

THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR EDUCATION AND DIGITAL COMPETENCE ENHANCEMENT AMONG YOUTH IN SERBIA²⁷

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Abstract: Intensive development of information technologies has caused changes in all social segments, including education. The need to revise educational practices arose as a consequence of the fact that there is a growing need for individuals who possess advanced ICT skills in the global labour market. Given that most educational practices in Serbia are still based on traditional learning methods, the need to bridge the gap between practical skills and theoretical knowledge is a constant challenge. Greater success in the implementation of e-education in traditional educational practices in Serbia could be achieved by using social media as software that most young people perceive as a natural environment. Through a review of the existing body of knowledge, this paper considers the benefits of using social media in educational practices. In order to gain insight into the attitudes of students in Serbia regarding the application of social media in education, an empirical research was conducted. Based on the obtained results, conclusions and recommendations for future research were presented.

Key words: Social media, education, digital competence, youth, Serbia.

Discussion

Due to the omnipresence of digital technology, the shift from traditional to digitally supported educational practices is present worldwide. It can be claimed that this shift is significantly provoked by the changes in the global labour market. According to the World Economic Forum, the need for reskilling revolution on a global level is critical. It is predicted that by 2022, 42% of core skills needed to perform existing jobs will change. Undoubtedly, high-tech skills will be in great demand which calls for extensive introduction of ICT-supported pedagogical practices (Domazet, Lazić, 2017).

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The question that arises is how can students efficiently adopt complex digital skills needed for the 21st century world and its labour market. The solution that is often imposed in literature and in practice is the application of social media in classrooms. This practice includes the use of software and gadgets to support ICT skills development among students and enhance the overall learning outcomes (Vukmirović et al., 2020; Stojanović, Domazet, 2020). As a result of their popularity and widespread usage among students, the employment of social media for educational purposes and development of ICT skills is gaining significant attention in scholarly circles (Domazet, Simović, 2020). Existing body of research on the use of social media for education includes their application for teaching specific courses, such as management (Rueda et al., 2017) or statistics (Everson et al., 2013), with particular attention being paid to student perspective on learning with social media (Gikas, Grant, 2013). Large part of the existing researches indicate that social media have favourable impact on students' academic performance (Chugh, Ruhi, 2018). Development of skills such as problem solving and creative thinking are among perceived benefits of social media use in education (Fowler, Thomas, 2015). Moreover, it is thought that social media have the capacity to encourage meaningful conversations and collaboration among students (Garcia-Lopez & Garcia-Cabot, 2016). This presents an important information since as Alkan and Meinck (2016) proved strong relationship between the frequency of social media use for communication and students' computer and information literacy scores.

Another beneficial aspect of social media is emphasized in the paper of Sobaih et al. (2020). The authors argue that in most developing countries, the access to formal online learning management systems (LMS) is not provided. In those circumstances, social media can be used as a substitute to foster online learning, communication and collaboration among students and enable effective interaction with lecturers who can provide feedback in real time (Simović, Domazet, 2021). On the other hand, Manca (2019) states that the affordances of social media can exceed the benefits of LMS regarding online collaborative activities, as notable majority of students already use social media to achieve interaction with peers and are therefore skilled to use them for the purpose of studying as well. This argument is supported in the UNESCO policy brief *Social Media for Learning by Means of ICT* (unesdoc.unesco.org). The study points out that social media have been thoroughly explored by students, which simplifies the process of social media adoption for educative purposes as there is no need for additional training (Vukmirović, Domazet, Kostić-Stanković, 2020).

In order to provide the answer to the requirements of the 21st century world and its labour market, which are considered by numerous world organizations, Martin

et al. (2011) have developed a mentorship model based on social media use. Motivated by studies at the EU level which elaborate on the need for new competencies for the emerging sectors, authors proposed a training system which should result with ICT and entrepreneurship skills development among young graduates. Students, tutors and mentors were connected via Facebook and eTutor platform in order to ensure the transfer of knowledge. The authors took advantage of the fact that students were familiar with the use of Web platforms to provide the environment in which they could master selected ICT skills. In another study, social networking service Instagram was used to enhance students' knowledge in economics (Stojanović et al., 2019). As in the previously elaborated study, the authors have based the assumption of the concept success on the ubiquity of student app use.

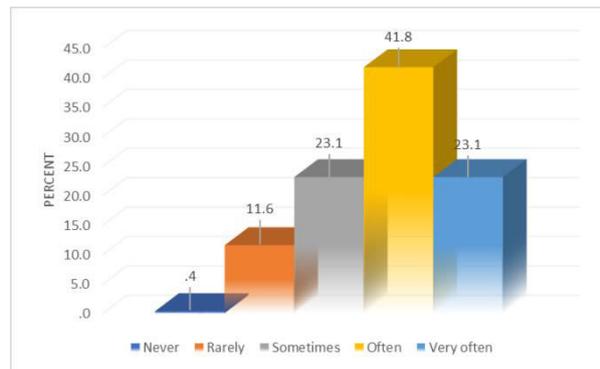
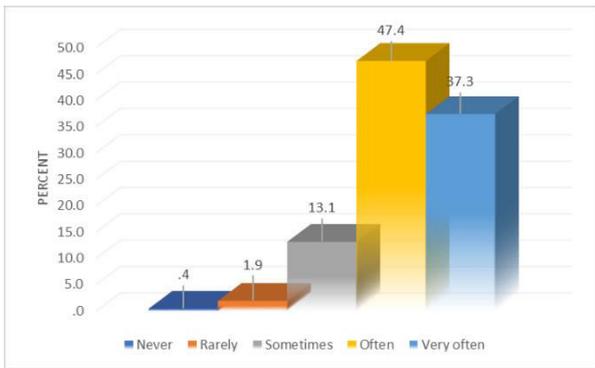
Results

In order to gain the insight into the possibilities of social media use for educational purposes among youth in Serbia, it is important to examine their attitudes regarding this topic. For the purpose of this study, an empirical research was conducted among students at the University of Belgrade. The aim of the research was to collect information on the structure and frequency of social media used for information purposes and education. The answers to an online questionnaire distributed via social media were collected during January and February 2020. A total of 283 questionnaires were collected and 268 were processed. The remainder was excluded from the analysis due to missing answers. In the structure of processed sample, 67.9% were female respondents and 32.1% male respondents. All respondents were undergraduate students, aged 21 to 28 years, of which 68.7% were students of social science and humanities while 31.3% were students of technical and natural sciences.

The distribution of answers regarding social media use for educational purposes among university students was favourable. Below presented chart (Figure 1) shows that 47.4% of surveyed students stated using social media for education often, while 37.3% of students claimed using social media for educational purposes very often. Free online courses were also considered as a valuable educational tool. Among surveyed students, 41.8% stated using free educative content in form of online courses often, while 23.1% of surveyed students used free online courses as a source of knowledge very often (Figure 2).

Figure 1. Frequency of social media use for education

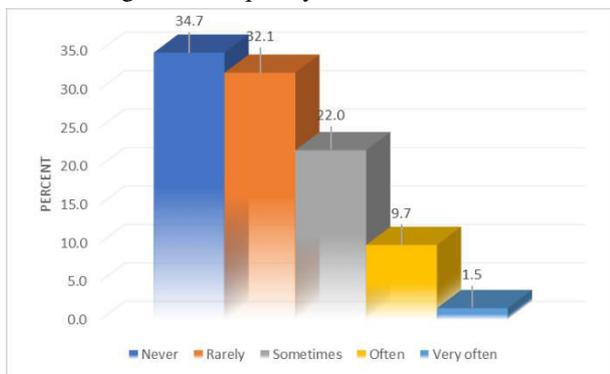
Figure 2. Frequency of free online courses use for education



Source: Authors' research

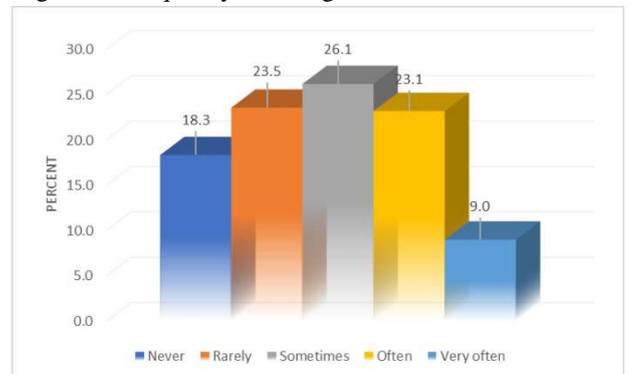
In order to explore students' perception on the suitability of specific social media platforms for education purposes, research participants were asked to state which social media they commonly use for education (Figure 3). Facebook was not frequently used for education among the observed group of students. Only 11.2% of surveyed students stated using Facebook for the purpose of education, while 34.7% of students stated that they never use Facebook for education. Another question was asked regarding the use of Instagram for education. Relative uniformity of responses obtained indicates that students still do not have a clear picture of how Instagram could be used for education.

Figure 3. Frequency of Facebook use for education



Source: Authors' research

Figure 4. Frequency of Instagram use for education



As it can be seen in Figure 4, the largest percentage of surveyed students (26.1%) stated using Instagram for education sometimes, while 23.1% of students claimed to use Instagram for educational purposes often. On the other hand, 23.5% of surveyed students stated that they rarely use Instagram for stated purpose, while significant percentage (18.3%) never use Instagram for education. Based on the obtained results, it can be assumed that Facebook and Instagram are perceived as suitable for casual collection of information rather than for acquiring knowledge.

Unlike Facebook and Instagram, YouTube was considered as a relevant online tool for education. The majority of surveyed students (42.5%) claimed using YouTube for education often, while 23.5% stated using this platform for educational purposes very often (Figure 5). The explanation for such perception of YouTube among surveyed students can be found in the distribution of answers to the question regarding the use of tutorials for education. Tutorials were found to be the most popular tool for education among surveyed students, as 44.4% stated using tutorials often, while 37.7% stated using tutorials for educational purposes very often (Figure 6). Tutorials are generally popular among students as they teach by example and provide necessary information in order to solve an issue or complete a task. As video tutorials are distinctive content most commonly associated with YouTube, it is understandable why this social network is perceived as more suitable for educational purposes.

Figure 5. Frequency of YouTube use for education

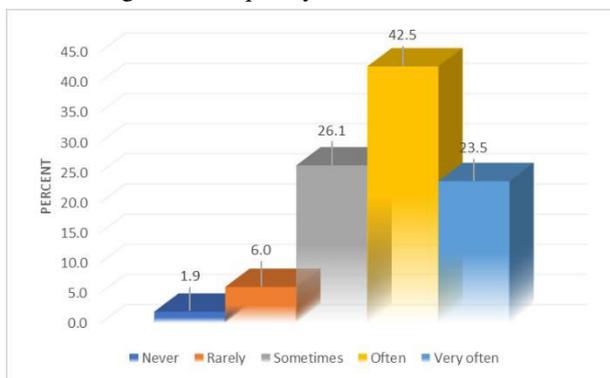
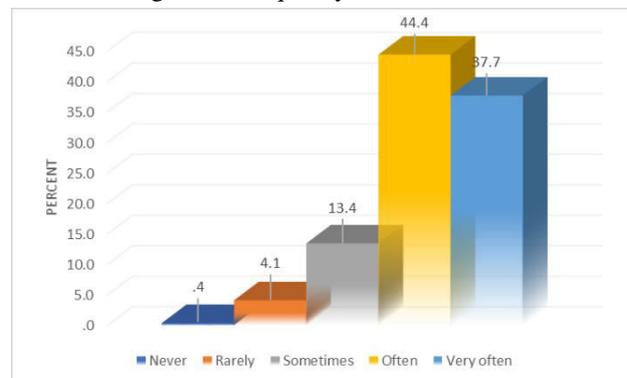


Figure 6. Frequency of tutorial use for education



Source: Authors' research

Conclusions

The results obtained from the research presented in this paper indicate that among the observed group of university students, social media are perceived as a suitable tool for collecting information and acquiring knowledge. Even though social media are not significantly employed within formal education practices in Serbia, it can be assumed that students use social media to create personal learning environments. Research results suggest that in self-regulated learning processes, students employ social media to gain knowledge or inform themselves on different topics. These results can be used as a starting point for further investigation of digitally supported learning and teaching. As this research has limitations in context of survey sample, it would be interesting to conduct a research which would include larger number of respondents. Future researches should consider including questions which could provide additional information on students' perception of social media use in formal education practices. Their insights regarding the benefits of social

media in achieving better educational outcomes could be of importance for education policy makers as well.

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