

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN ACADEMIC TEACHING

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Purpose: The main aim of this article is to determine the usage of social media in university teachers' educational activities, along with identifying the primary obstacles.

Design/methodology/approach: The study was carried out using the CAWI (Computer Assisted Web Interview) method. The data was gathered in June 2023 by surveying a sample of academic instructors at the Faculty of Organisation and Management at Silesian University of Technology.

Findings: The findings indicate that social media is scarcely used by the academic staff for teaching purposes, but rather for communication with students. Remarkable differences were observed between generations. Younger academic educators appear to demonstrate a greater willingness to use social media tools in their work, both in communication with students and during lectures.

Research limitations/implications: A limitation of the study is the size of the research sample. This may indicate the direction of future research concentrating on using social media in different activity areas by academics.

Practical implications: Students, who are one of the main users of social media, use these online platforms to enhance their learning in a variety of subjects. Teachers should also use these tools to improve their teaching process by making it more attractive.

Originality/value: This paper addresses knowledge gaps regarding the use of social media in working with students. Its findings can aid academics in developing strategies for using social media in the classroom.

Keywords: social media, academic teachers, teaching.

Category of the paper: research paper.

1. Introduction

Social media (SM) is becoming more and more integrated into many different aspects of the academic world, including teaching, research and professional networking (Chawinga, 2017; Purwanto et al., 2023; Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2016).

Using social media by academic teachers can have a positive impact on the didactic process, in particular by providing a new platform to engage and motivate young students (Cooke, 2017). It is very important, especially for the growth of generations Y and Z, who have spent their entire lives in the digital environment (Briggs, 2020; Deloitte Insights, 2021; Karasek, Hysa, 2020; Moczydłowska, 2020; Wolfinger, McCrindle, 2014). The use of social media in the educational process is inevitable, although it requires the acquisition of new skills (Kumar, Nanda, 2019; Purwanto et al., 2023). Social media allows teachers to break the routine, makes teaching more attractive and also removes the feeling of burnout, which occurs especially after 20-30 years of work (Anderson, 2019; Keenan et al., 2018; Manca, Ranieri, 2016). Although increasingly adopted by Polish academics, social media remains less prevalent than in other countries (Mazurek, 2018; Sobaih et al., 2016). This is due to many barriers that appear during the use of social media in the wider academic sphere (Manca, Ranieri, 2016). The most common barriers are privacy concerns, plagiarism, and a negative impact on students' productivity (Wąsek, 2019). The development of technology makes it possible to precisely track internet user activity, leading to legitimate privacy concerns. Additionally, teachers may refrain from implementing social media as an educational tool to prevent students from gaining access to their personal lives. Another noteworthy issue is students' lack of independence in using social media, which leads to plagiarism. In particular, GPT artificial intelligence has been over-used by students recently (Steele, 2023; Yu, 2023). However, there is a lack of deep research on this subject in Poland.

Therefore, the primary aim of this article is to determine the level of utilisation of social media in university teachers' educational activities, along with identifying the primary obstacles. Following an introduction, the article is divided into three chapters. The first chapter presents the literature review on the use of social media in the didactic process at universities. The second chapter is a presentation of the research methodology. The third chapter contains an analysis of the results of a study and discussion. The material for the analysis was collected through an online survey of academic teachers. Finally, the article concludes.

2. Literature review

Today, information technology, the internet and social media are inescapable. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that they can impact all aspects of our lives, both in private and professional spheres. Social media's popularity has made it a widely studied subject in various disciplines (Anderson, 2019; Boahene et al., 2019), including its usage in higher education. With the emergence of internet technology, social media has become an essential component of every student's life. Social networking makes it easier and more convenient to share information, communicate and stay connected (Doğan et al., 2018). Teachers and students can use social platforms to stay connected and use them for educational purposes. As Romero

(2015, pp. 1-15) points out, the use of social media in education can translate into higher quality education; improving communication between lecturers and students and between students themselves, shaping and developing their 'digital competencies' (Romero, 2015). Mazurek (2018) points out that the use of social media in teaching encourages students to actively participate in class, and supports critical thinking and collaboration (Mazurek, 2018).

Au, Lam and Chan (2015) found that the inclusion of social media in the teaching process makes the role of lecturers change. They then become not 'teachers' but rather 'coordinators' or 'mentors' who set the tone and encourage students to discuss and work. Therefore, the big challenge of using social media as an educational tool is that it requires a new pedagogical approach. Age is important in terms of the decision to use social media for teaching. Several studies indicate that social media are increasingly utilised as educational resources by younger scholars (Anderson, 2019; Au et al., 2015; Horzum, 2016; Kumar, Nanda, 2019; Mazurek, 2018). Keenan et al. (2018) reveal three values for social media: engagement: reaching students inside and outside of the classroom, utility: familiarity and immediacy, sharing: collaboration and dissemination (Keenan et al., 2018).

However, some factors discourage academic teachers from using social media. One of the most commonly cited is privacy concerns (Au et al., 2015; Mazurek, 2018). Academics are afraid of using social media because of loss of privacy, cyberbullying, and stalking (Korzynski, Protsiuk, 2022; Tandon et al., 2021). Moreover, lecturers may not wish students to have insight into their personal lives (Sobaih et al., 2016). Another issue identified is the fear of losing influence over the teaching process (Au et al., 2015). Although universities aim to improve educational outcomes by promoting teamwork among students and members of the research and teaching staff, there is still concern about losing control over the quality of teaching and learning processes. Moreover, social media can also have a negative influence on students' productivity (Chawinga, 2017; Manca, Ranieri, 2016; Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2016; Wushe, Shenje, Jacob, 2019). It can be potentially time-wasting, distract and overwhelm other information that students receive (Boahene et al., 2019; Chakraborty et al., 2013). Plagiarism is also another concern including misuse of social media in a didactic process. In communication with students, teachers also complained about students' expectation of instant, quick answers (on e-mails, blogs, tweets, posts, etc) (Cooke, 2017; Manca, Ranieri, 2016).

Despite the vast number of studies published on social media adoption for didactic purposes in higher education, there is a lack of research regarding teachers' perspectives on how to implement social media and the impact it has on learning outcomes within this adoption. Hence, the following research questions have been developed:

1. How do academic teachers in Poland use social media in the didactic process?
2. What are the main concerns of teachers regarding the use of social media in working with students?
3. What are the main perspectives related to the use of social media by academic teachers?

3. Methods

Data were collected in June 2023 through a survey conducted on a sample of academic teachers of the Faculty of Organization and Management at Silesian University of Technology using the CAWI (Computer Assisted Web Interview) method. This was a preliminary study to verify the research assumptions and evaluation of the measurement tool. In this article, only research related to the didactic work of academic teachers is presented. The study used a purposive sample as it aimed to interview all teachers working at the Silesian University of Technology in the field of Management Science and Quality (n = 118).

The questionnaire consisted of three parts. The first part concerned the use of social media by teachers in didactic and research work, the second part contained questions about concerns and opportunities related to the use of social media. The last part included questions about teachers' work performance. The questionnaire included also questions about sociodemographic data.

The survey was dominated by closed questions with a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 represented *strongly disagree* and 5, *strongly agree*. However, there were several open questions where respondents could explain their previous choices or enter comments. After an initial selection of the collected questionnaires, sixty-nine were qualified for further analysis, which is 58% of all teachers working at the Faculty of Organization and Management at The Silesian University of Technology and in the field of Management Science and Quality.

The structure of the survey sample is shown in Table 1.

Table 1.

Structure of the survey sample

	Item	%
Sex	male	55.1
	female	44.9
Age	up to 28	16.2
	29-42	29.3
	43-59	49.2
	60-67	5.3
	above 67	0
Position	research and teaching	69.6
	only research	11.6
	only teaching	18.8

N = 69.

Source: own study.

Both women (44,9%) and men (55.1%) took part in the study. Almost half of the respondents (49.2%) were between 43 and 59 years old. They represent the X generation. One-third of respondents (29.3%) were between 29 and 42 years old. It is the Millennium generation. People from the Z generation, under 28 years of age, constituted 16% of the respondents. The rest of the respondents were more than 60 years old. They represent the oldest

generation, Baby Boomers. Most people participating in the study worked in research and teaching positions (69.6%). Respondents who held only research positions constituted only 11.6% and only teaching positions 18.8%.

4. Results and Discussion

The first question was about using social media (SM) for professional work (both didactic and research work¹) by academics. Every fifth respondent stated that they did not use social media at all (21.7%). 7.2% of academics have been using SM for less than one year, 18.8% from two to three years, 14.5% from four to five years, 20.3% from six to ten years and 17.4% over ten years (Figure 1). However, the answers were significantly dependent on age. Most of the academics who didn't use SM at all for professional work were over 43 years old. All younger respondents (from generations Y and Z) used SM for their work for more than six to ten years. These responses support other established research (Manca, Ranieri, 2016), but in opposite to the research (Keenan et al., 2018).



Figure 1. Academic teachers' use of social media in their professional work.

Source: Own work.

It is worth noting that almost one-fifth of teachers started using social media at work for 2-3 years, which was certainly contributed to by the Covid-19 pandemic, which began in the world 3 years ago (Charina et al., 2022; Podgórska, Zdonek, 2022; Zdonek, Król, 2021).

The results confirm many other studies that education systems and educators have been forced to adopt “emergency education,” shifting from traditional face-to-face learning pedagogies to remote virtual platforms. This forced distance teaching and learning contributed to the increase in teachers' digital competencies (Godber, Atkins, 2021; Selvaraj et al., 2021).

¹ For editorial reasons, not all aspects of the research are presented in this article.

Analysis of answers, regarding different SM platforms/portals in didactic work, showed that academic teachers use typical SM platforms. As shown in Figure 2 the most popular SM platforms/portals in a teaching process were video platforms e.g. Zoom, Teams, Skype (66.7%), data clouds e.g. OneDrive, Google Drive, Dropbox (51.9%), YouTube (38.9%). This is in line with other research (Boahene et al., 2019; Godber, Atkins, 2021; Romero, 2015). This is not surprising because video platforms were essential in teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Clouds improve the process of storing and transmitting information. Many YouTube videos are academic and professional, and if used properly, can enhance classroom discussions and engage students through images and sounds.

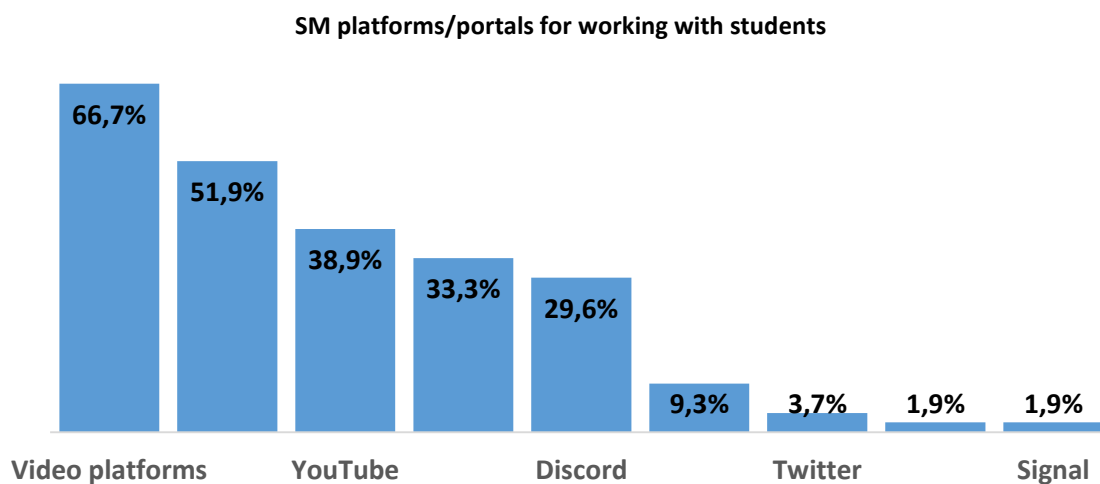


Figure 2. Used platforms/portals for working with students.

Source: Own work.

Academic teachers used Messenger or WhatsApp (33.3%) only in communication with students. However, significant differences were observed in the use of social media by the various generations. Younger academic teachers are more willing to use social media tools in their work both in communication with students and during lectures. Compared to other countries (Boahene et al., 2019; Chawinga, 2017) Polish academics rarely use Instagram (9.3%) Twitter² (3.7%) and Facebook (1.9%) in their teaching process.

The respondents who admitted they didn't use social media at all were also asked why. Preference for other forms of cooperation and communication (66.7%) was the main reason for not using social media by respondents. Interaction between a student and a teacher is still based on face-to-face contact during designated consultations at a specific time and place. Older generations of teachers in particular prefer this form of contact or via email.

At present, every academic teacher is obliged to have an email address. After the lockdown, because of the Covid pandemic they also much more often use remote education platforms to contact students, send the necessary materials for classes and solve problems that arise regularly.

² 23 July 2023 Twitter's name and logo were changed to X platform.

Privacy concerns were the second most common reason given by respondents for not using social media (46.7%). These results confirmed previous findings ((Mazurek, 2018) where 51% of respondents were concerned about privacy. Surprisingly, 40% of teachers stated that SM was not necessary for their work, which was contrary to Mazurek's (2018) study where 17% stated this. Other reasons given by respondents for not using social media for teaching purposes include: *I'm not interested in posting on SM* (33.3%), *I think the service takes too much time* 6.7%.

Respondents were also asked about their attitudes to using social media in a didactic process and how social media and new technologies (e.g. IA) have changed and will change their work with students. There were several statements to agree or disagree with (Figure 3).

According to the results, thirty percent of respondents (33.3%) (answers *I strongly agree / I rather agree* -57.4%) admitted that *SM has significantly changed the way they teach*. 37% percent of respondents answered that *SM has significantly changed the way they communicate with students*. It is worth paying attention to the neutral answers of the respondents because almost thirty percent of the academic teachers said so. This may mean they are not sure or don't want to admit it. Additionally, almost forty respondents (38.9%) claimed that *the use of SM for professional purposes would not have developed so much if there had been no COVID-19 pandemic*. This shows the positive side of the pandemic: teachers of all ages have had to make an effort to improve their digital skills.

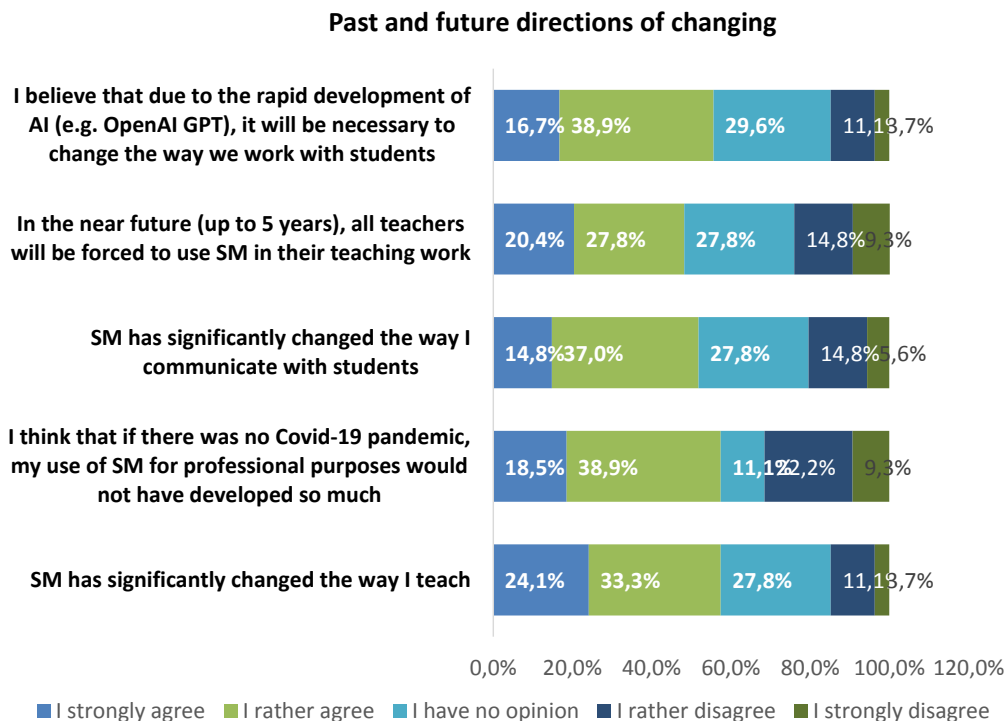


Figure 3. Past and future directions of changing in the didactic process.

Source: Own work.

Looking for the future directions of social media in the context of the teaching process, academics had diverse opinions. Almost forty percent of respondents (38.9%) (answers I strongly agree / I rather agree -55.6%) *believe that due to the rapid development of AI (e.g. Open AI), it will be necessary to change the way they work with students* but also 29.6% of respondents indicated neutral option and 19.8% disagree with this statement (they indicated options *I rather disagree/ I rather disagree*. Similarly, 27.8% of academic teachers admitted that *in the near future (up to 5 years), all teachers will be forced to use SM in their teaching work, and* the same percent of respondents indicated a neutral option (27.8%) This may indicate that those surveyed feel uncertain about the direction of social media in teaching.

5. Summary

Social media has dramatically changed the educational process in recent years. Especially since the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, the universities have transformed teaching and learning and the lecturers have been conducting online classes.

Academic teachers in Poland are increasingly integrating social media into their teaching and professional activities, recognizing its potential to engage and motivate students, particularly those from younger generations like Gen Y and Gen Z. However, there are several concerns related to the use of social media in academia. Privacy concerns, plagiarism, and negative impacts on student productivity are common barriers. Teachers are concerned that students' reliance on social media may result in immediate responses.

Research on this topic in Poland is limited, prompting a study to assess the utilization of social media among university teachers and identify primary obstacles. The survey revealed that while many teachers have adopted social media for professional use, there are age-related differences in their adoption. Younger teachers are more inclined to use social media tools in their teaching. Video platforms, data clouds, and YouTube are the most popular platforms used for teaching, likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Privacy concerns and a preference for other forms of communication were the main reasons cited for not using social media in teaching. A significant percentage of teachers also indicated that they didn't believe social media was necessary for their work. Nevertheless, a considerable portion of respondents acknowledged the positive impact of social media on their teaching methods and communication with students.

Teachers expressed varying opinions on the future of social media in education, with some believing that the rapid development of AI, such as OpenAI, will necessitate changes in their work with students, while others remained uncertain about the direction of social media in teaching.

In summary, while Polish academic teachers are increasingly using social media in their teaching and professional work, there are concerns and uncertainties regarding its long-term impact and the need for new pedagogical approaches to fully harness its potential.

As this study was not representative of the population as a whole, the results cannot be generalised to society as a whole. They can only be treated as tendencies, which require deeper research. Looking at the future directions of social media in the higher education process in Poland, the use of social media tools for academic teachers will be inevitable. As technology GPT and the world continue to develop, academic teachers must also develop to meet the new challenges that arise.

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