



## **Social Media as a Learning Technology for University Students**

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This paper demonstrates the role of social media as a learning technology for university students and highlights their problems associated with its use. The population of the study consisted of Masters' and Bachelor Studies students studying in their final semesters in the departments of Social Sciences at The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan; and using social media for more than three years. The data was collected from 450 students taken convenient cum purposively according to the nature of study. A questionnaire on five point rating (Likert) scale was developed and used as a research tool. The tool was finalized after its pilot testing and it was administered to elicit opinions of the respondents. The study demonstrated that social media plays a significant role as a learning technology. Its careful use promotes opportunities of virtual interactions among university students, instant access to multiple, latest, reliable and students' preferred sources of learning. It facilitates in nurturing critical thinking, problem solving approach and argumentation among university students by illustrating application of theories and/ or techniques through examples, visuals and illustrations and videos, and assists them with mastery learning and futuristic approach through task oriented activities.

Keywords: social media, learning technology, virtual community of learners, virtual learning environments, information and communication technologies

## **INTRODUCTION**

The history of inventions and innovations which now-a-days are termed as technologies appears to be associated with the history of mankind on the earth. Therefore, it wouldn't be misleading that there might have existed different types of such technologies and/ or tools developed by human being according to their needs in their specific contexts and/

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or environments. It is believed that features and capabilities of technologies had been going through a process of continuous transformation and refinement since their inception and even in the present era –the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The 21<sup>st</sup> century is called the century of technologies particularly, the information and communication technologies (ICTs) which facilitate communication and interactions among users and bring about a change in their lives (Hussain, 2005). Apparently, all aspects of human activity including health, education and training, communication and interaction, transportation, aviation and alike have embraced such technologies (Hussain & Durrani, 2012) to enhance their efficiency and performance (Hussain, 2005). Amongst others computer and internet and its related technologies appear as main gift(s) of 21<sup>st</sup> century to its dwellers. Thus ICTs have prevailed over all activities and all aspects of human life with an undeniable impact particularly on education, training and instruction –teaching and learning. The ICTs which facilitate learning process and are used by students purposefully are referred to as ‘learning technologies’. This notion of learning technologies is used in this paper.

Computer, internet and its associated technologies are considered as the main ICTs and basics to rest of such technologies. Seemingly, ICTs have become popular and are used to facilitate and enhance communication and interactions among the users. Innovations and developments have been being made in ICTs by adding different features, tools, applications (apps) and capabilities to enhance their performance and efficiency. Generally, the new features and apps including Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Twitter etc. are termed as social media have become popular among users (Hussain & Cakir, 2015) particularly the university students.

According to Edith Cowan University’s Centre for Learning and Development social media includes websites and related tools which facilitate [virtual] connectivity and interactions among users and the phenomenon is called social networking. Communication and interactions are essence of any instructional program; whereas, social media appears with a great potential to enhance communication and interactions in teaching and learning process. The most common examples of social media and social networking sites (SNSs) are Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter and Google along with discussion forums, blogs, wikis and web conferencing (Hussain & Cakir, 2015) sites.

It is generally assumed that effective learning takes place through active learning (active involvement of learners in lessons, activities etc.) which is based on active participation of the learners in teaching learning process. Wenger, White and Smith, (2009) asserted that the use of social media facilitates active learning by developing [virtual] communities of learners. Learners work in virtual groups through their interactions, collaboration and cooperation. Learning in virtual groups is based on active pedagogy (Hussain, & Cakir, 2015) where learners appear to be participating actively in instructional process and reflect in their group(s). Social media has capability to shape mechanisms for supporting peer learning and peer assessment (Wenger, White & Smith, 2009) to estimate the level of students’ learning and success of instruction.

Presently, social media and social networking sites seem to be part and parcel of human interactions and communication even education and training. Now teaching learning process is widely embracing social media and institutions are using social networking sites for information sharing, marketing and advertising purpose. Apparently, the use of social media in instructional process ensures student-centered and social constructivist pedagogies in virtual learning environments (VLEs). Therefore, social media is said to play an important role and is used as learning technology by students.

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

Generally, an accelerating trend is observed in educational use of social media due to its popularity, availability and ease of usage for instant communication, interaction and feedback. Usually, global connectivity, provision of world class support services, realization of global perspective and meeting international standards of education and instruction, enhanced efficiency of the system and user friendly capabilities (AL-Rahmi, & Othman, 2013) and ever emerging apps appear to be the incentives of social media for university students.

Various studies (cited below) explored the role of social media and SNSs in different contexts of education –teaching learning process. These studies have demonstrated interesting and useful results. Apparently, SNSs [internet technologies] provide university students with an innovative and unique platform called virtual learning environment (VLE) for getting and sharing latest information according to their need and interest (Hussain, 2005). It was affirmed by Henderson, Snyder, and Beale (2013) through their synthesis of literature that social media provides an innovative platform for communication, interaction and collaboration in learning process. Wentworth (2013) who is an analyst of Brandon Hall Research Group, described that social media has appeared as part and parcel of social life for majority of the people. In 2013 there were one billion active Facebook users, 72 hours' videos were uploaded on YouTube every single minute; whereas, the worldwide members of LinkedIn reached to 175 million users.

Similarly, Wasoh (2014) conducted a study on effectiveness of Facebook as an instructional tool for teaching of English as Foreign Language (EFL) by using web-based courseware and online discussion board followed by interview of the subjects. The results affirmed positive inclination of students towards Facebook as it developed motivation and confidence among the subjects. It appeared as an effective learning tool which offered students opportunities of discussion with their teachers and fellows having better understanding of grammar and writing skills on their convenience. Likewise, Liu (2010) conducted an online survey on 221 students in order to assess the reasons of using different social media tools. It demonstrated that students used social media sites because of four reasons: 85% of the students used social media for their social engagement, 56% for direct communication, 48% used to get immediate and timely feedback on assignments and their results, whereas, 47% preferred to use social media for developing and maintaining relationships with members of their virtual community. Similar results were reflected by the studies of Hussain (2005), Hussain and Durrani (2012), and Hussain and Cakir (2015).

Ricoy and Feliz, (2016) conducted a study on use of Twitter in university education. It adopted mixed method approach based on virtual ethnography and quantitative analysis of 3,026 relevant tweets. The study demonstrated students' increased motivation and participation in using Twitter for their learning purpose. The use of Twitter appeared to be increasing over time and associated with its technical knowledge and understanding of the users (the university students). Interaction and learning within a [virtual] community was reinforced by gratifying learning experiences of university students in such environments.

Ractham and Firpo (2011) conducted an experimental study to investigate the possibility of using SNSs to enhancing learning of graduate level learners. Facebook as an instructional [as well as learning] tool for a course of Management Information System (MIS) was used for five months. The study demonstrated that it [the Facebook] appeared as an effective learning tool and fostered a culture of learning among university students. Besides, it appeared as a students' friendly technology, and they used it for sharing and generating tacit knowledge within small groups. The Victoria University (<https://www.vu.edu.au/>) used social media for communicating expectations, moderating and facilitating students, peer sharing and learning from each other, developing critical literacy skills by engaging in critical thinking and digital literacy skills development process, providing opportunities of informal and participatory learning.

The use of social media enables learners to accomplish their collaborative tasks and also they can help each other in completing their learning activities (Hussain & Cakir, 2015) and tasks. Likewise, AL-Rahmi and Othman (2013) found usage of social media and its perceived ease of use to be positively correlated with satisfaction among Malaysian universities' students. They used social media for learning through edutainment and found it to be encouraging. Besides, the university academia appeared to having accounts of social media and web-pages, blogs etc. through social networking sites. According to Moran, Seaman, and Tinti-Kane (2011) an overwhelming majority (90%) of university academia used social media for instructional purpose and their professional development.

Socially and psychologically the users are different from each other and they use social media in different ways for different purposes; therefore, variations in using social media exist and thus seem to be justified. In overall, Facebook appears to be the most popular social networking site as it catches largest number of posts. YouTube is secondly most visited site and seems to be chasing Facebook. The situation further depicts popularity of social media among academicians as 66% of them use it even in the classroom or during an ongoing instructional session, class or activity. Similarly, more than 40% of academicians advise their students to use social networking sites as an assignment, 30% provide contents of their respective courses through these sites, and 20% required students' reflection on some posts of social media. Even so, a significant majority (80%) of academicians suggested their students to view an online educational or instructional video (Moran, Seaman, & Tinti-Kane, 2011) for enhancing their learning and expanding intellectual horizon.

Some of the universities using social media for instructional purpose have addressed some problems and issues in their guidelines developed for faculty and students (The Social Media Advisory Group, n.d; Queensland University of Technology, 2011). These issues include inappropriate postings, privacy and confidentiality issues, equitability and accessibility, copyright and other intellectual property issues, and existing institutional social media channels.

### **Rationale of the Study**

Social media appears to be a popular source of interaction and communication among masses generally; and the youth –the university students particularly. Interaction is regarded as one of the basic elements of instruction (Rodgers, 2004; Yelland, & Masters, 2007) and necessary for effective learning (Holden, Westfall, & Gamor, 2009). The studies discussed in the above section have acknowledged the role of social media in communication and interaction; however, its instructional potential and role in teaching learning process particularly, the learning of students at university level needs to be explored. Therefore, a justifiable need was felt to conduct a separate study on the role of social media as a learning technology for university students. The results of this study would be useful for academicians, policymakers, administrators and university students in making appropriate use of social media in teaching learning process.

### **Objectives of the Study**

This study focused on the social media as learning technology; and therefore, the objectives of this study were to

- a) Examine the role of social media as learning technology for university students, and
- b) Identify the problems faced by university students in using social media as learning technology.

### **METHOD**

This study focused on the opinion of university students on the role of social media as a learning technology. It was a non-experimental, exploratory-descriptive study which addressed the situation in an elaborative way. “*Non-experimental research is used in studies which aim at describing or description of individuals or situation*” (Polit, Hungler, & Beck, 2001; 178) and it is suitable for the study of university students. Whereas, the descriptive research “*is designed to provide a picture of a situation as it naturally happens*” (Burns & Grove, 2003; 201). Also one may use it to justify current practice and make judgment(s). Therefore, for the purpose of this study, descriptive research method ‘which describes the situations in a better way’ was used to elicit opinions of university students regarding the role and problems of social media as a learning technology with a view to understand and describe the situation properly and improve it accordingly. It was a small scale study and was delimited to the Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan. The survey approach of the descriptive research method was used for data collection.

### **Population and Sampling**

The population of this study consisted of Masters’ and Bachelor Studies students studying in their final semesters in the departments of Social Sciences. The study used purposive cum convenient sampling technique(s) because of the reason(s); firstly, the

students who were using social media for more than three years about 3-4 times daily and having an android phone for the same period were included in the sample thus purposive sampling techniques was used; and secondly, it was a non-sponsored self-managed and self-financed/ self-sponsored study with time and cost as its main constraints; therefore, it used convenient sampling technique which is a form of non-probability sampling used in exploratory studies and cuts the expenses.

The principal researcher contacted the subjects in their respective classrooms after their class time with the permission of their respective class teachers. A total of 450 students using social media for more than three years and having an android phone for the same period were agreed to participate in the survey on volunteer basis.

#### **Tool for Data Collection**

It was a quantitative exploratory-descriptive study which used survey approach for data collection. After literature review the researchers prepared a questionnaire on five-point rating scale. The questionnaire was developed on the main themes which were identified during literature review and given in headings of the tables in the next section. The research tool was developed keeping in view the objectives and nature of the study. The tool was validated through its pilot testing on 30 subjects and expert's opinion. It was finalized according to results of pilot testing and experts' opinion by modifying and rephrasing some statements. A thorough proof reading of the tool was done before its implementation for data collection.

#### **The Procedure of Implementation of Research Tool and Data Collection**

Three M.Phil scholars were selected as data collectors. The data collectors were trained in a session on "data collection" by the principal researcher and they participated in pilot testing. The principal researcher got consent from the respondents and mutually decided time for administration of the tool. Afterwards, the data collectors administered research tool and collected data from the respondents.

The respondents participated in the survey on volunteer basis. They were briefed once again about the objectives of the study and the survey mechanism by the data collectors. They were also assured about the confidentiality of information provided by them. The tool was administered on 450 students but the response rate was 86% as 387 complete responses were collected.

#### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations for conducting such social science research were taken care by the researchers and data collectors by following the three principles of the Belmont Report (1979), namely beneficence –above all do no harm; respect for human dignity – the right to self-determination and full disclosure; and as well as justice i.e. the right of the participants to fair treatment and privacy (Polit, Hungler, & Beck, 2001:75).

#### **Data Analysis Techniques**

The data was coded and analyzed through MS-Excel in terms of descriptive statistics – percentage to explain the situation in a simple way. The scale values assigned were from highest 05 strongly agreed (SA) to lowest 01 strongly disagreed (SDA). The data were analyzed by the co-authors and write up of the paper was finalized by the first author.

## FINDINGS

The data collected through questionnaire of the university students was analyzed in terms of percentage. The findings drawn from the data analysis are presented in tabular form along with their respective description here;

Table1.

Opinion of university students about social media in promoting their interaction and access to learning sources

Statement/ Theme	Level of Agreement				
	Frequencies & Percentages (given in parentheses below)				
	Strongly Agreed	Agreed	Uncertain	Disagreed	Strongly Disagreed
Social media technology promotes					
Instant access to sources of latest knowledge	166 (42.89)	144 (37.21)	4 (1.03)	32 (8.27)	41 (10.59)
Access to reliable sources of learning	171 (44.19)	126 (32.56)	18 (4.65)	39 (10.08)	33 (8.53)
Efficient support services to students	131 (33.85)	153 (39.53)	9 (2.33)	36 (9.30)	58 (14.99)
Access to students' preferred learning materials	166 (42.89)	135 (34.88)	12 (3.10)	41 (10.59)	33 (8.53)
Access to multiple sources of learning materials	126 (32.56)	162 (41.86)	13 (3.36)	54 (13.95)	32 (8.27)
Opportunities of interaction	144 (37.21)	171 (44.19)	9 (2.33)	54 (13.95)	9 (2.33)
Discussion among virtual community of learners	186 (48.06)	122 (31.52)	6 (1.55)	45 (11.63)	28 (7.24)
Opportunity exchange of experience and/ or information	165 (54.7)	103 (34)	8 (1.3)	67 (4.7)	44 (5.3)

Interaction of students and availability of learning materials is regarded as basic element of effective teaching learning process. The table-1 demonstrates opinion of the university students about social media as learning technology which is used for promoting their peer interactivity and access to learning sources.

The data elaborated that 80 % of the respondents were of the opinion that the use of social media as learning technology facilitates them in getting instant access to sources of latest knowledge; whereas, 75.76% viewed it as a useful technology which promotes access to reliable sources of learning. More than three-fourth (73.38% and 77.77%) of the respondents were of the view that it (social media –learning technology) provides efficient students' support services and access to their (students') preferred learning materials respectively. However, according to 74.42% of the respondents it promotes their access to multiple sources of learning materials which they use for their studies.

Likewise, 81.4% of the respondents acknowledged the role of social media as learning technology in promoting opportunities of their interaction among their study circles and with teachers. While, according to 79.58% of the respondents it promotes opportunities for discussion among their virtual community members; and 88.7% valued its role in extending opportunities for exchanging their learning experiences and/ or information among their circles.

Table 2  
Opinion of university students about social media in developing learning skills

Statement/ Theme	Level of Agreement				
	Frequencies & Percentages (given in parentheses below)				
	Strongly Agreed	Agreed	Uncertain	Disagreed	Strongly Disagreed
<b>Social media technology</b>					
Facilitates critical thinking	166 (42.89)	154 (39.79)	5 (1.29)	33 (8.53)	29 (7.49)
Develops problem solving approach	169 (43.67)	133 (34.37)	5 (1.29)	39 (10.08)	41 (10.59)
Assists with mastery learning	141 (36.43)	152 (39.28)	6 (1.55)	39 (10.08)	49 (12.66)
Promotes student-centred learning environment	171 (44.19)	143 (36.95)	7 (1.81)	27 (6.98)	39 (10.08)
Develops argumentation and reasoning	142 (36.69)	121 (31.27)	14 (3.62)	48 (12.40)	62 (16.02)
Illustrates application of theories/ techniques	171 (44.19)	119 (30.75)	9 (2.33)	56 (14.47)	32 (8.27)
Inculcates futuristic approach/vision	126 (32.56)	111 (28.68)	11 (2.84)	63 (16.28)	76 (19.64)

Social media plays an important role in nurturing intellect of university students by presenting multiple learning materials for critical analysis. The table-2 illustrates opinions of university students about the role of social media technology in promoting their learning and analytical skills.

According to the results of the data analysis, 82.68% and 78.04% of the respondents were of the view that social media technology promotes their critical thinking and problem solving approach respectively by providing opportunities of cross-examination of multiple learning resources and information presented over there. Similarly, 75.71% of the respondents described that social media technology assists them with mastery learning by reading and understanding different phenomena and commenting on those to continue dialogue in a positive way. It was supported by 67.96% of the respondents who asserted that such activities on social media develop argumentation and reasoning skills among them. It also creates student-centred learning environment which was appreciated by 81.14% of the respondents.

The data analysis further demonstrated that 74.94% of the respondents acknowledged the role of social media technology in explaining application of theories and/ or techniques through examples, pictures, visuals and illustrations and videos. Even so, 61.24% of the respondents acknowledged that through the aforementioned activities social media inculcates futuristic approach and/ or vision among university students to get into it with proper preparation.

Table 3  
Opinion of the respondents about the role social media technology in inspiring and engaging university students

Statement/ Theme	Level of Agreement				
	Frequencies & Percentages (given in parentheses below)				
	Strongly Agreed	Agreed	Uncertain	Disagreed	Strongly Disagreed



Social media technology					
Increases students' motivation	153 (39.53)	139 (35.92)	6 (1.55)	42 (10.85)	47 (12.14)
Enhances learning experience of students	134 (34.63)	163 (42.12)	4 (1.03)	41 (10.59)	45 (11.63)
Develops among students an urge for deeper learning	136 (35.14)	167 (43.15)	6 (1.55)	26 (6.72)	52 (13.44)
Guarantees learners' autonomy	178 (45.99)	139 (35.92)	4 (1.03)	19 (4.91)	47 (12.14)
Promotes self-regulation in learning	112 (28.94)	153 (39.53)	12 (3.10)	47 (12.14)	63 (16.28)
Enhances team working opportunities	156 (40.31)	141 (36.43)	7 (1.81)	34 (8.79)	49 (12.66)
Offers innovative learning tasks	132 (34.11)	164 (42.38)	6 (1.55)	37 (9.56)	48 (12.40)
Ensures active learning of students	147 (37.98)	128 (33.07)	8 (2.07)	43 (11.11)	61 (15.76)

Effective learning takes place when students are inspired and actively engaged in learning process through different activities and learning tasks. The data analysis given in table-3 explains that 75.45% of the respondents were of the view that social media technology increases their motivation to learn and complete their learning tasks, which according to 78.29% of the university students develops among them an urge for deeper learning.

It was also asserted by 76.75% and 76.74% of the university students that social media technology enhances their learning experiences and promotes opportunities to work in virtual teams [of learners] respectively. The data analysis further showed that according to 81.91% of the university students social media affirms their autonomy; and 68.47% acknowledged that it promotes self-regulation in their learning process as they themselves schedule their study, and select and manage learning materials and activities.

Similarly, 76.49% of the respondents viewed it useful as it offers innovative learning tasks; whereas 71.05% were of the belief that social media thus ensures active learning by involving them in different learning activities.

Table 4  
Opinion of university students about role of social media technology in promoting 21<sup>st</sup> century skills

Statement/ Theme	Level of Agreement				
	Frequencies & Percentages (given in parentheses below)				
	Strongly Agreed	Agreed	Uncertain	Disagreed	Strongly Disagreed
Social media technology					
Develops competition urge	116 (29.97)	153 (39.53)	8 (2.07)	47 (12.14)	63 (16.28)
Promotes opportunities social learning	142 (34.11)	137 (35.40)	11 (2.84)	42 (10.85)	65 (16.80)
Provides opportunities of confidence	133	137 (35.40)	6 (1.55)	67	44 (11.37)

building	(34.37)			(17.31)	
Enhances interactive skills of students	152 (39.28)	133 (34.37)	7 (1.81)	57 (14.73)	38 (9.82)
Inculcates global learning skills among students	128 (33.07)	136 (35.14)	9 (2.33)	63 (16.28)	51 (13.18)
Accommodates individual learning styles of students	117 (30.23)	142 (36.69)	12 (3.10)	61 (15.76)	55 (14.21)

Apparently, the students feel comfort with social media and they use it frequently at a continuum. The table-4 demonstrates that 69.5% of the respondents were of the view that social media technology develops competition spirit among university students; whereas, 69.51% asserted that it promotes opportunities of social learning through interactions with members of their virtual community.

Similarly, according to 69.77% of the university students described that they use social media as a learning technology and it provides them opportunities of confidence building through aforementioned interactions. In this way (according to 73.65% of the university students) it enhances their interactive skills (how to communicate and interact with others), and (according to 68.21% of the respondents) it inculcates global learning skills among university students to live and work in 21<sup>st</sup> century –the century of information and information technology.

It was also acknowledged by 66.92% of the respondent that social media technology accommodates individual learning styles of university students due to its flexibility, convenience of usability, ever emerging applications (apps) or innovations and above all the popularity among university students.

Table 5

Opinion of university students about their understanding of social media technology and its usefulness in teaching learning process

Statement/ Theme	Level of Agreement				
	Frequencies & Percentages (given in parentheses below)				
	Strongly Agreed	Agreed	Uncertain	Disagreed	Strongly Disagreed
Social media technology is useful					
tool for effective learning	156 (40.31)	132 (34.11)	4 (1.03)	43 (11.11)	52 (13.44)
in learning from and/ with others	171 (44.19)	133 (34.37)	6 (1.55)	29 (7.49)	48 (12.40)
in promoting self-paced learning	154 (39.79)	138 (35.66)	13 (3.36)	33 (8.53)	49 (12.66)
in promoting opportunities of collaborative learning	157 (40.57)	142 (36.69)	4 (1.03)	34 (8.79)	50 (12.92)
tool of distributed learning	166 (42.89)	139 (35.92)	7 (1.81)	28 (7.24)	47 (12.14)
platform for cross-cultural understanding	159 (41.09)	128 (33.07)	18 (4.65)	37 (9.56)	45 (11.63)

Data analysis as presented in table-5 demonstrates the opinion of university students about usefulness of social media technology in teaching learning process. According to

the table 74.44% of the university students were of the opinion that social media plays a significant role as a learning tool and it facilitates their access to relevant study materials and websites to enhance learning.

Similarly, 78.56% of the respondents viewed social media technology useful in learning from and with others beyond geographical boundaries of their country as it (according to 74.16% of the respondents) works as a suitable platform for cross-cultural understanding of values, norms and learning behaviours of students with different demographics. Likewise, 75.35% of the university students valued the role of social media technology in facilitating their self-paced learning; whereas, according to 77.26% it promotes opportunities of collaborative learning and instils worthwhile inspiration to accomplish such tasks.

However, 78.81% of the university students viewed it as a pragmatic technology to play a constructive role in promoting opportunities of distributed learning –a modern concept of learning which is getting popularity among students particularly, the university students.

Table 6

Opinion of respondents about the problems faced by university students in using social media as learning technology

Statement/ Theme	Level of Agreement				
	Frequencies & Percentages (given in parentheses below)				
	Strongly Agreed	Agreed	Uncertain	Disagreed	Strongly Disagreed
<b>The use of social media technology</b>					
Causes loneliness	177 (45.74)	155 (40.05)	6 (1.55)	21 (5.43)	28 (7.24)
Create social problems	174 (44.96)	159 (41.09)	7 (1.81)	19 (4.91)	28 (7.24)
Cause health and physique problems	127 (32.82)	1131 (33.85)	4 (1.03)	47 (12.14)	78 (20.16)
Presents cheating and false identities	167 (43.15)	145 (37.47)	5 (1.29)	41 (10.59)	29 (7.49)
<b>Promotes risk of malwares</b>	171 (44.19)	113 (29.20)	8 (2.07)	56 (14.47)	39 (10.08)
Offers dubious information	144 (37.21)	123 (31.78)	19 (4.91)	58 (14.99)	43 (11.11)
Presents un-ethical information	133 (34.37)	121 (31.27)	11 (2.84)	52 (13.44)	70 (18.09)
Internet/social media addiction	169 (43.67)	137 (35.40)	12 (3.10)	43 (11.11)	26 (6.72)

Table-6 reflects problems of university students which they generally face in using social media as a learning technology. The data analysis illustrates that a significant majority (85.79%) of the respondents reported that although social media enhances their connectivity even beyond their country but they often feel loneliness in their home(s) as it limits their real-life face to face interactions with their parents, siblings and friends. This situation (according to 86.15% of the respondents) creates social problems for them like wedging in relationships, untrustworthiness, unnecessary exploitation etc.

Similarly, 66.67% of the respondents described their health and physical problems (often backache, blurred vision, dryness of skin) associated with excessive use of social media. The respondents also reported some technical problems which they usually encounter in using social media.

According to 80.62% of the respondents, unknown people do not disclose their real identity rather they cheat by using fake identities. Likewise, 63.39% reported the problem of increased risk of malwares; whereas, 65.64% were of the view that social media presents unethical and/ or unauthentic information which creates social and moral problems for them. However, 79.07% of the university students were of the opinion that unnecessary and excessive use of social media leads the users towards 'internet addiction or social media addiction'.

## **DISCUSSION**

This study demonstrates interesting and useful results which can be considered by university academia, students and other stakeholders to appreciate the role of social media in teaching learning process. It asserts that social media technology plays a significant role in promoting opportunities of virtual interactions of university students, instant access to multiple, latest, reliable and students' preferred sources of learning (table-1). Alike the results demonstrated by the studies of Ricoy and Feliz, (2016), Hussain and Cakir (2015), Hussain (2005) and the synthesis of literature by Henderson, Snyder, and Beale (2013) which described that social media technology provides an innovative platform for communication, interaction and collaboration in learning process.

Primarily, learning skills play an important role throughout the academic life of students. Generally, the students equipped with appropriate learning skills appear to be comfortable and they complete their studies successfully. It is evident from this study that university students appreciated the role of social media in developing learning skills among them. According to findings of the study social media technology develops critical thinking, problem solving approach and argumentation, illustrates application of theories and/ or techniques, assists them with mastery learning through task oriented activities, and inculcates futuristic vision and approach among university students (table-2). It coincides with the outcomes of The Victoria University (<https://www.vu.edu.au/>) project which used social media for communicating expectations, moderating and facilitating students, peer sharing and learning from each other, developing critical literacy skills by engaging in critical thinking and digital literacy skills development process, providing opportunities of informal and participatory learning. It is also supported by Moran, Seaman, and Tinti-Kane (2011) according to which 80% of academicians suggested their students to view an online educational or instructional video to enhance their learning and expand intellectual horizon.

Effective learning takes place when students are inspired, motivated and actively engaged in learning process through different activities and tasks. The study demonstrates that social media increases motivation and learning experiences of university students by developing among them an urge for deeper learning through their

active engagement in innovative learning tasks. It provides opportunities of students' autonomy and self-regulation in their studies (table-3). Different studies (Wenger, White & Smith, 2009; Hussain, & Cakir, 2015; Wasoh, 2014; Ricoy, & Feliz, 2016; Ractham, & Firpo, 2011) affirmed that social media plays an important role as an effective tool [technology] of learning and it fosters a culture of learning in the universities. Recently, social media has appeared as an effective and popular media (Hussain, & Cakir, 2015) among youth particularly the university students. This study reveals that social media plays a significant role as a learning technology which promotes opportunities of self-paced and distributed learning. It also works as a suitable platform for cross-cultural understanding of values, norms, social learning and learning behaviours of students with different demographics. It enhances opportunities of confidence building, interactive and global skills of university students by accommodating their individual learning styles (table-4 & 5). These findings are supported by the studies of Hussain, (2005); Hussain and Cakir, (2015); and Ricoy, and Feliz (2016) which demonstrated students' increased motivation and participation in using social media tools [apps] and technologies for their learning purpose. The use of which appeared to be increasing with the time and gratifying learning experiences of university students. This study also illustrated some problems which university students face when they use social media. The university students reported that social media creates loneliness, social and health problems, problems of malwares, unethical information and internet addiction (table-6); that is supported by the studies of Hussain (2005); Hussain, Çakir, Ozdemir, and Tahirkheli (2017); Yildirim (2014); and Hussain and Durrani (2012) which reflect more or less alike results.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, this study concludes that social media plays an important role as a learning technology to enhance teaching learning process, particularly, the learning of students at university level. It asserts that social media technology is significantly promoting opportunities for virtual interactions among university students, instant access to multiple, latest, reliable and students' preferred sources of learning. It (social media and its use as a learning technology) upholds the prospects of developing critical thinking, problem solving approach and argumentation among university students by illustrating application of theories and/ or techniques through examples, visuals and illustrations and videos, and assisting them with mastery learning and futuristic approach through task oriented activities. It also develops and sustains motivation and enhances learning experiences of university students by developing among them an urge for deeper learning through their active engagement in innovative learning tasks. It ensures opportunities of students' autonomy and promotes opportunities of self-paced and self-regulated learning. Social media facilitates distributed learning and works as a suitable platform for cross-cultural understanding of values, norms, social learning and learning behaviours of university students with different demographics –thus leading towards social learning. It enhances opportunities of confidence building, interactive and global skills of university students by accommodating their individual learning styles. However, its excessive use creates psychological, social and health problems for

university students. They also face problems of malwares, unethical and unauthentic information and internet addiction or social media addiction.

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