

STUDENTS' USE OF THE SOCIAL MEDIA AS A LEARNING TOOL DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN MAURITIUS

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ABSTRACT

Social media is known to have revolutionised learning in many countries. However, it was not the case in the small island, Mauritius, until the emergence of the coronavirus pandemic in 2019, when there was an urgent shift in learning from the traditional classroom to the remote and online learning. In this context, the use of the social media websites and applications became prominent and challenging as well, as the usage of the social media changed. This study aimed at analysing the use of social media as a learning tool by students during the COVID-19 pandemic. It examined the relationship between the perceived ease of use of social media and perceived usefulness of social media as a learning tool, how and why are learners using social media as a learning tool. The study adopted a mixed methods approach. A questionnaire and semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from students aged from 13 to 24 years old. It was found that perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness of social media have a positive effect on the use of social media as a learning tool. Moreover, students are using social media as learning tool for self-directed learning be it individually and by engaging in collaborative learning.

Keywords: social media, online learning, learning tool, perceived use.

Introduction

Numerous technological advancements have facilitated the widespread of tablets, smartwatches and smartphones. They have allowed people to be connected to each other. In 2012, there were 1.06 billion smartphone users and this number increased to 3.6 billion in 2020 (Statista, 2020). Nowadays, with the availability of mobile data and free Wi-Fi in public places, people can be constantly connected to the internet. This evolving technological progress brought about a significant rise in the number of social media sites (SMS) and social media users (Koeze & Popper, 2020).

Over the past two years or so, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the global village where people were compelled to face an unprecedented situation, with governments imposing lockdowns and schools were closed. Indeed, "COVID-19 is the greatest challenge that national education systems have ever faced" (Daniel, 2020, p.91). With the advent of technological advances, well before the pandemic, social media provided digitally mediated technologies that were already popular (Guraya, 2016), but were being used to some extent for the purpose of online teaching and learning (Kind, Genrich, Sodhi & Chretien, 2010). So, with the pandemic and the urgent close of educational institutions, students and teachers had to shift from face-to-face classes to emergent remote learning (Garfin, 2020). Following the second wave and third wave of COVID-19 and the respective lockdowns, remote learning and online learning became the new normal in the whole world. Though remote learning and online learning were new concepts in the education sector in Mauritius, yet, teachers and students had to adapt to them, to the best of their capabilities.

Nevertheless, online learning is not a new concept in many countries, as e-learning has proved to provide numerous opportunities for students to enhance their learning and succeed in their academic progress. The use of digital technologies positively impacts learning and students gain more learning opportunities, despite time and geographical barriers (Noor-Ul-Amin, 2013). Furthermore, Clover (2017) and Salehi et al. (2015) highlighted the various benefits to e-learning, namely self-directed learning, flexibility, users learn as they go for learning on the social media, the use of discussion forums for interactivity and interaction, it is more convenient to learning at one's pace and place at any time.

Previous studies have highlighted that social media can be used as a learning tool. The use of social media sites for the learning can cater for the diversity of students and it has been found that students might sometimes prefer

learning through the social media to formal learning with the use of online tools (Mpungose, 2020; Mudaly et al., 2015). Indeed, the use of social media enhances the students-users' learning and personal development, and it impacts significantly on their engagement as well as improves collaborative learning among peers (Faizi et al., 2013; Pearson, 2018; Bozanta & Mardikyan, 2017). Besides, social media as a learning medium promotes the four c's; cheapness, creativity, collaboration and convenience for the student (Mudaly et al., 2015).

PEARSON (2018) report indicated that 55% of Gen Zers considered that YouTube contributed to their learning and personal development during the past one year. According to Youmei (2010), YouTube can be used as visual aid to facilitate learning, and videos which are easily and freely accessible on social medium and used as learning resources, can help to cater for different learning styles. Nevertheless, the educational value of YouTube is often underestimated as YouTube is viewed more as a medium of entertainment (Lee & Lehto, 2013). Yet, another study on the use of social media as learning tool for the enhancement of language learning found that Facebook provides students with the opportunities to learn on their own or with their peers (Kitchakarn, 2016). It also showed that students may improve in writing abilities and grammar by actively participating in Facebook activities. Students also view the use of Facebook for class activities as more interesting than the traditional class teaching activities (Shahril et al., 2018). Conversely, Kirschner and Karpinski, (2010) found that frequent Facebook users score a lower grade and the use of social media, Facebook in particular, make the former fall into depression and, even worst, into schizoid disorders (Rosen et al., 2013; Cao et al., 2018). Other studies that assessed the use of social media as a learning tool found many drawbacks for the students, namely some students consider it as ambiguous to be used for learning purposes as they use social medias more for personal use (Rambe & Ng'ambi, 2014); students spend too much time on the social media for other purposes than for learning and this negatively affects their learning performance (Mim et al., 2018).

The most recent study conducted in Mauritius found that 85% of the surveyed students consider that social media may be adopted as a teaching tool; 97 % consider that social media may be an interesting and innovative platform for alternative assessments in the form of assignments/project collaboration; 91% were of the view that it may be used for sharing of teaching and learning documents; 83% found that it may be used for knowledge and information sharing; 72% for the sourcing of information and 87% consider the social media to be an effective way to communicate with friends, peers and teachers (Roopchund et al., 2019). The study also found that that social media makes learning more fun through active student engagement. Another study among senior secondary schools' students showed that 58% of the respondents use social media to discuss class activities and exam papers, 69% look for guidance from their classmates and 39% of them do collaborative online learning; Facebook was also found to be the most popular social medium among the students (Khedo & Elaheebocus, 2012). It is obvious that students were already using the social media for learning purposes. However, there is no much studies and thus empirical literature on the use of social media as a learning tool in the context of Mauritius. No studies have been conducted, particularly of the use of social media as a learning tool during the COVID-19 pandemic in the country.

Objectives Of The Study

The purpose of this current study is to identify the perceptions of the students of the ease of use and of the usefulness of social media as a learning tool. In addition, it analyses how students are using social media for both individual and self-directed learning and for collaborative learning. The findings of this study will shed light on the current use and benefits of social media for learning purposes in Mauritius. The research questions are as follows:

- 1) What is the Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) and Perceived Usefulness (PU) of social media as a learning tool by learners?
- 2) How and why are learners using social media as a learning tool?

Research Methodology

Study Design and Setting

The study adopted the mixed approach i.e., a combination of the quantitative and the qualitative research methods. The mixed research approach is the most appropriate as it is a procedure that is used to collect and analyse data in an attempt to understand the research problem (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The advantage of mixed methods is that it helps to get a better understanding of the research problem. Indeed, a proper quantitative design provides the researcher the ability to determine the link between variables, whether the link is correlational and predictive; a well-designed qualitative method enables the investigation of the use of social media for the purpose of learning through interviews by gaining views, attitudes, perceptions and opinions of those participants who are directly involved in the setting in which the phenomenon takes place (Creswell,

2007). The aim was to compare and contrast both types of data to analyse the extent of convergence and/or divergence of the findings about the use of social media in the selected educational institutions.

Participants

All students were aged between 13 and 24 years old and who were willing to participate in the survey. The target population was determined as the whole population of students in the country who were aged between 13 and 24 and who had the experience of using the social media for learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The snowball sampling was used to administer the questionnaires to the participants. The link of the survey was sent to numerous teachers, parents and students by using social media like Facebook, Messenger, WhatsApp and Instagram who would in turn request students of age between 13 and 24 years old to fill in the survey. These students would send the link to their friends, and this went on as such, by creating the snowball effect for the data collection. This was based on the obvious advantage of snowball sampling in that it can select numerous participants for a study (Creswell, 2012). Since the country was in the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic and the sanitary protocol, established by the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life, was regulated, the snowball sampling was proved to be the most suitable sampling technique to reach the maximum number of respondents. It was time-saving and cost effective. However, it was impossible to determine the response rate with the snowball sampling and so, 200 was the targeted number of respondents as it was considered to be a realistic size that would allow a reliable data analysis within the time frame of the research.

The convenience sampling was used for the interview. This sampling technique is used when respondents are selected because they are willing and available to participate freely and voluntarily in the study (Creswell, 2012). The sample for the semi-structured interview was ten students, aged between 13 and 24 years old from the targeted population. The targeted sample was limited due to the prevalence of the pandemic during the period of July to August 2021.

Data Collection and Processing

A survey was conducted to collect data from students aged between 13 and 24 years old by using a standardized structured questionnaire. The semi-structured questionnaire was designed to determine the perceived ease of use and the usefulness of social media for individual and collective learning. Since the researcher intended to have the perceptions of the respondents to their use of social media for learning purposes, the semi-structured questionnaire was suitable as it “does not presuppose the nature of their responses” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018, p. 475).

There were 40 questions in the questionnaire and they were grouped in to seven sections. The first section consisted of the profile of the respondents; the section B comprised items pertaining to the mostly used social media and the average time spent on social media; the section C comprised items related to the usage of social media; the section D consists of items related to the perceived ease of use of the social media; the section E related to perceived usefulness of social media; the section F relates to the uses of social media for individual learning and for collective learning; the section G consists open-ended items pertaining to the anything the respondent would like to add on the area of study. The Likert scale with 5 rating was used, with 5 for strongly agree to 1 for strongly disagree. The link to the survey was posted on Facebook together with an explanatory note about the purpose and the ethical considerations.

The semi-structured interview is one of the most powerful method that can be used to understand human beings (Fontana & Frey, 2000). It is essential that the participants share the daily use of social media and they are the key informants on the topic of research. There was a pre-defined list of questions pertaining to the demographic profile of students, social media, social media usage, ease of use of social media, social media usefulness for both individual learning and collaborative learning. The semi-structured interview makes the conversation natural between the interviewer and the interviewee for greater flexibility and the research may probe the participants to get further details about the use of social media in educational institution. The interviews were conducted simultaneously with the online survey. The duration of each interview in average was between 20 and 25 minutes and they were recorded by using an audiotape, with no access to a third party.

Both the questionnaire and the interview were pilot tested and corrections were made in terms of the formulation of some items which seemed to be providing the same responses and the language of the interview was changed from English to Creole, the mother tongue of all the respondents and participants as well as that of the interviewer/researcher. The questionnaire also had a Cronbach Alpha value exceeding 0.7.

The quantitative data entry and analysis were done by using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 22). Percentages and p-values were used to present the data. For the qualitative data analysis and

processing, the steps, as propounded by Rubin and Rubin (1995), were followed, namely: (1) coding methods for locating and identifying the underpinning concepts in the data; (2) sorting information into groups based on related types of information; and (3) connecting disparate concepts and topics. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, thick descriptions were used and verbatim statements supported them; member-checking was also done. The findings of this study cannot be generalized, but they are transferable to the extent that the reader may relate them to their own setting and profile of teachers in their setting.

Ethical Approval

This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Open University of Mauritius (OUREC) after the submission of the ethics declaration form to it. The selected participants and respondents participated voluntarily and confidentiality as well as anonymity were key to the study. A written consent form was issued for each participant and the research aim and outcomes were explained to them before the questionnaire is distributed them, as per the Data Protection Act (2017) of Mauritius. Besides, the study was approved as a low risk study by the OUREC, as there was no risk of harm nor the involvement of vulnerable groups.

Research Findings And Discussion

273 responses were gathered on the online survey, exceeding the expected 200 responses. Out of the 273 responses, 23 had to be disregarded because the respondents which did not meet the criteria of the targeted category; or some submitted a completely blank or incomplete questionnaire. Therefore, the total number of respondents for the analysis amounted to 250 respondents. The interviews were conducted simultaneously with the online survey from July to August 2021. 10 persons who responded to the questionnaire gave their consent of participation in the interview, but due to some individual constraint eight persons participated.

Social Media Usage

Figure 1 shows the different social media platforms used by the respondents.

Figure 1: Social Media Platforms

Figure 1 shows the different social media platforms used by the respondents. The most popular platform being WhatsApp with 97.6% and the least popular one Reddit with 8% users. Other apps amounted to 3.6% and represented social media platforms like Tumblr, Discord, LinkedIn and Telegram and some respondents mentioned applications like Zoom and Google Classroom.

WhatsApp's popularity could be due to the fact that it is a free instant messaging that allows people to communicate with each, allow exchanges of different media like photos, pictures etc. without any cost. Some interviewees mentioned that WhatsApp was particularly useful following the lockdown and school closures by allowing them to communicate with their friends, relatives but to also keep in touch with their teachers. WhatsApp groups were created for better exchange for queries regarding their studies, exchange of notes etc. YouTube, is the second most used platform (90.4%) and is a great source of entertainment as specified by interviewees. But it is also used for educational purposes due to wide range of videos and tutorials available. However, even if Facebook is the most popular social network (Statista, 2021), Khebo and Elaheebocus (2012) stated that Facebook was the most popular social media site, it is not even in the top five, with 50.6% of respondents using it in the current study. Pangrazio and Neil (2018) found that Facebook was considered as a social media platform for adults. This supports the finding of this study whereby an interviewee stated that he doesn't use Facebook anymore as "*It is now a social media network for older people*". Besides, there were also the privacy issues associated with Facebook. One interviewee convincingly mentioned: "*For me Facebook is not safe and secure*". Facebook was among the pioneers of social media platforms then many others came with the same options or sometimes better options that Facebook.

Average Time spent on Social Media

Figure 2 shows the average time spent on social media.

Figure 2: Average time spent on social media

Table 1: Crosstab age and time spent on social media

Figure 2 shows that 60.4 % of the respondents spend between 3 hours or more than 4 hours on SMS: this is much time. Only 5% spend less than 30 mins per day on social media. Digital (2021) reported that people aged 16-24 years are very active on social media spending approximately 2 hours 25 mins per day on SMS. The report of Digital (2021) included teens aged 13,14 and 15. Indeed, Table 1 shows that 14 and 15 years old also spend a lot of time on social media. However, given the number of respondents aged 13 it is more complex to analyse the trend for this age. Students had more time to go on SMS compared to when they are physically at school without access to SMS. From this perspective, an interviewee shared: "*During the holidays, I was spending more time on social media, now since school has resumed (face to face) it is a bit less, approximately two hours per day*". The pandemic situation also made students spend more time on social media, as their

physical movements were restricted. Furthermore, their teachers were sending notes and homework on WhatsApp, or they were sending YouTube links, together with lessons explanation.

Perceived Ease of use (PEOU) of social media

The Table 2 below shows the perceived ease of use by learners.

Table 2: PEOU of social media

Table 2 shows that learners can easily use social media. This generation is considered as tech savvy and they grew up with technology, for them using social media is not rocket science.

Some pertinent statements from some interviewees are obvious in justifying the easy use of social media by students, as shown below:

“In a sense we grew up with social media so it is easy to use it”.

“For me there is no difficulty as my brain is already formatted to use it, however for older people it might be more complicated.”

This generation has been so deeply immersed in technology that for them using social media is something completely normal. This is in consistency with the findings of the study conducted by Lagwig (2018), which maintained that technology is more incorporated in Generation Z lives than the previous generations.

Perceived Usefulness of social media usage

The Table 3 shows the perceived usefulness of social media usage.

Table 3: Perceived usefulness of social usage.

Table 3 shows that, in general, social media is very useful: it provides useful information and allows people to communicate with each other. Social media has been particularly useful during the pandemic by helping people to keep in touch with friends, relatives but also helping students to stay in touch with the teachers. One respondent mentioned, very enthusiastically: “Without social media especially during this pandemic and lockdowns we would have had a lot of difficulties communicating with teachers and relatives”. This confirms the findings of the study by Perez and Gomez (2011) and Ahmad (2011) that; social media allow people to find information and to keep in touch with acquaintances. With social media people also have access to local and international news. One respondent explained this important usage by averting: “Social media helps us to stay up to date with current news and events”.

However, the opinions of respondents differ for the question “I use social media because people of my age use it”. A big majority (38.4%) replied ‘neither agree nor disagree’, meaning that this might not be a factor influencing their choice of using social media.

The relationship between the variables

The relationship between variables was tested by conducting Spearman correlation as measurements were taken from an ordinal scale. Spearman Correlation is more appropriate for measurement from an ordinal scale (Wheater & Cook, 2000). Table 4 below shows a summary of results for each hypothesis testing.

Table 4: Results of hypothesis testing

H1 confirms a positive relationship between Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) of social media and social media usage. This is supported by the study of Rauniar et al., (2014) that concluded that PEOU has a positive impact on actual social media usage. It is quite normal that people are most likely to use something which is easy to use, compared to if it was tedious and not user-friendly. Several interviewees confirmed that if a social media platform is too complicated to use, they would stop using it and go for something more user-friendly.

H2 confirms a positive relationship of between Perceived Usefulness (PU) of social media and social media usage. The study of Rauniar et al., (2014) supports this finding also: PU has a positive effect on social media usage. One interviewee averred in the same line: “I was not using Facebook, as it was not useful.”

H3 and H4 confirm that there is a relationship between social media usage and individual and collaborative learning respectively. The results of this study confirm that the PEOU and PU of social media have a positive relationship with social media usage, and that learners are using social media for individual learning and collaborative learning. H5 and H6 confirm that there is a relationship between PEOU and PU of social media and individual learning. H7 and H8 confirm a relationship between PEOU and PU of social media and collaborative learning.

Below are some statements from interviewees that justify the perceptions of ease of use of the social media:

“It is easy to use, you just have to install the app and there you get everything”

“I have a smartphone with which I can easily access social media”

“For me it is easier to learn on social media”

“We can easily among ourselves exchange notes, ideas etc”

So, it can be obvious that PEOU has an impact on how learners are using social media as a learning tool. This is in consistency with the findings of the study of Wiid et al., (2013) that PEOU of social media has a positive effect on use of social an educational tool

The relationships established between the different variables as spelled out in the hypotheses above are summarized in Figure 3 below:

Figure 3: Relationships between the different variables

Students’ Use of Social Media as a Learning Tool

Table 5 shows the various ways in which students used social media as a learning tool both for individual and collaborative learning and the possible reasons of using it.

Table 5: Students’ use of social media as a learning tool

Table 5 shows that social media is being used for learning purposes. The participants insisted that they turn to social media as a learning tool to a greater extent and more often with the emergence of the pandemic and with the consequent closure of schools. They were forced to stay at home and go for online learning. An interviewee succinctly mentioned: “While I was at home studying for my exams, I used my phone a lot for my studies, 30% was social media for entertainment but the rest was for my studies.”. However, 12% of them did not agree to the above statement on the use of social media for learning purposes. For some participants, the social media is considered as a source of entertainment or a communication tool rather than a learning tool. In the same vein, Rambe and Ng’ambi (2014) found that the use of social media for academic purposes can be ambiguous for some students.

Students used the social media for different learning purposes and in different ways during the COVID-19 pandemic. Besides, social media technologies allow them to prevent loss in their learning and to make their learning experience more effective and positive. These are discussed in the following paragraphs.

The use of social media videos

76.9 % do watch videos related to their studies. Social platforms like YouTube have an extensive collection of videos on different learning topics and this provides students with the opportunity to optimize the advantages of asynchronous learning. Videos and podcasts on WhatsApp are effective ways that allow the students to view and review learning content at their own pace. They may pause the video and replay it at the time convenient to them. Videos offer the advantages of covering different topics which are explained differently by different persons thus, learners can look for videos matching their needs. Videos were also very useful for practical subjects like Art and Design and subjects like Literature, Psychology and Sociology. A participant commented with enthusiasm: “I watched videos on sociology uploaded by the class teacher on WhatsApp and the Facebook group, explaining the sociological perspectives of Marx and Weber on social classes, and they enhance my understanding and learning as they provide me with much more detailed explanations, compared to the teacher’s limited explanation on the Zoom classes”. Moreover, with no in-person classes, teachers were not able to do live demonstrations and students could not do experiential learning. Teachers demonstrate practical lessons through video tutorials posted on Facebook. For instance, students were able to learn different drawing and painting techniques in Arts and Design. Another participant further added: “I viewed and reviewed the demonstration class of the teacher on Facebook in the class group on the social media as many times as I could until I mastered the different steps in mounting the shoe rack. I scored a high grade in my assignment in the subject.” It is obvious that the use of video tutorials prepared by the class teachers enhances the teaching as well as learning process of the students, and hence contribute to their academic progress.

Nevertheless, despite the closure of the classes due to the pandemic, students prefer the traditional learning methods of classes with the physical presence of the class teacher and the students interacting among themselves. Video tutorials and demonstrations of practical lessons on the social media are not the definite solution to effective learning on the social media: every student has different learning styles, leaning experiences, expectations and needs. This was manifested in the comments of some of the participants. They concurred: “It depends on what video you are watching. Not all videos are easy to understand, sometimes it is easier to understand the explanation of the teacher. Also, I prefer reading notes than watching a video on a

topic.” A combination of the use of social media and the traditional media of teaching and learning is therefore recommended. Though, in times of pandemics, the advantages of the face-to-face interaction may not help the students to learn effectively; at least, social media ensures continuous learning.

Access to information, research work and revision notes

84.1 % of the participants are using social media to find information related to their studies. The study also showed that 85.2 % of the students are using SMS to do research work and 53% use the social media for their revision. Some interviewees also mentioned that Pinterest was very useful for creative learning in subjects like Art and Design to find secondary sources for their drawings or to have a range of interesting mind mapping that could be used for revision purposes. A participant pointed out the usefulness of professional social media in helping to get access to the profile of companies and their marketing principles: “Professional Social media sites like LinkedIn, where you can look for jobs and find any related articles related to industries you are interested in.” This possibility for learning allows them to widen their knowledge about concepts in Business Studies and Economics and it brings authentic learning to them, instead of teachers providing them with hypothetical examples of companies and their activities. Furthermore, learning through the social media gives students the opportunity to develop their critical thinking skills and application skills which are more relevant to students of higher classes of secondary schools and university studies. From this perspective, a participant highlighted the following pertinent statement: “Social media helps me to know the current development in the world and that knowledge provides me with an edge over other students who are not on LinkedIn, for example. Here, I can use the innovative ideas and concepts that are currently being applied in companies and supplement my learning and content in answering questions and in case studies.”

This shows that students of age 13 to 24 years old are conscious of the contributions of the social media to their development as an autonomous learner who may use social media to apply what they learn to the actual world. Indeed, Roopchund et al. (2019) assert that students use social media for sourcing of information to enhance their learning.

Social media for collaborative learning

93.2 % of respondents have a social media group with their classmates. This study revealed that WhatsApp is very useful for students to seek for help from classmates, share notes and ask for clarifications. During interviews it was noticed that WhatsApp was the social media platform that was the most appropriate for collaboration as it is a free application that allowed them create groups for interaction. This was an ideal platform for group discussion and exchange of notes and links etc. A participant contextualized this assertion by stating: “We have a WhatsApp group for each class, we use it if we did not understand something, if we missed something in class, did not copy something so we ask our friends to send us the notes.” Another participant added very succinctly: “Yesterday, we received our marks for an assignment and we ask the person with the best marks for if she was willing to send her assignment so that we may get an idea of how it should have been done etc. She did that and we all could discuss what were our strengths and weaknesses and how we could improve our knowledge and answers to possible examination questions”.

However, students should be careful about what they are sharing on these platforms because these platforms are sometimes misused for example; cyber bullying, propaganda, harassment, spreading of fake news, sharing of explicit content. Moreover, WhatsApp is a popular app with 97.6% of respondents using it. However, though the age limit is 16, yet many participants under the age of sixteen were using it. The thirst for collaboration among students is supported by McLeod (2019) who maintained that collaboration among peers can help to develop their zone of proximal development, as propounded by Vygotsky’s theory of learning and development (1978).

Self-efficacy through social media

The study also found that students develop self-efficacy when they use social media for learning purposes. Their level of motivation increases when they are able to get the learning resources from the social media and learn on their own, at their own pace and time at home. It has become obvious from this study that students are able to do research work, do collaborative learning, do revision for examinations, work group work and learn autonomously with social media like WhatsApp and Facebook. They may also learn on their own initiatives, from their intrinsic motivation. A participant unhesitatingly pointed out: “Yes, it allows me to learn by myself when I go on social media on my own initiatives, as I know that schools are closed and I need to use the resources available there (social media) to learn on my own and get prepared to instruct myself.” So, students are engaged in self-directed learning, which Abdullah (2001) describes as the ability of students to be responsible for their own learning. Rescorla (1988), indeed, defines learning as the ability to adapt. Students did their best to adapt to the new normal, whereby they had no choice than to make their best of what was available to keep on learning, without being extremely disturbed, as the exams were held during the pandemic in

Mauritius. Furthermore, they concur: “It is easier to learn on social media as it is more fun. Learning is fun on the social media.” Therefore, the learning process was made interesting and fun with the student engagement that was determined by the self-efficacy of the students, brought about by the social media as a learning tool. This is supported by the study of Roopchund et al. (2019) which asserted that social media can improve student engagement as it increases the student’s interest in learning.

However, the opinions are more divergent for the statement “I prefer collaborating with my classmates on social media than working alone”. Even if Pearson (2018) reported that Generation Z like to learn in collaboration with friends, when the question was asked to the interviewees everyone stated that they prefer working alone than with classmates, as working with other students could lead to divergent opinions, frictions and conflicts. Yet, they did acknowledge that social media facilitated interaction and collaborative learning. These elements could explain the divergent opinions for the statement.

The foregoing discussions of the findings have shown that students in Mauritius made an optimal use of social media for learning purposes that were really beneficial to them at a time when they are deprived of the traditional teaching and learning process and to adopt to remote learning, which was the only most appropriate means of instruction.

Conclusion

Based on the hypotheses, the study findings indicate that potential factors that impacted the use of social media as a learning tool were; the Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) and Perceived Usefulness (PU) of social media. The findings indicated that there is a positive relationship between both PEOU and PU of social media and social media usage as per study of Rauniar et al (2014). Participants from this study confirmed that they opted for the use of social media sites and platforms which were practical and untroublesome for them. Facebook was considered by some as “unsafe” and a “social media network for older people” with only 50.6% of respondents using the platform. At the same time, a positive relationship was established between the PEOU of social media for individual learning and collaborative learning as well as relationship of PU of social media for individual and collaborative learning, thus confirming results of research of Wiid et al (2013) that PEOU and PU have a positive effect on the use of social media as a learning tool.

The findings of the study also showed how the students were using social media for learning purposes especially with the impact of the COVID19 pandemic on face-to-face learning. Like stated in previous studies (Mpungose, 2020; Pearson, 2018; Youmei, 2010) YouTube and WhatsApp were particularly popular and used as learning tools. However, further studies could be conducted on other applications mentioned by participants such as Pinterest and TikTok which is gaining popularity amongst youngsters. The findings showed that social media was a learning tool for students be it by watching videos related to their studies, watching videos to learn new skills, to look for information, do research work and prepare revision notes as stated by other studies (Pearson 2018; Roopchund et al. 2019). Previous studies showed that social media was also used for collaborative learning (Faiza et al., 2013; Pearson, 2018; Bozanta & Mardikyan, 2017; Mudaly et al.,2015), and this was confirmed in this study as students were creating social media groups with classmates for collaboration, sharing of notes and information.

The study also provides a hint on why learners are using social media as a learning tool. Like stated by Wiid et al., (2013) findings showed that PEOU and PU impacted the use of social media as a learning tool, mainly since the beginning of the pandemic where social media was particularly useful for students. As reported by Roopchund et al., (2019) this study validated that social media motivated learners and improved students’ engagement. Vygotsky (1978) stated that social interaction is essential for the development of individuals and findings showed that students were using social media for interaction and collaboration amongst classmates. The study findings also reflected that other reasons were that social media; was helping students academically, was offering an alternative to traditional learning methods and helped them to expand the knowledge acquired in class; more studies on the subject are needed to support these findings.

Even if social media is often seen as a source of entertainment this study has explored and shown its potential as a learning tool. Mauritian learners are using it for self-learning; be it for individual or collaborative learning. However, proper awareness for effective and safe use of social media is crucial to extend that use of social media as a learning tool particularly now with all the changes associated to the COVID-19 pandemic and other pandemics that will shake the education of students. Nonetheless, it does not mean that the use of social media can replace the formal education system or face to face learning, but it can be an additional tool to enhance learning.

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