Role of Social Media in Language Learning

Saba Ghafoor
University of Karachi.

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Farhan Uddin Raja
FUUAST, Karachi.

Abstract

Purpose: *This study is primarily intended to explore the role of social media in language learning. In the contemporary age, technology is used to make learning and teaching more interactive and engaging. Students and teachers are now provided with more applications and webs to make their learning or teaching process efficient.*

Methodology: *This qualitative study has been carried out by following a case study design. This research had three participants, and they all were associated with the field of the English language. The information gathered through interviews was analyzed with the help of a SWOT matrix. This helped determine the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of using social media in language learning.*

Findings: *The information gathered through the interviews suggests that social media has considerable benefits and advantages. The advantages provide the learners with an enhanced learning experience. However, on the other hand, the drawbacks of using social mediahinder learning and impact the correct use of language.*

Conclusion: The present study proves that social media can positively affect language learning. However, along with the advantages, there are drawbacks as well. Social media's threats can significantly hinder learning, particularly for language learners. As far as the advantages of social media are concerned, it can be beneficial as it provides a platform where individuals can access the latest information from all across the globe.

Keywords: Social Media, Language Learning, SWOT Matrix, Interactive Teaching

Introduction

Social media has proliferated through the years and has changed our ways of living from different angles, including the exchange of knowledge, education, and communication (Bhatti, 2018; Bhatti, Bano, & Rehman, 2019). In the contemporary age, technology is used to make learning and teaching more interactive and engaging. Students and teachers are now provided with more applications and websites like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and E-mail to make their learning or teaching process efficient. Many students depend on social media as a medium of communication as well. In their study, Valenzuela, Park, and

Kee (2009) found out that students usually use social media for at least an hour a day to keep in touch with their friends. This portrayshow impactful social media can be if utilized for online learning.

As the prevalence of various social networking sites is continually growing, many researchers and scholars have put forward this question: to what extent can social media's growthfacilitate students in the academic setting. In previous research, it was found that a particular group that was given inspiration, commitment, and learning with the help of social networking websites led to greater benefits regarding the English proficiency test than the group that was provided training in person (Wamba, 2016). The Internet is packed with online communities that greatly benefit English language learning (Gaudeul & Peroni, 2010).

Moreover, social networking websites allow users to share their views and interact with people from all across the globe (Khan, Ayaz, & Faheem, 2016). In a study carried out by Kerm (2006), it was highlighted that the constructivists approach highly supported online blogs like social media are quite helpful in language learning as they provide individuals with ample opportunities of

interacting with different people (Selwyn, 2007), which is an important aspect of language learning.

Despite the inevitable effect of social media on various aspects of individual's lives, and considering how students in the contemporary age are defiant to obsolete techniques of learning (Bosh, 2008), there is not much research that explores the impact of social media in education andparticularly in the domain of English Language. By taking different theories, including Input Hypothesis, Constructivism,

The area of concentration that this research will be investigating is can social media be beneficial in learning English as a second language. Anchored on different theories, including Input Hypothesis, Constructivism, Social-Interactionist, PC-created instruction, Cooperative Learning, and Web-based Learning, this study aims to contribute to the occurring discussion on the role of social media in English language learning (Bhatti & Rehman, 2019). Moreover, using a SWOT analysis model, the study will investigate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that social media poses for English language learning. The study will also bring together the insights of individuals directly associated with the field of the English language. Thefindings of this research will help teachers develop strategies to effectively utilize social media in their teaching methods and facilitate the students to the maximum.

Literature Review

This study uses various learning models and second language acquisition (SLA) theories. SLA theories helped discuss different themes and topics in this study. TheSLA theories discussed in this study include Constructivism, Social-interactionist, Cooperative learning, Computer-generated instructions, and Web-based learning.

The topic of social media is wide; hence, there cannot be a single definition. Considering that social media does not have a technical meaning, individuals have roughly defined social media in different words. Xiang and Gretzel (2010) defined social media as a web-based collaboration of knowledge generated by consumers online. Kaplan and Haelein (2020) also defined social media, stating that social media is a group of different applications based on the Internet. This group of applications forms the technological and ideological foundations of the Web and enables the creation and transfer of user-

generated content.

According to Evans (2012), social media is a place where words, texts, pictures, and videos are created with the purpose of sharing. The term "sharing" has been used in the mentioned definition, which is the core idea of social media in the contemporary age. The idea was also put forward thatsocial media can be perceived as a place with communication, sharing, exchange, mutual relationships, groups, and likes (Bhatti, Saad, & Gbadebo, 2019).

Although social media tools are versatile, vague, and diverse, some researchers chose the systematic classification of social networking websites as per their common features and functions (Bhatti, Saad, and Salimon, 2018). These social networking websites, tools, and applications havepreviously been classified into even broader aspects for communication, education, collaboration, and entertainment specific to social networking. This categorization includes publishing, picture-sharing, microblogging, audio, video, live casting, gaming, virtual worlds, productivity applications, rich sites summary, aggregators, search, interpersonal, and mobile (Safko & Brake, 2009). Tools of social media that have been popular among individuals include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, MySpace, Wikipedia, Skype, Blogger, iTunes, Flickr, Yahoo Search, Picasa,Second Life, Google Docs, World of Warcraft, Digg, Google Search, and Jott. Individuals, especially Asians, have shown a strong and overwhelming presence in the above-mentioned social media websites and applications (Steckman & Andrews, 2017).

According to the Input Hypothesis, Krashen (1985) explained that individuals learn language through the reading texts or input they are exposed to. Therefore, an individual with access to extensive comprehensible input is more likely to learn and produce the English languagecorrectly. Taking this fact into account, it can be said that language learners, being exposed to extensive knowledge in the contemporary digital age, can easily pick up the language with the help of blogs, social networking sites, microblogging sites, professional networks, content-driven communities, and video sharing networks (Walaski, 2013). However, with this vast stream of knowledge, individuals must filter the received knowledge to get the right input for their academics.

Vygotsky formed the theory of social constructivism in the late 1970s. This

theory put forward the idea that language is less interpersonal and more intrapersonal (Vygotsky, 1978). In his theory, Vygotsky also highlighted the role of other individuals in learning (Jones & Brader-Araje, 2020). With the help of these interactions, social media has made language learning easier and more convenient. Individuals can get the opportunity of connecting to various people and communicate with them over the Internet. It has been known that children's language or vocabulary learning is directly associated with the environment they are exposed to. Social interactionists hold the opinion that language learning with children is more natural when they interact with adults who are proficient in the language (Rudd & Lambert, 2011). The interaction can be linguistic, cognitive, social, or physical (Cooter and Reutzel, 2004). However, this theory has a limitation as well. When individuals, more specifically children, pick up wrong and inappropriate language from people in both real life and social media.

Since the Internet has an interactive nature, it plays a significant role in the production of a highly conversational linguistic environment or context (Black, 2005). When non-native speakers join online communities or forums, they get the opportunity of participating in discussions. By having discussions with individuals online, they get exposed to their native language and engage in valuable conversations in a greater way. These conversations also allow the learners to learn from individuals with a more diverse experience interacting within the speech communities (Duff, 2002). Learning language through socialization does not only consist of exposure to the native language and engaging in meaningful and grammatically sound discussions. It also enables the learners to benefit from various cultural exchange mediums. In addition to that, individuals also learn to use language with the sense of being pragmatically and socially correct. They also learn meaningful ways of engaging with native speakers, leading them to confidently interact with people in their daily activities (Garrett, 2008).

Furthermore, online game communities are no exception if we talk about the role of social media in language learning. In their research, Pena and Hancock (2006) analyzed the socioemotional messages that individuals exchange within the gaming community. It was found out that players exchanged less

socioemotional messages and more positive socioemotional messages despite being rivals. Furthermore, the greater the interaction was between beginner and advanced-level players, the more they engaged in the socialization process. However, this learningfeature provided by the virtual environment has posed many challenges for teachers and educators. Therefore, it has become harder for educators to develop effective learning processes for second language learning (Thorne, 2008), independent learning, and analytical thinking (Melerba, 2011). This is because the use of foul language and 'trash-talking' on different social media websites and applications have become common among individuals these days.

However, everything comes with certain advantages and drawbacks. Web 2.0 has been designed to allow individuals to publish and share their work more interactively (Warschauer and Grime, 2007). We can take the example of YouTube here. Many people are using Youtube not just for streaming and sharing videos, but it has also become a platform for community-building and interaction between native and non-native speakers. The users willensure their ability to create, collaborate, and share (Lomicks & Lord, 2009).

Considering the number of gaming sites and online communities, it can be said that socialmedia has caught the attention of today's generation. According to Nielsen (2010), most of our time in our house is spent consuming social networking sites. Furthermore, as Malerba (2011) discussed, Facebook is one of the most widely-used social networking websites, with over175 million users worldwide. Having international users from almost every country, Facebook provides individuals with a space to interact and share their knowledge, culture, and language (Harrison & Thomas, 2009). The point is that social interaction can be taken as an approach that helps explain different themes of language learning with the help of social networking sites.

Moreover, in the context of social interactionism, 'mediation' also holds a significant position as it is highly essential for the development of human learning (Feuerstein et al., 2003). The term mediators or 'the one more knowledgeable than others' refers to the people who help people learn language through social media websites. With the help of these mediators, individuals get the opportunity of interacting with them, which further determines the success of culture

transmission and language learning (Feuerstein et al., 2003).

As per the research carried out by McConnell (2002), cooperative learning and interaction do play a vital role in language learning. While discussing the benefits of socialization in language learning, McConnell (2002) explained that it helps individuals clarify vague concepts. It also develops the skill of critical thinking in individuals and gives them a diverse avenue for exchanging information. In addition, it also enables individuals to enhance their communication skills and provides them with the chance to learn in a social context. Lastly, individuals can also seek validation for their thoughts by having meaningful conversations or engaging in different perspectives or arguments.

Integrating technologies in learning processes has been prevalent in many parts of the world. Teachers and educators use social networking sites, including Facebook, Blogs, Twitter, Flickr, and YouTube, to make the learning process more interactive. These social networking sites are mostly used for writing as the writing process is made more engaging and creative with the help of technology and the online environment (Nichols, 2007). Hence, this is the foremost reason

individuals today are expected to have advanced technical skills and be equipped with all the essential tools to help them participate in the community, public, economic, and creative life (New London Group 2000). In other words, the trend not only promotes construction skills but also profoundly impacts social skills.

In research carried out by Renali (2008), it was stated that computer-generated activities and simulations help promote various opportunities for individuals to elevate the target language. Furthermore, another research found that video-based blogs are highly effective in learning English as a second language. Besides that, blogging also helps enhance language learners' posture, enunciation, gestures, and facial expressions. Furthermore, it encourages the learners to look for their mistakes by repeatedly watching their videos, enabling them to make noticeable improvements (Shih, 2010). Lastly, with extensive exposure to the digital environment, provided with the help of social media, language learning is made accessible and convenient to everyone.

All of these theories were discussed in this study to examine the context of social media's role in language learning. Being

proven and relevant to the current study, these theories would bebeneficial in having thorough insights into the role of social media in language learning and how it affects the learning process of individuals in the contemporary age.

Research Questions

Following are the questions that this research will aim to address:

1. What are social media's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats concerning English Language Learning?
2. What strategies can be developed to maximize the use of social media in English LanguageLearning?

Research Objectives

The following are the main objectives of this research

1. Explore the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of using social media in English Language Learning.

2. To find out the strategies that can be developed to maximize the use of social media in English Language Learning.

Methodology

The qualitative research design was chosen as the main and substantial method of the study. In a qualitative approach, the researcher collects, analyses, and interprets data obtained with the help of various conversational methods. Moreover, in qualitative research, responses are collected through open-ended questions. Therefore, these responses collected in qualitative research are non-numerical.

Research Design

This qualitative research is based on an interpretative method of research. Various factors have been considered for this research. The reason for using interpretative methods is their different implications. The views and opinions of the participants have been integrated into the research through a thematic approach. The thematic approach was beneficial in discussing different aspectsof this research. A case study design has been followed to carry out this study.

The study will probe into the "why" and "how" of the impact of social media on English language learning and has conducted an in-depth analysis. A SOT matrix has also been used to provide elevated focus. Using the SWOT matrix allowed the researcher to probe into the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of using social media for English language learning. SWOT analysis is a tool

commonly used in corporate systems and business organizations.

However, it was used in this study owing to its effectiveness and practicality. The mentioned approach was appropriate for the study, as it helped the researcher explore significant constituents of the study and attain explicit goals.

Sample

The sample population for the current research study consisted of English language teachers and instructors at the secondary school level with a background in English language learning. These were deemed the primary users of social media and key individuals involved in teaching the English language in various educational institutions. For this reason, this study employed purposive sampling in qualitative research. The participants were chosen based on their capability and experience with social media to provide accurate information regarding English language learning.

The inclusion criteria for the participants were their background and expertise in social media for providing accurate and precise information on English language learning. In addition, the participants were also expected to give meaningful contributions to their educational insights into the topic selected by the researcher.

Three participants were included in the sample of the study. Each of these participants wasinvolved in the field of the English Language and had an extensive understanding of English Language Learning.

Data Collection

The data in this study were collected through written interviews with the participating individuals. The researcher contacted the participants through an online WhatsApp messenger application. The participants were asked to participate in the interview guide by E-mail or via the same messenger app. The participants submitted all the answers to the interview questions in a week or two to the researcher's written form. That gave the participants ample time to construct their thoughts and suitably address the topic.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was guided by the themes that emerged during the study. Therefore,themes, ideas, or concepts stated at least three times by the participants will be evaluated. Additionally, participants were asked to fill out a SWOT analysis matrix to ensure that all the study components were incorporated and all

research questions were addressed.

Results and Discussions

The SWOT analysis matrix was used to compile all findings easily. Afterwards, the research questions were addressed by employing the findings of the study. Given the nature of qualitative research, the entire data acquired in this work was cautiously treated. Nevertheless, the findings of this study, or the various variables examined, were considered springboards for future research on this subject or theme.

Strengths

The data acquired highlighted some strengths of using social media for language learning that the current study has taken into consideration. The respondents identified the strengthening factors decisive and the main variables in determining how social media positively impacts English language learning. The majority of the participants' insights were based on the notion that English is acknowledged as a "global language" (Crystal, 2012) and is widely utilized by most people worldwide. In the same way, it also is used on the majority of social media platforms.

Source of information, vocabularies, and language text;

The participants stated that social media platforms such as news, blogs, and wikis are excellent sources of relevant information which is available in the English language.Additionally, the content shared on social media platforms presents even enticing texts that are a combination of linear and non-linear texts and hence attract young people (Howe & Strauss, 2009). However, it takes comprehensive judgement onthe part of each individual to determine what constitutes legitimate or fake news, as social media platforms make huge amounts of information available for public consumption. Additionally, they underlined the importance of social media in developing one's vocabulary and linguistic proficiency. Some of the participants stated,

> "*Social media is an all-free and all-available information source for language learners. There is no reason to engage an English instructor or join costly English academies. You can find almost everything on YouTube and other online courses.*"
>
> "*Since the English language is progressing with millennial words, individuals will need to master it because it is the primary language or medium of communication onthe*

internet."

"There are several phrases, slang terms, and abbreviations that we will never learn from our textbooks. Thus, assisting us in a more natural and efficient language."

The exposure provided by social media to English language learners occurs in an environment conducive to enjoyment, learning, and learning of the language in a more natural manner.

*They are being exposed to communication, interaction, and connection***;**

Data collected by participants also demonstrates the role of social networking sites and media in promoting human contact and interaction. Given that these websites, programs, and applications connect individuals, they create venues for conversation, allowing users to exercise the target language. According to their assessments of the strengths of social media, participants said:

"English language learners develop their communication abilities on a broad scale through social media interaction."

"More impact over how the language is used increases interest in learning."

"It is enjoyable to maintain contact

with old friends and acquaintances. A pleasant way to sit andunwind for a while."

"Educators can share information, promote debate, and respond to student inquiries. Even the hashtag craze can assist educators in developing interactive projects and generating online interaction between learners."

Considering that some participants were exposed to this type of technology while growing up, they appeared to have a natural ability to use it. Whether they are writing e-mails, posting on social networking sites, or playing games, they have the opportunity to improve their English and exchange information with others.

Technology and social media are ingrained in the world where learners grow up;

Participants asserted that individuals exposed to technology and social media are more technologically savvy and acquire more quickly than their predecessors. Furthermore, these individuals receive extensive exposure to English language materials from a young age, which aids in their language acquisition and learning. They added that because social media is ingrained in the

present society, language learners will have greater exposure to a print-rich atmosphere where English learning is powerfully emphasized.

> *"Since even young children can simply use social media sites, they can practise their language skills through interaction with others."*
>
> *"Adequate exposure to social media to Children can be extremely beneficial for English language learning."*
>
> *"Social media has evolved into a whole different reality. They are beneficial for language learning since they appeal the most to youth. Almost everyone has a Facebook account these days. It is through other people's posts that they mostly learn their vocabulary and language."*

Weaknesses

After obtaining the data, three main weaknesses have been identified that influence the role of social media in English language learning. These weaknesses adhere to widespread disinformation, foul language, and grammatically incorrect language. Texts, a lack of real-world language engagement, and a decline in writing skills. These

weaknesseshave a detrimental influence on English language learning.

Pervasive disinformation, violent words, and grammatical errors in texts;

While social media platforms provide a wealth of information, language beginners frequently catch up on falsenews, obscene phrases, and even grammatically incorrect English texts. These unprocessed language stimuli affect not just language learning but also on how information is collected. False information spread via social media distorts one's perception of the world. A naive beginner, for instance, may believe that social networking sites are only populated with fake news and misinformation. These pieces of information are quite damaging, even more so in today's world, when some individuals believe whatever they see on social networking sites. While social media platforms provide opportunities for language learning, a more immediate problem is the type of language individuals learn online. Absurd language, filthy imagery, and expletives are just a few of the drawbacks of social media platforms that increasingly influence their viewers. One of the participants shared:

> *"Most of us have Internet access, and social media has given us the*

right to express our views. However, individuals often do not appropriately use the language that hinders language by disseminating inappropriate and, in some cases, vulgar language terms that should not be used."

Lack of genuine engagement with languages;

There is no face-to-face personal component of communication in the interaction process of social media. The body language, emotions, gestures, expression of the face, and other visual indicators on social media is not enough, if not completely absent. In a successful communication cycle, these factors are crucial. With minimal engagement, individuals tend not to demonstrate their actual feelings and motives in the real world and the ability to interact orally efficiently is restricted. Furthermore, the more time consumed by social media, the greater are the chances of an individual's communication skills getting affected.

*Decrease in writing skills***;**

The increase in social networking websites has also led to short texts, messages, memes and slang. The participants stated that the current writing system has a detrimental influence on the educational writing of the learners. Most of these abbreviations also appear in individuals' official writing. Their increasing popularity has resulted in the beginners of social media languages adopting them, overlooking defects of grammar and syntax. Also, since individuals pay more attention to how quickly they can publish or upload, theydo not take the time to verify their written punctuation and grammar.

Opportunities

*Enhanced access to English native speakers***;**

Some viewed social media as tools for providing broader interactions and communication with non-native English speakers. These technologies were thought to be associated globally with native English speakers or language specialists. Social media has also opened the door for online training or lessons. In addition, language learners can copy or understand how individuals adopt the speaking or writingof online videos, posts on Twitter, Facebook posts, captions on Instagram, debates, ted talks, and other numerous things. Social media offers language learners the capacity to communicate with people with expertise in all disciplines or areas of focus and obtain the knowledge

they want.

Threats

Reason for learners getting distracted from learning and wasting time;

    Participants concluded that this age's technological engagement is why many learners are distracted, especially with social media. Because technically knowledgeable individuals do several things simultaneously on different social media websites and waste a good amount of their time daily.

    Because technically knowledgeable individuals do several things simultaneously on different social media websites and waste a good amount of their time daily. It is considered that excessive time people spend on social networking sites, gaming, blogs or other online communities distracts learners who are meant to be attentive to their academics.

    These social media temptations considerably harm users' learning, attention and health. Not only may social media users be diverted, but they might also be bewildered by a great deal of information and lose their focus on appropriate sources of information.

Unending growth of slang and undermining of language;

    The constant spread of slang and undermining language is a great risk for language learning. Some might have regarded it as good or beneficial, but most participants viewed it as a danger to learning English.

    Nevertheless, with all the slang, the terms of thousands and the mainstreaming of grammatically incorrect lexis, people on social media, particularly beginners of language, seem to adopt the network and embrace it regardless of their errors.

Conclusion and Recommendations

    This study provides evidence that social media can positively affect language learning. However, along with the advantages, there are drawbacks as well. Social media's threats can significantly hinder learning, particularly for language learners. As far as the advantages of social media are concerned, it can be beneficial as it provides a platform where individuals can access the latest information from all across the globe. This data stream also allows interaction with different individuals and practice of their learnt language skills. On the contrary, the same social networking sites can be a cause of distraction for language learners with misguidance, false information, and grammatically wrong texts, which further leads to unethical or inappropriate communication between the

individuals.

Taking into account the diverse sources of information that social media provides, it can be suggested that the provided data and opportunities for communication are a great input. This input can be used by teachers in either traditional learning or casual learning sessions with the students. As social media is filled with various knowledge and information, teachers or educators can utilize these inputs and get considerable output from the learners. Teachers can also take verified content, including texts, audios, videos, or images from social networking sites and integrate them into their classroom activities. With adequate supervision by teachers, learners will also be able to differentiate between correct and incorrect information, which will further enable them to use social media correctly. Learners can also make an online community with their peers where they can interact, help each other overcome their shortcomings, and work collectively on the areas they lack.

Talking of the drawbacks of social media in language learning, it is recommended that teachers and educators should play their part in educating the learners regarding the ills of social media and how it can impact their language learning process. Teachers should also try to express themselves more in person despite living in a digital age. In addition, social media exposure to learners should also be confined to certain hours, orit can also lead to serious addiction. Furthermore, if they get addicted to social media, learners will not be able to engage in practical activities, both academics and extracurricular. Lastly, education related to using social media tools for language learning should also be standard in educational institutions.

This study may be considered an extra reference or research carried out to explore the roleof social media in language learning. However, social media is an extensive world, and much research is still needed to find more in-depth about its benefits and drawbacks in language learning.

Limitations

The current study complies with a few potential limitations that are identified by the focused nature of the study in exploring the underlying opportunities, strengths, weaknesses, and threats in English Language Learning.

Ethical Considerations

Because this research includes human subjects, it was necessary to maintain the confidentiality of every

participant. Before the data collection, all participants were informed about the research's scope, and consent was taken. Throughout the procedure, the participants' rights were upheld. Only individuals who consented were included in the study.

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Appendix

Interview Questions Demographic Information

1. For how long have you been in the field of education?

2. What are your current work responsibilities?

3. How has your experience been so far?

Research Question 1

1. What are the possible benefits of using social media in language learning?

2. What are the possible pitfalls of using social media in language learning?

3. In your opinion, what opportunities do the learners get by using social media in language learning?

4. What threats are the learners exposed to by using social media?

Research Question 2

1. How do you feel about your students using social media extensively?

2. Have you tried to develop ways to minimize learners' daily use of social media?

3. How would you cope with the possible threats posed by social media to language learners?