%), around one-fifth of the respondents is undecided (20.7%), while only a small percentage disagree (4.8% partially and 2.2% strongly disagree).

In the following tables, data on the statistical significance of respondents' answers concerning the independent variables of the study are presented: year of study, study program, grade point average, duration of presence on social networks, and frequency of access to social networks.

Table 2: *Statistical significance of differences in students' attitudes based on the year of study*

Items	Year of study	M	SD	F	df	p
Sharing educational materials through social media is beneficial for learning	I	4.08	0.99	1.65	3	0.18
	II	4.36	0.77			
	III	4.29	0.94			
	IV	4.20	0.74			
The exercise classes at the faculty should be supported by using social networks	I	2.90	1.29	0.85	3	0.46
	II	3.05	1.22			
	III	3.02	1.29			
	IV	3.22	1.14			
Social networks could significantly contribute to organizing debates and discussions on topics from lecture and exercise classes	I	3.45	1.14	2.17	3	0.09
	II	3.85	0.91			
	III	3.61	1.12			
	IV	3.59	1.02			
Social networks can contribute to more successful implementation of student group projects and preparation of presentations	I	3.93	0.98	2.22	3	0.09
	II	4.29	0.87			
	III	4.08	1.17			
	IV	3.93	0.97			

Social networks can facilitate solving academic problems	I	3.35	1.03	1.01	3	0.39
	II	3.49	1.06			
	III	3.41	1.08			
	IV	3.63	0.96			
Social media can be useful in students' research work	I	3.98	0.89	0.81	3	0.49
	II	4.11	0.94			
	III	4.18	0.97			
	IV	4.09	0.87			
Social media is a significant tool for online academic group discussions	I	3.91	0.97	0.45	3	0.72
	II	4.05	1.03			
	III	4.05	0.98			
	IV	4.00	0.93			

Based on the data presented in Table 2, it can be concluded that the variable of year of study does not significantly affect students' attitudes toward the examined topic.

Table 3: *Statistical significance of differences in students' attitudes based on study program*

Items	Study program	M	SD	F	df	p
Sharing educational materials through social media is beneficial for learning	PSY	4.33	0.87	1.07	4	0.15
	SPSW	3.85	0.81			
	PED	4.21	0.72			
	CPR	4.11	1.21			
	JOU	4.12	0.86			
The exercise classes at the faculty should be supported by using social networks	PSY	2.92	1.29	1.21	4	0.31
	SPSW	2.60	1.05			
	PED	3.09	1.13			
	CPR	3.15	1.28			
	JOU	3.21	1.37			
Social networks could significantly contribute to organizing debates and discussions on topics from lecture and exercise classes	PSY	3.63	1.03	0.84	4	0.50
	SPSW	3.35	0.81			
	PED	3.55	1.07			
	CPR	3.80	1.18			
	JOU	3.50	1.17			
Social networks can contribute to more successful implementation of student group projects and preparation of presentations	PSY	4.13	0.98	1.19	4	0.31
	SPSW	3.95	0.83			
	PED	3.98	1.01			
	CPR	4.20	1.02			
	JOU	3.81	1.11			
Social networks can facilitate solving academic problems	PSY	3.38	1.06	0.89	4	0.47
	SPSW	3.35	0.93			
	PED	3.40	0.92			
	CPR	3.70	1.05			
	JOU	3.48	1.17			

Social media can be useful in students' research work	PSY	4.14	0.85	0.93	4	0.44
	SPSW	3.85	0.81			
	PED	4.03	0.94			
	CPR	4.17	0.85			
	JOU	3.93	1.13			
Social media is a significant tool for online academic group discussions	PSY	4.06	0.93	0.53	4	0.71
	SPSW	3.90	0.72			
	PED	3.93	0.98			
	CPR	4.07	1.00			
	JOU	3.86	1.20			

The data presented in Table 3 indicate that the variable of study program also does not have a statistically significant effect on students' attitudes toward the use of social networks in university education.

Table 4: Statistical significance of differences in students' attitudes based on average grade

Items	Average grade	M	SD	F	df	p
Sharing educational materials through social media is beneficial for learning	6.00-6.99	3.90	0.88	0.69	3	0.56
	7.00-7.99	4.14	0.86			
	8.00-8.99	4.25	0.92			
	9.00-10.00	4.25	0.89			
The exercise classes at the faculty should be supported by using social networks	6.00-6.99	3.00	1.25	0.06	3	0.99
	7.00-7.99	2.99	1.20			
	8.00-8.99	3.05	1.26			
	9.00-10.00	2.99	1.30			
Social networks could significantly contribute to organizing debates and discussions on topics from lecture and exercise classes	6.00-6.99	3.30	1.25	0.70	3	0.55
	7.00-7.99	3.53	1.12			
	8.00-8.99	3.60	1.07			
	9.00-10.00	3.72	1.01			
Social networks can contribute to more successful implementation of student group projects and preparation of presentations	6.00-6.99	3.50	0.85	2.04	3	0.11
	7.00-7.99	3.90	0.99			
	8.00-8.99	4.14	1.01			
	9.00-10.00	4.08	1.01			
Social networks can facilitate solving academic problems	6.00-6.99	3.60	1.07	0.35	3	0.79
	7.00-7.99	3.35	1.03			
	8.00-8.99	3.47	1.05			
	9.00-10.00	3.47	1.02			
Social media can be useful in students' research work	6.00-6.99	4.30	0.67	1.28	3	0.28
	7.00-7.99	3.91	0.98			
	8.00-8.99	4.09	0.90			
	9.00-10.00	4.16	0.89			
Social media is a significant tool for online academic group discussions	6.00-6.99	3.90	0.88	1.49	3	0.22
	7.00-7.99	3.82	0.94			
	8.00-8.99	4.10	0.92			
	9.00-10.00	3.95	1.10			

Based on the data provided in Table 4, it can be concluded that the variable of grade point average does not statistically significantly affect students' attitudes toward the examined topic.

Table 5: *Statistical significance of differences in students' attitudes based on the length of presence on social media*

Items	Length of presence	M	SD	F	df	p
Sharing educational materials through social media is beneficial for learning	1-5 years	4.23	0.81	0.24	2	0.78
	5-10 years	4.19	0.93			
	More than 10 years	4.26	0.83			
The exercise classes at the faculty should be supported by using social networks	1-5 years	2.86	1.36	0.88	2	0.41
	5-10 years	2.97	1.21			
	More than 10 years	3.16	1.31			
Social networks could significantly contribute to organizing debates and discussions on topics from lecture and exercise classes	1-5 years	3.45	1.06	0.79	2	0.46
	5-10 years	3.57	1.08			
	More than 10 years	3.71	1.06			
Social networks can contribute to more successful implementation of student group projects and preparation of presentations	1-5 years	4.23	0.75	0.75	2	0.47
	5-10 years	4.06	1.00			
	More than 10 years	3.95	1.08			
Social networks can facilitate solving academic problems	1-5 years	3.14	1.21	1.88	2	0.15
	5-10 years	3.41	1.00			
	More than 10 years	3.59	1.06			
Social media can be useful in students' research work	1-5 years	4.00	0.93	0.07	2	0.93
	5-10 years	4.07	0.94			
	More than 10 years	4.08	0.85			
Social media is a significant tool for online academic group discussions	1-5 years	4.00	0.87	0.40	2	0.67
	5-10 years	4.02	0.98			
	More than 10 years	3.91	1.00			

The data in Table 5 indicate that the variable of the length of presence on social media does not have a statistically significant effect on students' attitudes toward the topic under investigation.

Table 6: Statistical significance of differences in students' attitudes based on frequency of accessing social media

Items	Frequency of access	M	SD	F	df	p
Sharing educational materials through social media is beneficial for learning	Rarely	4.00	0.01	1.49	3	0.22
	Sometimes	4.83	0.41			
	Frequently	4.03	0.90			
	Regularly	4.22	0.90			
The exercise classes at the faculty should be supported by using social networks	Rarely	3.00	1.63	0.60	3	0.61
	Sometimes	2.67	1.21			
	Frequently	2.78	1.13			
	Regularly	3.05	1.26			
Social networks could significantly contribute to organizing debates and discussions on topics from lecture and exercise classes	Rarely	3.50	1.29	0.86	3	0.46
	Sometimes	3.00	1.09			
	Frequently	3.47	0.95			
	Regularly	3.63	1.08			
Social networks can contribute to more successful implementation of student group projects and preparation of presentations	Rarely	4.25	0.50	0.28	3	0.84
	Sometimes	3.83	0.98			
	Frequently	3.94	0.84			
	Regularly	4.06	1.03			
Social networks can facilitate solving academic problems	Rarely	2.50	1.73	1.52	3	0.21
	Sometimes	3.00	1.09			
	Frequently	3.47	0.95			
	Regularly	3.46	1.03			
Social media can be useful in students' research work	Rarely	4.25	0.50	1.23	3	0.30
	Sometimes	4.17	0.41			
	Frequently	3.78	0.83			
	Regularly	4.10	0.93			
Social media is a significant tool for online academic group discussions	Rarely	4.25	0.50	0.52	3	0.67
	Sometimes	4.17	0.41			
	Frequently	3.81	0.90			
	Regularly	4.00	1.00			

Based on the data provided in Table 6, it can be concluded that the variable of frequency of accessing social media during the day does not statistically significantly influence students' attitudes toward the use of social media in the studying process.

Discussion

The emergence of social media has brought significant changes in both personal and professional communication domains. In line with this, researchers seek to shed light on the relationship between social media and students, particularly exploring the potential use of social media as an educational tool during the studying process (Chugh & Ruhi, 2018; Sobaih et al., 2016). In an attempt to address this issue in our context, a study was conducted to determine students' attitudes toward the use of social media as educational support during their academic studies.

The results of our research partly confirm the first hypothesis that students have positive attitudes toward the use of social media in university education, and that they represent educational support in the studying process. The findings from the study indicate that the majority of respondents expressed agreement with the statement that sharing educational materials through social media is beneficial for learning, which is consistent with the findings of previous studies (Hamid et al., 2015; Zachos et al., 2018). Our research found that most respondents have positive attitudes toward the idea that social media could significantly contribute to organizing debates and discussions on topics from lectures and exercises, which is also supported by other research indicating increased student interaction and engagement when using social media (Chugh & Ruhi, 2018). Interestingly, the largest percentage of surveyed students have positive attitudes toward the notion that social media can contribute to the successful completion of group projects and preparation of presentations – 37.9% completely agree, while 39.8% partially agree. It may be assumed that social media facilitates coordination and group work, suggesting that students can quickly share documents via social media, communicate online, collaborate more effectively, and exchange ideas. Similarly, the results obtained for the statements that social media can facilitate problem-solving, can be useful in students' research work, and are a significant means for online academic group discussions can be interpreted. The positive attitudes of students regarding these items only confirm the stance known to the academic community, where social media are perceived as digital tools in the university context, significant for collaborative learning, creativity development, dynamics, and orientation toward research work (Ansari & Khan, 2020).

The research found no statistically significant differences concerning the independent variables of the study: year of study, study program, grade point average, duration of presence on social media, and frequency of access, thus confirming the second hypothesis. The obtained findings are consistent with the results obtained in the research on Facebook as a digital tool for supporting studying (Stanisavljević Petrović & Mamutović, 2018; Pavlović et al., 2017). In the aforementioned studies, it was found that the affiliation with the study program, as well as the grade point average, do not influence students' attitudes toward social media.

Conclusion

Social media is an integral part of young people's lives, significantly impacting the shaping of social interactions and changing the ways in which young people communicate, collaborate, and learn. The rapid development of new technologies is characterized by the emergence of new social platforms such as Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat, WhatsApp, or TikTok, which, like Facebook once did, provide space for new channels of communication in various aspects of young generations' lives. Consequently, there is a clear initiative to integrate social media into higher education processes because, according to their characteristics, they can contribute to improving learning, sharing and exchanging knowledge, and enhancing academic

achievement. Accordingly, there is a need to study different aspects of the relationship between students and social media, with the intention of recognizing the potential of these digital tools and utilizing them in the study process to the best possible extent.

In our research, it was found that students generally have positive attitudes toward using social media for educational purposes. Specifically, they recognize the potential of these tools for sharing and exchanging educational materials, and they are aware of their contribution to cooperative work when tasks are solved at the group level or when collaborative projects and presentations are done for specific subjects. Encouragingly, the research data indicate that students may perceive social media as an opportunity for discussion with peers and teachers and for solving academic tasks and problems. The results obtained regarding the independent variables of the study show that there are no statistically significant differences in the attitudes of students, indicating that respondents' attitudes toward social media are not conditioned by characteristics related to the academic context or the frequency of access and length of presence on social media.

The pedagogical implications of our research relate to the justification for greater integration of social media into higher education. This could involve using platforms like Facebook, Instagram, or LinkedIn for interaction between students and university teachers, sharing educational materials, and fostering collaboration and cooperative learning. Teachers from various departments could design activities that help students better understand how to use social media for professional development and networking. Additionally, teachers could devise learning strategies tailored to individual student needs, such as using social media to create customized study groups or projects that reflect diverse interests and talents. Furthermore, teachers could use social media to create dynamic discussions, surveys, and organize online events that encourage interaction and collaboration. Educational institutions could develop policies and practices that promote balanced use of social media, focusing on academic growth and student success.

The results obtained from the research can be considered significant as they provide a general overview of students' attitudes toward social media as an educational tool that can support the studying process. However, at the same time, this could also be a limitation since it does not provide a clear picture that would apply to each social media platform individually. Additionally, a limitation of this research pertains to the methodology used. Specifically, employing a qualitative approach or a mixed methodology might contribute to a more detailed examination of this issue. In that context, this research can serve as a reference point for future studies focused on specific social media platforms and their contribution to higher education.

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Društvene mreže kao obrazovna podrška studiranju

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Apstrakt

U radu su prikazani rezultati empirijskog istraživanja koje je imalo za cilj utvrđivanje stavova studenata prema društvenim mrežama, kao digitalnom alatu u procesu studiranja. U istraživanju je korišćena deskriptivna istraživačka metoda, a za prikupljanje podataka korišćen je namenski konstruisan instrument – skala procene. Uzorak istraživanja je nameran i čini ga 314 studenta osnovnih akademskih studija sa Filozofskog fakulteta u Nišu. Rezultati istraživanja ukazuju da većina ispitanika izražava pozitivne stavove prema primeni društvenih mreža tokom studiranja. Naime, ispitanici prepoznaju potencijale ovih alata za deljenje i razmenu nastavnih materijala i svesni su njihove korisnosti u podršci kooperativnom radu, kada se radi o rešavanju zadataka na nivou grupe ili saradnji na nazajedničkim projektima. Studenti društvene mreže doživljavaju kao platformu za aktivnu diskusiju sa kolegama i nastavnicima, kao i za rešavanje akademskih izazova i problema. U istraživanju je utvrđeno da nema statistički značajnih razlika u odnosu na nezavisne varijable istraživanja (godine studija, studijski program, prosečnu ocenu tokom studiranja, dužinu prisustva na društvenim mrežama, učestalost pristupanja). Zaključuje se da je neophodno detaljnije istraživanje specifičnih društvenih mreža kako bi se postigao veći doprinos u visokom obrazovanju.

Ključne reči: društvene mreže, studenti, obrazovna podrška, studiranje, visoko obrazovanje.

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