

Original Article

Privacy, Trust, and Social Media – A Student’s Perspective in the Era of COVID-19

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Abstract - This study has attempted to analyze the effects and implications that the use of social media has brought with it in a classroom and educational environment. The study has been based on various data collection methodologies such as direct questionnaires, survey data collection, and survey/questionnaire results analysis. The paper most importantly emphasizes the impacts of social media in the educational sector, whether it be advantageous to the user or disadvantageous to the user. Not only does the study discuss the effects of the use of social media but also how the invasion and breach of data gathered by social media can intern have effects on the person/people whose data and privacy have been breached. The study also takes into account the current global climate and how the COVID-19 pandemic has also had an impact on the global social network. This paper has also presented educators with various forms of methodologies that they can make use of in order to implement social media into their classroom environments if they so wish to do so. Hindrances of such use of social media in the education sector have also been noted and explained.

Keywords - Privacy, Trust, Social-Media, COVID-19, Education.

1. Introduction

Social media refers to websites and software applications that are made and designed to enable the people who use them to communicate and share content quickly and seamlessly through the use of the World Wide Web [1]. Social media does not refer to one single website but rather encompasses a wide range of websites and applications. Different social media can have different purposes. For example, Twitter is most commonly used for short-written messages and sharing links to articles, whereas Instagram and Facebook specialize in the sharing of photos and videos [2]. Due to the nature of these applications and websites being free to access and use, anyone with internet access can sign up for a social media account. They can then use that account to share and view any content they wish as long as it conforms to the guidelines of the respective social media company. This, therefore, creates a diverse community of people who can use their accounts from all across the world for other people from different countries also to view.

2. Types of Social Media Networks

There are many different types of social media that all serve different purposes. The main types are media networks, social networks, discussion networks, and review networks. Media networks specialize in the distribution of content, such as videos and photographs. Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube are prominent examples of media networks. Social

networks specialize in connecting with other people through exchanging messages and sharing thoughts, ideas, and content with other users. Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp are prominent examples of social network types. However, there are more less used social networks such as LinkedIn which is used for more professional reasons that may be considered a social network as well. Discussion networks are used as outlets for posts that can spark in-depth discussions and debates amongst their users. Users are able to leave lengthy written responses in the comments section, and other users can respond directly to those comments. This allows for discussion to grow and develop naturally. Discussion network Reddit is considered the most popular in its category. Review networks such as TripAdvisor and Yelp aid with the reviews of products and services. People are able to interact directly with the people leaving reviews in order to get a better understanding of the product or service.

3. The Importance of Privacy in Social Media

In recent years, social media has become the one and only central hub where we all share information amongst our friends and family, and they share information with us. Social media is able to create an experience where its users are able to share their experiences discussions, and communicate amongst their networks. This, however intern means that these networks are susceptible to hacking and data breaches [3]. Personal information of anyone with a network online can



come into the hands of anyone capable of retrieving that information [4], and that person is then able to do what they please with the information they have collected without the notice of the party that they have stolen the data from [5]. Privacy concern amongst social media users has become a great issue and is being demanded by users that it be taken seriously [6]. Since social media has become meta amongst our daily lives, there have been many big data mining companies have been traversing social media sites to collect information about individuals [7]. This has been evident to even social media users as they have seen various advertisements of topics relating to them on social media websites that they use regularly [8]. This can make users very uncomfortable [9], as privacy is important because it enables individuals to have the control which they deserve over their lives. Personal information is very important to individuals' day-to-day lives and to their making important decisions [10].

These decisions can vary from being employed, criminal background checks, and being able to take out loans and mortgages [11]. The importance of this is further enhanced when the information is retained around students in education as online tracking of individuals is becoming even more common [12]. If the privacy of a student is breached and misused, it can become very difficult for them to gain employment in the future and attend interviews as their true selves. It could also even end up going as far as their respective university excommunicating the student due to their social media presence and private information being leaked online for anyone to see. The universities and institutions do not want to correlate themselves with information that they believe would not be beneficial for their image, so the student/worker is instead relegated as it is very easy to link the perceptions of the person whose data was breached to their intentions [13].

4. The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Social Media

The COVID-19 pandemic has had significant effects on the usage of social media all around the globe. The increased use has contributed to not only the general public but also politicians, celebrities, world leaders, and other professionals. Social media has played a prominent role in the spreading of information about the pandemic and its evolution [14]. It has helped many people deviate from the socially distanced lifestyle they have been plunged into since the pandemic started and enabled them to connect with friends and family through the use of social media networks [15]. There has been a rise in the popularity of online counselling services that use social media in order to protect and preserve people's mental health [16]. This has allowed those who needed it most to safely connect and socialize with the mental health workers who were ever so crucial to those who needed them and were not able to visit them face to face [17]. COVID-19 is not only considered a pandemic at this stage but also info emic [18]. This is due to the fact that platforms such as Twitter and YouTube have played a major role in leaving their users

susceptible to fake news and rumours concerning the pandemic [19]. This spreading of false information has played a large part in how individuals view the threat of the pandemic [20] and has limited group cohesion intern, making it even more difficult for the government and health departments to handle [21]. Various politicians and health organizations have used social media platforms, whether that be national or international, to share information concerning the pandemic so that it would be able to reach a large audience of people quickly and effortlessly [22]. Other than how social networks have been used, the pandemic has also aided in the increased usage of various types of social media applications. Multiple social media websites reported a sharp increase in usage after lockdown restrictions were put in place. As a result of social distancing and lockdown restrictions, many were unable to socialize with their family and friends face to face. Therefore, social media has become the main form of communication among these separated acquaintances. Video call services such as Zoom and FaceTime had seen exponential growth at the height of the pandemic.

5. The Use of Social Media in Education

In this day and age, social media is taking every aspect of the world by storm. Its use can be seen everywhere from eating food to even seeing educational institutions adapting to the developments it has brought in order to improve their ecosystem. The use of social media in education is beneficial for all stakeholders, such as students, teachers, and even parents, as it helps them get useful and relevant information easily and efficiently. Using online platforms enables the interaction between student-teacher and student-classmates to become much more intimate [23]. By using social networking applications and sharing important news, dates, updates, assignments, and meetings, the understanding and coordination between educators and students become much more efficient and effective, keeping both parties on the same footing [24].

Statistics show that over 95% of students have daily access to at least one type of social media network on their personal devices for entertainment and networking purposes [25]. This internship means that it is theoretically possible for educators to have contact with all 95% of students through one single application, making for a more coordinated and easier-to-execute curriculum even outside of the classroom [26]. The general consensus is that social media is useful in education when it comes to sharing information or making an organized set of tasks [27]. Due to the rise in the niche popularity of social media use in educational institutions, there have been implementations and introductions of educational social media applications such as Blackboard, Moodle, and Microsoft Teams. The benefit of social media in the education sector does not have to stop at a basic teacher-student relationship level. It can also be beneficial in other aspects, such as principles and administrators using new ways to promote their university and higher levels of education.

6. The Disadvantages that Come with the Use of Social Media in the Classroom Environment

It is equally important to remain cautious and pessimistic when attempting to implement the use of social media in classroom environments. It is a coin-flip situation as to how the use of social media in a classroom will evolve over time. Whether it will end up being advantageous to the students and teachers or whether it will end up bringing more complications rather than solutions is not yet clearly visible. It is possible that the use of social media in a classroom environment can have a negative impact on the relationships between students and teachers and also students and peers. It is highly possible that students will also end up being caught in the chaos of social media issues rather than focusing on their schoolwork at hand. It is also largely possible that students may become over-dependent on the use of social media for their work and may face barriers and issues in workplaces where this system is not implemented in the day-to-day norm. Instead of relying on their own intelligence to attempt to complete work and tasks, students will become over-reliant on social media for answers and solutions to their problems. This overuse of social media will no doubt affect the critical thinking and problem-solving ability of future workers and students in the future when they begin their transition from the classroom environment to the working environment.

Putting young people on social media websites is also known to be very detrimental to the mental and sometimes even physical health of those young people. It is widely known that amongst teens and young adults, increasing the use of social media can lead to depression, anxiety, and a lowering in self-confidence. These are detrimental issues that affect not only the well-being of students but also affect their ability to perform and function to the best of their ability and can be disadvantageous to their education. Students who are affected by mental health issues find it hard to focus on school work and perform in the classroom to the best of their abilities.

7. The Use of Social Media in the Classroom Environment

Many different types of social media are used today in classrooms all over the world, as it has had a growing influence on all educational institutions across the decade [26]. The most commonly used are Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, and YouTube [28]. Whilst being the second most visited website in the world, YouTube has had a strong presence in classrooms throughout the world. Students are able to watch videos about their relevant and respective topics and discuss content amongst themselves or even in the comment sections. There is a multitude of educational channels on YouTube that can help students with various topics that they may be struggling with and give them further aid and assistance that they may not be able to get from their teacher or professor. Additionally, students themselves are able to create their own content videos and are able to share that content with others,

such as their teachers or classroom peers. Twitter can be used in order to improve communication amongst students and educational centres as tweets can be spread from person to person through the retweet function [29]. There are many universities and educational facilities with their own private Twitter accounts that are able to promote their universities and communicate with their students.

By creating various Twitter threads, discussions can be extended and added to the outside-of-classroom timings. It is also reported that using Twitter allows students to focus on the more important aspects of ideas and explanations due to the fact that Twitter tweets do not allow posts to exceed a 140-character limit. Therefore, expressing themselves purely and concisely has become a trait that students have found very beneficial when using Twitter.

8. Methodology of this Research

The primary data of the research is collected through an online questionnaire. The online questionnaire was built up with the help of 20 close-ended questions. In addition, 5 demographic questions were included about gender, age group, respondents' educational level, respondents' employment status, and their sole purpose of using social media platforms.

In total, 896 students participated in the survey of this research. Students' perceptions about the use of social media, privacy, and trust were measured through a liker scale of strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree. Overall, this chart, Figure 1, shows that the majority of respondents that participated in the questionnaire identify themselves as part of the male gender, 87.5% of total respondents, whereas there was a clearly fewer number of female participants that partook in the survey with only 10.7%. There are 1.8% of participants who preferred not to speak on the matter so, therefore, remain unidentifiable.

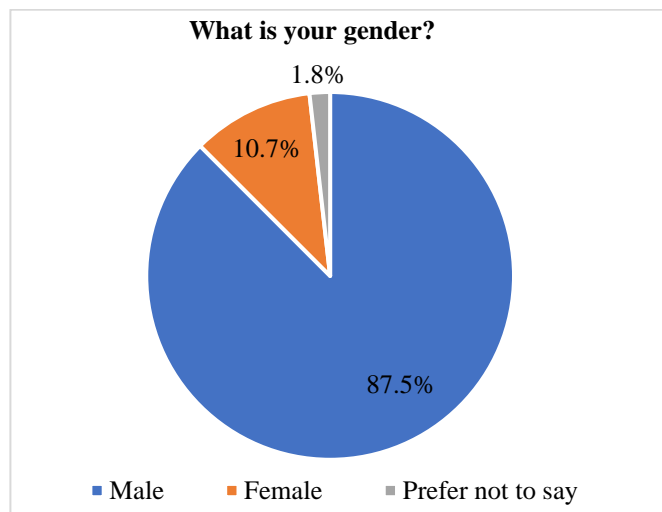


Fig. 1 Gender of survey respondents

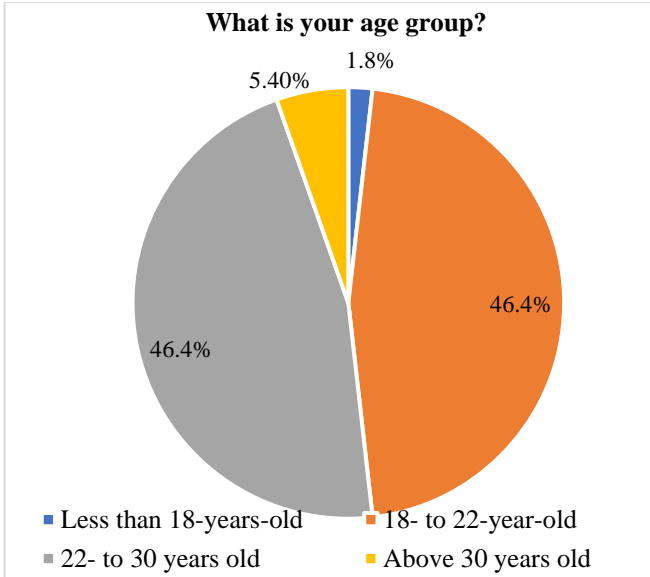


Fig. 2 Age group of survey respondents

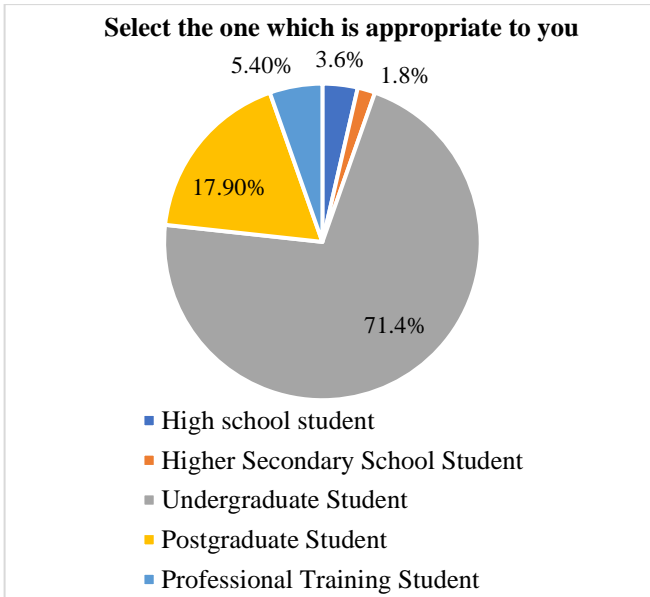


Fig. 3 Educational level of survey respondents

Figure 2 shows that there was a wide age range amongst the respondents of the survey. The majority of survey respondents were within the age range of 18 to 22 years old and 22 to 30 years old, as both these categories shared a percentage ratio of 46.4%. The second highest age group of respondents was those who were above the age of 30 years old, with a percentage of 5.40%. There was a very small percentage of respondents under the age of 18 at only 1.8%.

From the question given, as shown in Figure 3, the highest percentage of people who responded identified as undergraduate students, with a large 71.4% of all survey respondents. The second highest group of respondents were all postgraduate students coming in at 17.9% of all survey

respondents. Professional training students, high school students, and higher secondary school students accounted for the least amount of people that partook in the survey at 5.40%, 3.6%, and 1.8% respectively. The majority of answers for this part of the survey, as shown in Figure 4, were answered by full-time students with no other occupation, with 60.7% of the respondents identifying under this option. The second-highest ratio was amongst full-time students and part-time employers' accounting for 16.1% of all responses. The third-highest percentage came from people who did not want to mention what their occupational status currently was, accounting for 12.5% of all respondents. The lowest percentage ratio was amongst full-time employers and part-time The highest volume of responses for this question, as per Figure 5, was for communication with family and friends.

This purpose of using social media accounted for 85.7% of all respondents. The second-highest ratio of answers was for the use of browsing and entertainment which took a percentage of 69.6% of all respondents. The third-highest percentage of responses was shared by using social media for educational tasks and projects and for keeping up to date with what is happening in society, both of which had a percentage of 66.1% of survey respondents. The fourth highest use case was for shopping and keeping up with students, which accounted for only 10.7% of the total responses, with the latest trends occupying 57.1% of the responses. The lowest percentage ratio amongst all the options was for just killing time whilst using social media, which only had 50% of the responses.

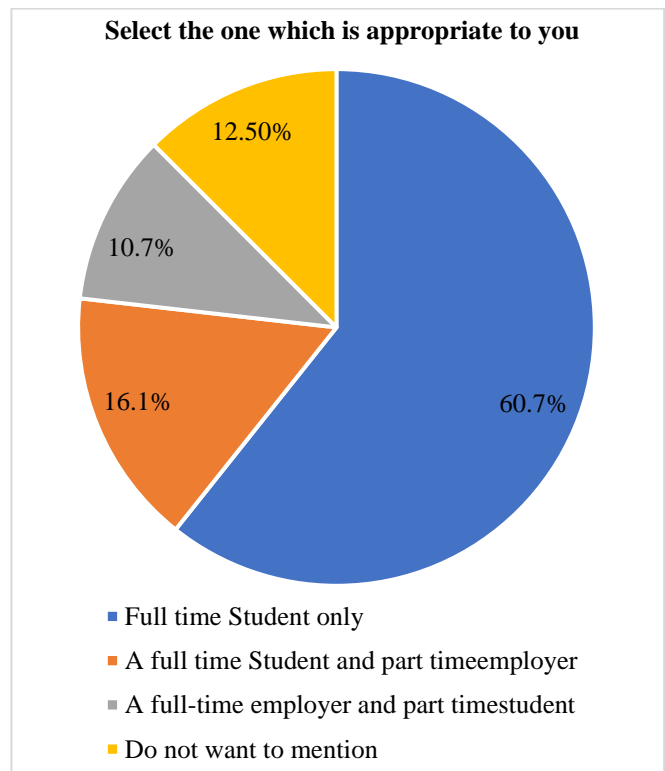


Fig. 4 Status of survey respondents

Table 1. Data collected from survey respondents

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Social networks and platforms are an important part of our lives due to the use of technology in our day-to-day tasks.	7.1%	5.4%	16.1%	35.7%	35.7%
2. The use of social media has a positive impact on our daily life.	0.0%	5.4%	35.7%	37.5%	21.4%
3. I always provide the right information when opening an account on any social media platform.	3.6%	10.7%	28.6%	32.1%	25%
4. I believe whatever information I have shared on social media is private and secure.	17.9%	35.7%	14.3%	21.4%	10.7%
5. I can trust social media platforms for the information I share about myself and my family members.	32.1%	37.5%	10.7%	14.3%	5.4%
6. I often share my pictures and videos on social media, and I have no fear of any data breach.	26.8%	30.4%	30.4%	10.7%	1.8%
7. I always share my location on social media and let my family and friends know where I am.	35.7%	33.9%	14.3%	16.1%	0.0%
8. I am fully comfortable while sharing my personal information on social media, and I have no fear of information misuse in the future.	53.6%	26.8%	7.1%	8.9%	3.6%
9. My social media account is often hacked by third parties, and I believe the data was stolen.	10.7%	28.6%	23.2%	30.4%	7.1%
10. I am a victim of identity theft because of social media platforms.	30.4%	28.6%	23.2%	17.9%	0.0%
11. I believe social media platforms do not seriously think about the privacy of individuals as they think about the business more.	8.9%	17.9%	21.4%	25%	26.8%
12. Social media platforms can never be trusted. They could be used only for activities such as entertainment and fun.	3.6%	19.6%	21.4%	41.1%	14.3%
13. I can trust people on social media and the information they share on these platforms.	17.9%	37.5%	33.9%	10.7%	0.0%
14. There is no appropriate legislation in place to tackle the issue of privacy and security.	8.9%	23.2%	32.1%	23.2%	12.5%
15. The news on social media spreads fast, but it cannot be trusted.	3.6%	5.4%	17.9%	32.1%	41.1%
16. Social media is a constant threat to an individual's privacy.	8.9%	3.6%	12.5%	55.4%	19.6%
17. I have the experience of receiving calls from unknown people who tried to steal my personal information, and I believe it was the result of sharing information on social media platforms.	17.9%	12.5%	5.4%	32.1%	32.1%
18. I am fully aware of the access of social media platforms to my personal information, such as images, videos, and text messages, when I download them on my mobile devices.	10.7%	1.8%	28.6%	39.3%	19.6%
19. I will suggest that all others take extreme care while sharing the information on any social media platform.	1.8%	3.6%	14.3%	44.6%	35.7%
20. Social media platforms are the main reason for increased electronic crimes.	12.5%	0.0%	8.9%	33.9%	44.6%

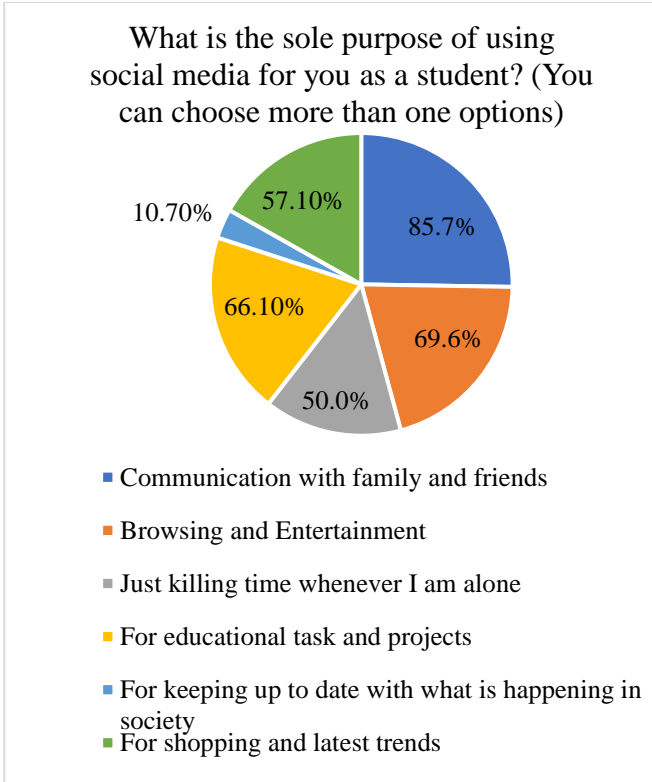


Fig. 5 Sole purpose of using social media

9. Data Findings and Analysis

Table 1 shows the data collected from survey respondents and its analysis.

10. Discussion on Data Findings

The discussion below in these sections refers to the statement/question numbers in Table 1.

- From the data collected from the survey, we are able to deduct that the majority of people either agree or strongly agree that social networks are an important part of day-to-day life as both had a percentage of 35.7% whilst 16.1% were neutral, 5.4% disagreed, and 7.1% strongly disagreed with the statement.
- For the second statement, the majority did not strongly agree that the use of social media has a positive impact on our lives, as only 21.4% of people believed this. However, the majority did agree to an extent, as 37.5% of people chose this option. The second-highest choice was neutral, with a 35.7% pick rate, and 5.4% of the people stood to disagree. However, 0% of people stood to disagree with the statement strongly.
- For this statement, 32.1% of people agreed that they provided the right information when opening a new account on social media. 28.6% were neutral with the statement. 25% strongly agreed with the statement. 10.7% of people and 3.6% of people disagreed and strongly disagreed, meaning that they did not provide the correct information when opening new accounts.

- For the fourth statement, the most occurring category selected disagreed, as 35.7% of people disagreed. However, the second-largest category chosen was agreed with 21.4%. 17.9% of people strongly disagreed with the statement. 14.3% were neutral about the statement, and 10.7% of people strongly agreed with the statement.
- In the fifth statement, only 5.4% of people strongly agreed with the statement, and 14.3% of people agreed with the statement. Only 10.7% of people were neutral with it, and a majority, 37.5% of people disagreed with the statement. The second highest percentage strongly disagreed, with 32.1%.
- For the sixth statement, the highest-picked option was split between two of the options. An equal number of people felt that they disagreed and did not share personal pictures without the fear of data breach, as the number of people who were neutral with the statement as both had 30.4% of picks. Further, 26.8% strongly disagreed with the statement, whilst 10.7% agreed and only 1.8% strongly agreed.
- In the seventh statement, most people tended to strongly disagree and disagree with the statement that they share their location and disagree with the statement that they share their location with friends and family, as both had 35.7% and 33.9% of respective votes. Only 14.3% of people preferred to remain neutral, 16.1% agreed with the statement and 0% of people said that they strongly agree with the statement.
- In the eighth statement, most people chose to strongly disagree or disagree with the statement, as the majority did not believe that they were fully comfortable while sharing their personal information on social media. In total, 53.6% strongly disagreed and 26.8% disagreed. 7.1% of people remained neutral, 8.9% agreed, and only 3.6% strongly agreed.
- For the ninth statement, there was a 30.4% rate of people who agreed that their social media account is often hacked and data is taken from it whilst 7.1% strongly agreed that this happens to them. Further, 23.2% of people were neutral towards the statement, whilst 28.6% disagreed and 10.7% strongly disagreed, saying that this has never been the case for them.
- For the tenth statement, most people tended to strongly disagree and disagree with the statement, as both had 30.4% and 28.6% of the answers. In total, 23.2% remained neutral, 17.9% agreed, however 0% strongly agreed. This means that most people felt that they were not a victim of identity theft due to social media platforms.
- In the eleventh statement, the most popular answers were strongly agreed, with 26.8%; agree, with 25%; and neutral, with 21.4%. Further, 17.9% disagreed with the statement, and only 8.9% strongly disagreed with the statement. This means that most people agree that social media platforms do not seriously think about the privacy of individuals and think about the business aspect more.

- For the twelfth statement, the highest-picked option was agreed, with 41.1% of answers. The second highest volume of answers came from the neutral option, with 21.4% of the answers. Also, 14.3% strongly agreed with the statement, 19.6% disagreed, and only 3.6% strongly disagreed. This overall means that most people agree with the statement that social media platforms can never be trusted.
- In the thirteenth statement, the highest picked options were disagreed and neutral, with 37.5% and 33.9% of picks. In total, 17.9% strongly disagreed, 10.7% agreed, and 0% strongly agreed with the statement. Overall, this shows that most people disagree that you can trust people on social media and the information that they share on the platform.
- In the fourteenth statement, the highest-picked option was neutral, with 32.1% of the votes. In total, 23.2% of people agreed, and 12.5% strongly agreed with the statement. Further, 23.2% disagreed, and 8.9% strongly disagreed. This shows that most people are unsure about whether or not there is appropriate legislation in place to tackle the issue of privacy and security.
- For the fifteenth statement, the most picked options were strongly agreed and agreed with 41.1% and 32.1% of all votes. Only 17.9% of people were neutral with the statement, 5.4% disagreed, and only 3.6% strongly disagreed. This implies that the majority of people cannot trust the news that is spread on social media.
- In the sixteenth statement, the highest picked option was agreed, with a majority of 55.4%, and strongly agreed, with 19.6% of all picks. Only 12.5% were neutral with the statement, 3.6% disagreed, and 8.9% strongly disagreed. This shows that most people agree that social media is a constant threat to an individual's privacy.
- For the seventeenth statement, the most picked options were agreed and strongly agreed, both with 32.1% of total responses. In total, 17.9% of people said that they strongly disagreed, and 12.5% of people disagreed, whilst only 5.4% were neutral with the statement. This implies that most people strongly agree that they have had an experience of receiving calls from unknown people who tried to steal personal information.
- For the eighteenth statement, the highest occurring answer was agreed, with 39.3% of total responses, whilst 19.6% strongly agreed. Further, 28.6% were neutral with the statement, 10.7% were strongly disagreeing with the statement, and only 1.8% disagreed with the statement. Overall, this shows that most people agree that they are aware of the access social media platforms have access to the personal information of the user.
- In the nineteenth statement, the highest-picked options were agreed and strongly agreed, both with 44.6% and 35.7% of votes, respectively. Only 14.3% of people chose to remain neutral, whilst 3.6% disagreed and 1.8% strongly disagreed. This suggests that the majority of

people agree that they will suggest others take extreme care while sharing their information on any social media platform.

- For the twentieth statement, the vast majority of people chose to strongly agree, with 44.6% of votes, and agree, with 33.9% of total votes. 8.9% of people voted to remain neutral, 12.5% strongly disagreed, whilst 0% disagreed with the statement. This means that the majority agree and strongly agree that social media platforms are the main reason for an increase in the electronic crime rate.

11. Conclusion

To conclude, social media has become a tool that has enabled anyone who uses it to create their personal network. This can come with its own multitude of benefits and disadvantages. Being able to access a near-infinite number of information and seamlessly connect with friends and family across the world will almost instantly sell people to the use of social media. However, the risks of privacy breaches and data mishandling by large companies can also deter many from the use of private social media accounts. The advantages social media provides us have allowed it to make use of itself even in classroom environments. Students and teachers alike almost all share social media networks amongst themselves and use them for both working purposes and personal purposes. It has been made evident that worldwide events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, have a huge amount of influence on how social media and online trust are perceived. The spreading of information about the pandemic has been made through the use of a global social network, and without this network in place, it is almost impossible for the news of the pandemic to reach every home and every person. Without social media, our lives would be very different as we would not be as aware and awake to the happenings of the world around us.

Recommendations

For educators who are already using social media in their classrooms or are researching the ideas of using social media networks for educational purposes they can implement different and various techniques into their methodologies of teaching. For example, they could:

- Create a social network consisting of only people who they teach and the classrooms that they supervise
- Promote their own social media accounts to students in order to stay more connected with them
- Promote their institution's account to students in order for the institution to have a better reach on all their students.
- Encourage students to build and share online communities amongst themselves regarding the work and curriculum they are part of
- Advertise the benefits of social media use in education fields to their students and peers.
- Request students to make their own content to post on social media that would benefit their peers and them as well.

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