

## The impact of social media as teaching and learning tool on higher education: A case study of Van Hien University\*

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### Abstract

*The COVID-19 pandemic has caused universities to switch from traditional to online teaching and learning methods. As a result, social media has gradually become prominent as a teaching and learning resource in universities. Vietnamese universities and institutes recognize the potential of social media as a powerful tool for promotion and teaching. This study examines the positive impact of social media use on (a) enhancing teaching and learning in universities, (b) motivating and supporting students, and (c) developing community connections and assesses limitations of social networks in student learning within the university context. A qualitative approach with explicitly utilizing in-depth interviews was employed to collect data from ten lecturers and 19 students of all faculties of Van Hien University. The results of this case study have shown the positive effects of social media: enriching the teaching and learning experience in higher education by inspiring and supporting student as well as promoting community connections. Integrating social media as a teaching and learning tool in higher education is part of the modern educational landscape.*

**Keywords:** *higher education, social media, teaching and learning tool*

### 1. Introduction

Social media has become an essential part of the lives of millions of people worldwide, including youth, adolescents, high school students, university students, and even the elderly. These platforms are used for communication, entertainment, work, e-commerce, information sharing, etc. In Vietnam, the prevalence of social media is significant. According to a report by We Are Social<sup>1</sup>, as of the beginning of 2023, there were 77.93 million internet users in Vietnam, representing a penetration rate of 79.1%. Furthermore, the number of social

media users in Vietnam reached 70 million, which accounts for 71.0% of the country's total population. Among the various social networking platforms, the top five most popular in Vietnam are Facebook (91.6% usage), Zalo (90.1% usage), TikTok (77.5% usage), Facebook Messenger (77% usage), and Instagram (55.4% usage). These statistics highlight social media's widespread adoption and influence in the country.

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly impacted learning and teaching, with social media technology significantly facilitating education during this time.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.wearesocial.com](http://www.wearesocial.com)

Social media platforms have provided lecturers and students with the means to continue learning and teaching remotely when in-person interactions are limited or impossible. These platforms have enabled real-time communication, collaboration, and engagement, ensuring continuity in the educational process (Sengupta and Vaish, 2023). While the role of social media in work and education has been amplified during the pandemic, its importance extends beyond this period. It has become an integral part of modern communication, collaboration, and information sharing, enabling individuals to thrive in both personal and professional aspects of their lives. According to statistics from We Are Social, 39.5% of users in Vietnam used social media for learning purposes and other education-related activities as of the beginning of 2023. Although the number highlights the significant role of social media in supporting education in this country, the question raised is whether social media is necessary and will continue to be an effective tool for teaching and learning after the COVID-19 pandemic. This study continues to explore the potential role of social media in higher education in Vietnam, especially in the post-pandemic period.

## 2. Literature review

Social media is a collection of online platforms and applications that enable users to create, share, interact with content, connect, and communicate with others. According to Grossek and Bran (2016), social media is *"a way of sharing online information among people in a virtual community and creating material"*. It provides a digital space for individuals, organizations, and communities to interact

virtually and share information, ideas, and media. Using social media as a learning tool (or mobile learning) in higher education is increasingly important in light of recent global changes. Social media's widespread adoption in higher education has led to numerous studies exploring its various roles, including its correlation with professional and instructional use (Manca and Ranieri, 2016), influence on academic success through online social networks (Paul et al., 2012), and connection to learner-generated knowledge and student achievement (Orús et al., 2016; Gür and Türel, 2022). Despite controversies, educators are encouraged to find effective ways to incorporate social media into higher education environments (Selwyn, 2012). Lan et al. (2011) and Papademetriou et al. (2022) emphasize that social media is an interactive digital learning platform, promoting active engagement and interaction between lecturers and students.

### 2.1. Social media promotes teaching and learning

In teaching, lecturers play a vital role in facilitating learning. They provide educational materials, guide students, consolidate knowledge, interpret concepts, and offer feedback to optimize the learning experience (Reece and Walker, 2006). Lecturers can leverage social media to disseminate course-related information to students. It provides a convenient channel for sharing updates, assignments, and important announcements. Additionally, social media platforms offer a space where students can share and discuss their lecturers' achievements and challenges, fostering a sense of community and collaboration (Celik et al., 2014).

Furthermore, social media facilitates

interactions between teachers and students, offering a forum for addressing educational queries. It allows for open-ended consultations, potentially leading to the emergence of exciting perspectives or unexpected insights. Lecturers can also utilize social media to make educational content available for future reflection and review. This enables students to revisit and revise their learning artefacts, enhancing their learning experience. By incorporating social media into the teaching process, lecturers can create an engaging and dynamic learning environment, promoting active student participation and knowledge retention.

## **2.2. Social media motivates and supports students**

In addition to facilitating the learning process, motivating and supporting students is crucial. Ryan and Deci (2000) defined motivation as engaging in exciting or enjoyable activities. When it comes to student motivation, they argue that motivation occurs when students are attracted to an assignment for its intrinsic value, the knowledge they gain, and the positive emotions associated with it. Motivation is closely tied to the support students receive. Support can manifest in various forms, such as mental, physical, financial, academic, and spiritual assistance, and it is one of the key factors contributing to student success in education. Instructors must strive to provide support and create an environment that satisfies students' needs so that they can focus on their learning journey (Williams and Williams, 2011). Researchers have identified the significant role of social media in student motivation. It enhances the student-learning environment by introducing creative and interactive

approaches to education, ultimately breaking down the traditional boundaries of learning. As a result, students experience growth and development in their learning process (Brave and Nass, 2008). Social media's influence on motivation sparks interest and encourages active participation and enthusiasm among students. By leveraging the potential of social media, lecturers can tap into students' intrinsic motivation, foster a supportive learning environment, and promote their overall learning growth.

## **2.3. Social media facilitates the establishment of connections within the university community**

According to Social practice theory, the most significant change elements in teaching, learning, and evaluation are the social interactions within workgroups (Engeström, 2001). These interactions contribute to the social construction of reality, particularly where individuals share common interests. Within these communities of practice, members establish a shared language, develop specific approaches to utilizing available resources, and cultivate situational awareness regarding various project aspects. In this regard, social media platforms have the potential to bring together virtual communities of individuals who are interested in a specific subject. These communities can facilitate knowledge sharing, collaboration, and mutual support within a community of practice. By leveraging social media, small virtual groups of individuals can come together to build awareness and engage in meaningful discussions about shared interests. They can exchange ideas, provide assistance, and collectively enhance their understanding of a subject. Social media platforms serve as a

tool for connecting individuals who may not have had the opportunity to interact otherwise, creating a virtual community where they can learn from one another and benefit from collective knowledge and experiences.

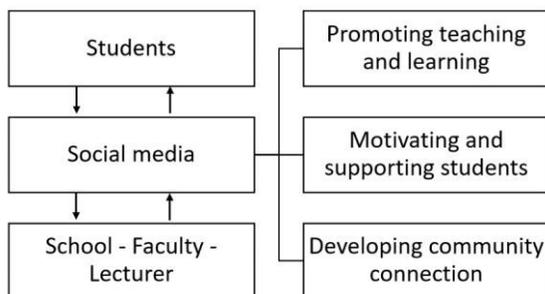
However, social media also brings many risks. The COVID-19 pandemic forces people to rely on digital platforms for social-emotional connection (Kanekar and Sharma, 2020). With strict restrictions and lockdowns, the use of digital devices has increased globally, affecting education, work, and socialization. Excessive device time is associated with adverse mental health outcomes such as low emotional stability, isolation, depression, and anxiety (Allen et al., 2019). Prolonged computer use, especially in children, is linked to various health problems such as being overweight, sleep disorders, vision issues, reduced attention, and stress (Sanders et al., 2019; Stiglic and Viner, 2019). There are also increased risks of musculoskeletal problems, vision issues, stress disorders, headaches, sleep disturbances, hearing problems from headphones, fear of technology, and internet addiction (Guerrero et al., 2020; Lozano-Blasco et al., 2022). Van Dijk (2020) explained the digital divide in terms of four types of access: lack of digital experience, inadequate access to digital resources and the Internet, insufficient digital skills, and unequal opportunities for accessing and using digital media. Social and class inequalities contribute to unequal access to digital resources such as the Internet, computers, and smartphones (Andrew et al., 2020), making distance education almost impossible or entirely out of reach for vulnerable students.

### 3. Theoretical framework

After the COVID-19 pandemic, online learning has been widely recognized for its potential to enhance the quality of education; however, there is still limited information about the best ways to design an effective blended learning environment that can support immersive learning experiences and improve access to education. Researchers are exploring how educational technology tools impact innovative teaching methods in Education 4.0 (Bizami et al., 2023). The aim is to enable educators to plan and deliver their lessons by selecting suitable educational technology tools that align with modern pedagogical approaches. In the context of Vietnam, research often focuses on the impacts of social media on students' mental health (Doan et al., 2022; Vu et al., 2022). Limited research delves into the effective utilization of social media. Pham et al. (2023) demonstrate students' profound insights into using social media to enhance their English vocabulary, positively affecting their vocabulary learning.

Similarly, Diep et al. (2020) revealed that students utilize social media to support their learning and that using it for educational purposes is linked to higher academic performance. Therefore, this study aims to explore the advantages and disadvantages of using social networks in universities in recent years and examine whether social networks effectively enhance teaching and learning. This study builds upon the findings of Lan et al. (2011) (Figure 1) and Papademetriou et al. (2022), with a focus on the following questions: What is the impact of the use of social media in (a) enhancing teaching and learning in higher education, (b) motivating and supporting

students, and (c) developing community connection?



**Figure 1.** Theoretical Model Adapted (Lan et al., 2001)

#### 4. Research methodology

The study was replicated using the research of Papademetriou et al. (2022) as a foundation. This research involved participants from various faculties at Van Hien University (Ho Chi Minh City) that maintains online teaching for about 30% of its education program. The interviews were conducted face-to-face from January to February 2023 randomly selected from the faculties of Economics - Management, Accounting - Finance, Information Technology, Tourism, Society and Communication, and Foreign Languages. All interviews were recorded with participant consent. In total, 29 in-depth interviews were conducted, including 10 with lecturers and 19 with students.

A qualitative research method was employed, gathering insights from students and lecturers regarding their perspectives on social media as a learning and teaching tool within the faculty. In-depth interviews were conducted to capture the perspective of students and lecturers and to explore the potential benefits, challenges, and obstacles related to the effective use of social media in the teaching and learning process.

Lecturers and students were asked the same questions in four categories: (1)

Demographic characteristics (gender, age, years of study/ position, and experience with online teaching and learning) and information related to internet reliability and speed at their respective universities and homes; (2) Context of social media usage: examining which social media platforms were used, the extent of usage, timing, and reasons for usage; (3) Experience in a lecture setting with the use of social media: Participants were asked about their experience with social media interactions, frequently used platforms and the extent to which they were informed about the use of social media; (4) Perceived effects on online learning and teaching experiences. Both lecturers and students were asked about the usefulness of social media in their learning, whether it increased their interest in the educational process, and how social media enhanced their learning/teaching experiences. Respondents were also allowed to provide additional comments or suggestions regarding using social media in higher educational institutions for academic purposes.

The data is manually evaluated by content analysis. Research that describes what the informant said, sticking to the text. To increase the study's validity, a separate analysis of each subject was conducted, and then the results were discussed to arrive at a general conclusion.

The content analysis was followed by the following main stages of content analysis: (1) decontextualization, (2) recontextualization, (3) categorization, and (4) compilation. At the decontextualization stage, the data was initially acquired by reading the transcribed text to grasp its essence. Subsequently, the research objectives were identified, and sentences or

paragraphs with similar aspects were aligned. The "open coding method" technique was employed for this purpose. At the recontextualization stage, all objective aspects were covered by reviewing the document and removing unnecessary information. In the categorization process, the categories were identified, and the following constructs were used to code: (a) Teaching and Learning; (b) Motivation and Support; and (c) Community connection. The review and writing-up process commenced at the compilation stage.

## 5. Results and Discussion

### 5.1. Descriptions of participants

The proportion of students with a higher proportion of Women than Men (63.2%), mostly under 30 years old, the 2<sup>nd</sup>

year student was the majority (42.1%), and the majority of students were from Economics - Management Faculty (21%).

The percentage of lecturers, both women and men, was equal (50%); lecturers in the age group of 41-60 years old accounted for the highest proportion (60%), with 1-2 years of experience being the majority (60%). Most lecturers are from Economics - Management, Information Technology, Tourism and Society and Communication (20% of each faculty).

All participants (100%) said that they regularly use social media, access and connect daily to the Internet. All the interviewees said social networks is connected via mobile phones (100%) and other devices such as laptops and tablets (Table 2).

**Table 1.** The profile of respondents

		Lecturers	Students
Gender	Male	5 (50%)	7 (36.8%)
	Female	5 (50%)	12 (63.2%)
Age	<30	1 (10%)	19 (100%)
	30-40	3 (33%)	
	41-60	6 (60%)	
Academic year	1 <sup>st</sup> year		6 (31.6%)
	2 <sup>nd</sup> year		8 (42.1%)
	3 <sup>rd</sup> year		4 (21.1%)
	4 <sup>th</sup> year		1 (5.3%)
Years of online teaching experience	<1	1 (10%)	
	1-2	6 (60%)	
	3-4	3 (30%)	
Faculty	Economics - Management	2 (20%)	4 (21%)
	Information Technology	2 (20%)	3 (15.8%)
	Accounting - Finance	1 (10%)	3 (15.8%)
	Tourism	2 (20%)	3 (15.8%)
	Society and Communication	2 (20%)	3 (15.8%)
	Foreign Languages	1 (10%)	3 (15.8%)

Both groups highly favour YouTube and Zalo as their primary social networks (100% usage). It was observed that Zalo is perceived as an effective communication tool for study and work groups in Vietnam, as acknowledged by both lecturers and students. YouTube is a platform for teachers to deliver lectures and for students to acquire knowledge. On the other hand, Facebook is widely utilized by students (100%), but not all lecturers (80%) use it. While TikTok is getting students' attention (78.9%), there needs to be more interest among lecturers

(10%). According to respondents, the primary motivation for using social networks is communication. Lecturers and students use social media platforms to connect with friends and family. Received 10 votes, all lecturers use social networks to connect with colleagues or students. The interviewees also mentioned other reasons for using social networks, including staying updated on the news (100%) and expressing their opinions (60% of lecturers and 94.7% of students) (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Social media usage between the two groups of lecturers and students

		Lecturers	Students
Devices used to connect in social media	Smart Phone	10 (100%)	19 (100%)
	Tablet	5 (50%)	3 (15.8%)
	Laptop	9 (90%)	18 (94.7%)
Social media used	Facebook	8 (80%)	19 (100%)
	YouTube	10 (100%)	19 (100%)
	Zalo	10 (100%)	19 (100%)
	Viber	2 (20%)	-
	Tik Tok	1 (10%)	15 (78.9%)
The purpose of using social media	Connecting with friends, family	10 (100%)	19 (100%)
	Connecting with other colleagues/ students	10 (100%)	19 (100%)
	For academic and learning purposes	10 (100%)	19 (100%)
	Updating news	10 (100%)	16 (80%)
	Demonstrating points of opinion	6 (60%)	18 (94.7%)

## 5.2. Social media as an effective teaching and learning tool

### 5.2.1. Enhancing teaching and learning in universities

The findings of this study indicate that social media plays a significant role in

fostering collaborative relationships between lecturers and students, facilitating teaching and learning, and promoting content sharing. In interviews conducted with participants from both groups, it was found that 100% of them acknowledged the

positive impact of social media on the teaching and learning process, which aligns with Grodecka et al. (2008). Lecturers emphasize the cost-effectiveness of social media as a means to share valuable insights with students. Additionally, they perceive social media as a helpful tool for disseminating relevant information and links to aid students in further studying and comprehending the lessons. It also lets them share lecture materials such as PowerPoint presentations, videos, tutorials, and more. As one lecturer pointed out, "*Social media has expanded my access to educational resources*". Furthermore, social media platforms serve as a convenient medium for instructors to communicate updates regarding assignments and changes to the course schedule. All lecturers acknowledged that providing feedback to students and assessing learning outcomes was effortless.

Moreover, social media platforms contribute to guiding student learning. Class-specific social networking groups (on Zalo and Facebook) facilitate prompt clarification of students' queries regarding the lessons. They also foster discussions, both within and outside the classroom, for collaborative projects and assignments. Furthermore, lecturers utilize game simulations and online case studies to deepen students' understanding of the lesson theory. Platforms like YouTube and Facebook serve as informative resources that encourage students to conduct additional research and explore the lesson concepts more extensively.

Supporting the findings, the responses from the student group served as concrete proof of the beneficial impact of social media on learning. Each student

acknowledged the advantage of having immediate access to their courses. They highlighted the ease with which they can obtain course information, check assignments, and review their study outcomes. Additionally, all students emphasized how social media aids in their learning process by allowing them to download lectures and access any relevant materials shared by their lecturers. This enables them to review lectures independently and download videos for future reference. Social media is a platform where students can access information through videos, photos, and short stories. This combination of verbal and visual content facilitates their ability to make connections, understand the relationships between different concepts, retain relevant details, and express their thoughts effectively.

Furthermore, social media has played a significant role in enhancing the technological proficiency of lecturers. One lecturer said, "*I have noticed that incorporating more technology into my lessons has helped me enhance my expertise in technology*". The shift to remote teaching has motivated instructors to seek out practical information rather than rely solely on theoretical knowledge, transforming them into adept social media users for discovering and sharing new learning opportunities within the classroom. Students, in turn, benefit from using social media by acquiring new technological skills and becoming more proficient in computer usage. As one student reflected, "*Initially, I was unfamiliar with social media, but now I am more skilled in utilizing its various functionalities*". This exposure to social media platforms allows students to explore

new technologies and develop a comfort level with computers.

### **5.2.2. Motivating and supporting students**

As affirmed by the lecturers, social media plays a pivotal role in motivating and supporting students. A significant majority, 80% of the lecturers believed that including social media in lessons made them more appealing to students. They noted that social media platforms inspired some students to participate in debates and discussions actively. One lecturer shared their enjoyment of engaging with students on forums, mainly when providing feedback and support. The lecturers wanted to establish a closer and more supportive relationship with their students. For instance, one lecturer stated, "*To ensure student engagement and satisfaction with my course, I consistently incorporate unique videos, case studies, and examples.*" Another lecturer emphasized the importance of fostering a positive learning environment: "*I want my students to be happy, energetic, and ready to learn, so I incorporate interactive games into my lessons*". These perspectives align with Nicol and McFarlane-Dick's (2006) notion that social media empowers students by providing them with engagement and active participation opportunities.

### **5.2.3. Developing community connections**

Social media facilitates meaningful human interaction between students and lecturers, serving as a student-centric approach that helps to initiate communication and foster rapport. These results are consistent with Ukwishaka and Aghae (2020), which supports the notion

that social media promotes peer-to-peer interactions and interactions between students and lecturers. The use of social media not only breaks the ice between students and lecturers but also provides a platform for enhanced connectivity and interaction within the lecturer community. It is valuable for fostering communication, collaboration, and engagement in the virtual learning environment.

### **5.3. Limitations of social media in teaching and learning**

Lecturers and students acknowledge the importance of using social media for teaching and learning, but certain obstacles exist. Monitoring student activities on various social media platforms was time-consuming for most lecturers (80%). Initially, privacy concerns were raised by 60% of the lecturers. The workload of verifying study materials was challenging for 30% of administrative lecturers. Students reported difficulty managing the vast amount of information from all their courses on social media (89%). Staying updated and participating in courses proved challenging for 63% of students, and students expressed concerns about spending excessive time on social media for assignments (53%). Lecturers must develop stricter assignment rules to avoid plagiarism; word limits and designated posting hours can help streamline information and reduce student workload. It is essential to address privacy concerns, improve information management, and have an effective time management strategy to maximize the benefits of social media in education (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Obstacles in using social media

	Percentage
<b>Lecturers</b>	
Time-consuming because of using many social media tools	80%
Information security	60%
Verifying study materials	30%
Heightened risk of student plagiarism	20%
<b>Students</b>	
Experiencing information overload on social media	89%
Staying updated and participating in courses	63%
Spending too much time to social media for assignments	53%

## 6. Conclusion

The utilization of social media by both students and lecturers has become an integral part of the modern educational landscape. Embracing technology and incorporating social media as innovative tools are essential for meeting the needs and expectations of the new generation of learners.

In general, the findings of this study demonstrated the positive impact of social media on higher education. Social media enriches higher education's teaching and learning experience by inspiring and assisting students while fostering community connections. These results affirm the crucial role of social media in the context of higher education. Moreover, the result can become the basis for developing strategies and models of teaching and learning for blended learning, including using social media. Besides that, lecturers and students are also concerned about information security and time management when using social networks in learning and teaching.

As a result, the authors propose that university faculties integrate social media into

their teaching and learning practices. Future research suggests that increasing data collection from more university specializations would have increased validity.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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