

From Likes to Learning: A Scoping Review of Student Difficulties in Utilizing Social Media for Education

Ilman Zulhakim Zulkifli¹, Nahdatul Akma Ahmad^{1*}, Norziana Yahya²

¹Center of Computing Sciences, Faculty of Computer and Mathematical Sciences, Universiti Teknologi MARA Perak Branch, Tapah Campus, 35400 Tapah Road, Perak, Malaysia

²Center of Computing Sciences, Faculty of Computer and Mathematical Sciences, Universiti Teknologi MARA Perlis Branch, Arau Campus, 02600 Arau, Perlis, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Social media is used as an education tool that provides easy access to information. This scoping review investigates the difficulties faced by students when utilizing social media for education. The review is based on 23 selected articles obtained from ScienceDirect, Web of Science, and Scopus, categorizes the challenges and findings into five themes: i) information challenges, ii) student learning difficulties, iii) ethical and security concerns, iv) pedagogical and communication barriers, and v) accessibility and social limitations. Moreover, the study reveals that students struggle to utilize social media for educational purposes because of these challenges. In addition to the challenges students face, educators may have difficulty understanding the challenges of modern education. By exploring the challenges, this paper provides valuable insights for researchers to understand the difficulties students encounter when utilizing social media for education, and helps address challenges in improving the quality of education for students and educators.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is indisputable that social media plays a crucial role in today's education, especially for students who frequently use social media for learning. Social media generally creates opportunities for students to exchange information, connect with other people, and seek advice and knowledge from people with diverse backgrounds. Social media has become a collection of internet-based platforms and applications based on Web 2.0 technology that provides users with the capability to create, share, and exchange several forms of user-generated content, such as images, videos, texts, and other multimedia (Dhingra et al., 2019). Educators utilize social media for meaningful discussion and engage with their students on academic matters, enhancing learning benefits through communication for both inside and outside the classroom. Integrating social media into education can help students become more engaged and interact with others to

^{1*} Corresponding author. *E-mail address:* nahdatul@uitm.edu.my
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enhance their knowledge. By using social media as a tool for learning, students can participate in learning through formal, informal, and non-formal modes across diverse contexts, while maintaining control over how, when, and with whom learning occurs (Anderson, 2019). This advancement has enabled interactive learning experiences and expanded opportunities for collaboration. However, despite the increasing use of social media and the new opportunities it provides for education, students often face difficulties in fully utilizing its learning potential (Rahmatullah et al., 2022).

Students spend much of their time on social media for entertainment. Consequently, social media can have more adverse effects by distracting them from using it for educational purposes (Kolhar et al., 2021). There are also concerns regarding the potential misuse of technology, as it may interfere with students' concentration, reduce their commitment to learning, and hinder the completion of tasks assigned by educators (Rohmiati et al., 2025). Social media can greatly waste students' study time and negatively affect their academic performance, distancing them from their academic responsibilities (Shanaa et al., 2023). According to a previous study by Talaue (2018), students choose to spend a lot of time on social media rather than complete their assignments and studies because they cannot pay attention in class when they are away from social media. These issues can prevent students from utilizing social media appropriately and can reduce their interest in learning, which negatively effects on academic achievement (Kolhar et al., 2021; Talaue et al., 2018; Shanaa et al., 2023).

Ironically, the use of social media for education has become more challenging in educational context. Unreliable information may affect student learning and lead to information overload, as students struggle to filter excessive data and ensure that the resources are relevant and accurate. This becomes more challenging when the information lacks the quality students need to evaluate content that aligns with their educational purposes (Al-Hail et al., 2024; Ali Al-Busaidi et al., 2017). The challenges students face when using social media in education have been addressed in previous studies (Al Mulhim et al., 2024; Alenezi et al., 2023; Al-Hail et al., 2024; Fuchs et al., 2023; Ha et al., 2018; Han, 2022; Kolhar et al., 2021; Talaue et al., 2018; Serrano et al., 2023; Shanaa et al., 2023; Sharma et al., 2024). This scoping review will explore students' difficulties in utilizing social media for education. In addition, this study contributes by enabling educators to better identify the difficulties students encounter when using social media for educational purposes and provides insights into possible ways to address these challenges.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To identify students' difficulties utilizing social media for education, this study has selected a scoping review to acknowledge the challenges of students using social media in learning. Based on the framework by Arksey and O'Malley (2005), there are five stages to conducting the scoping study, which are: i) identifying the research question, ii) identifying the relevant studies, iii) study selection, iv) charting the data, and v) summarizing the collection of data. Hence, the study can identify the challenges highlighted in previous studies regarding the students' difficulties utilizing social media for education. Fig. 1 illustrates the flow of the scoping review framework with a clearer visualization of the study process.

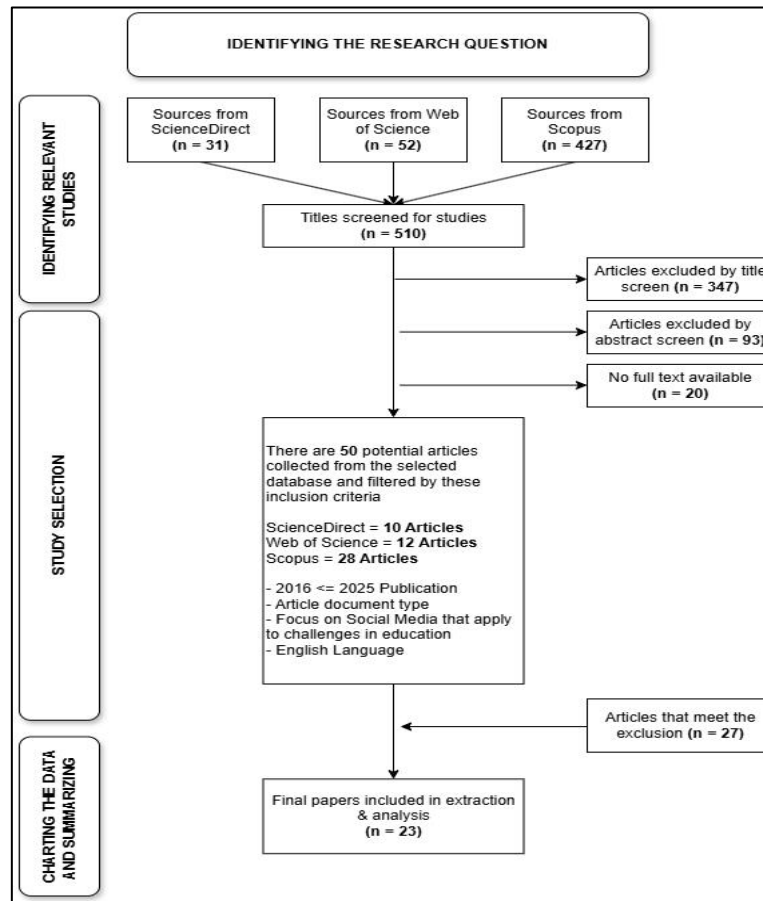


Fig. 1. Flow of the Scoping Review Framework

The benchmark for the scoping review must be able to create a meaningful objective after the data has been collected (Peters et al., 2020). The “PCC” mnemonic, which stands for Population, Concept, and Context, where the PCC framework can assist in developing research questions and establishing a clear structure of the scoping review (Hadie, 2024). It is important to use the PCC framework to develop a research question to ensure that the answer to the question can meet their objectives (Munn et al., 2018; Peters, 2016). The research questions play a crucial role in shaping the overall structure and direction of the study and are distributed as the fundamental framework of the entire study.

The goal of this study is to identify the difficulties of students utilizing social media for education to acknowledge their challenges in learning with social media. By using the PCC framework, the research question has been developed to explore key questions to collect relevant and valuable content that contributes to a deeper understanding of this topic. The following question is: i) What are the primary challenges and obstacles that students face when they learn through social media content?

After generating the research question, the next step is to identify the relevant studies. This step will help the scoping review become of higher quality by gaining valuable content from previous research, which can be a foundation for further studies on this topic. The research questions that have been created can lead to finding the keywords that are retrieved from the article based on the topic and need to be carried out systematically to ensure that the results obtained are genuine and relevant to the study (Okoli, 2015).

The keywords were entered into online databases, which includes ScienceDirect, Web of Science, and Scopus databases. Using the synonyms, Boolean operators OR/AND wildcards, and truncation in the databases can bring out the best results (Ramada et al., 2020). Each database has its advantages, including advanced search functionalities that enable filtering of information as well as access to a vast collection of extensive and comprehensive research findings (Gies, 2018; Gusenbauer et al., 2020; Martin et al., 2018). The search strings of each database from ScienceDirect, Web of Science, and Scopus have been filtered using keywords are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Search Strings

Database	Strings
ScienceDirect	(Challenge OR problem) AND (utilize OR using) AND (social media) AND (education OR learn)
Web of Science	TI=((Challenge OR problem OR limitation OR issue OR obstacle OR barrier) AND (utilize OR use OR employ) AND (social media OR social network) AND (education OR learning OR study OR teach OR instruct))
Scopus	TI - TITLE TITLE-ABS-KEY (Challenge OR problem OR limitation OR issue OR obstacle OR barrier) AND (utilize OR use OR employ) AND (social media OR social network OR social networking platform OR online communities) AND (education OR learning OR study OR teach OR instruct) AND (university OR higher education OR higher learning OR tertiary) AND PUBYEAR > 2014 AND PUBYEAR < 2026 AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE,"ar")) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE,"English")) AND (LIMIT-TO (SRCTYPE,"j")) AND (LIMIT-TO (PUBSTAGE,"final"))

In the study selection, Fellow (2008) has mentioned minimizing bias in the review process related to the topic to ensure the findings are credible, reliable, and valid. According to Fellow (2008), the understanding of inclusion and exclusion criteria when selecting process can help to refine and clarify the eligibility criteria of the article. Based on Table 2, this study establishes specific inclusion and exclusion criteria for selecting articles to enhance the accuracy and significance of the findings. In this study, there are no duplicate articles in the three databases after screening the articles.

Table 2. Inclusion and Exclusion of Selected Articles

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Publish Years	2016 until 2025	Less than 2016
Language	English	Non-English
Document Type	Article	Book, Book series, Conference Proceeding, book chapter, Review Article.
Focusing Type	Students' difficulties using social media in education	Other approach

The articles have been selected for this study starting from 2016 to 2025. The main reason this timeframe was selected is that the search began in January 2025, making it more valid to include recent data from previous studies to ensure the relevance and timeliness of the study. This method has been suggested by Fellow (2008) to minimize biases and human error in selecting a duplicate publication to avoid representing redundant data. The articles that have been selected are strictly filtered to the "article" document type, and the language of the article must be in English. During the screening phase, articles related to the student's difficulties utilizing social media for education will be evaluated based on the titles and abstracts to determine their relevance to the study. Articles that do not meet the requirements of study and are not reliable will be excluded because the articles meet the exclusion criteria.

Qualitative analysis techniques have been used in this study, developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) to identify, analyze, and report sub-themes. The first step is familiarizing the data, which involves repeated reading to find the meaning, patterns, and others of the data before beginning the coding. The next step is to generate initial codes after being familiar with the data. These initial codes highlight key features of the data, which are from related data, whether it is semantic content or underlying meaning. These steps represent the fundamental elements of raw data that can be meaningfully analyzed based on the phenomenon. After defining the initial codes, all codes will be sent to the co-author to verify the codes and correct the codes to avoid biased codes. From the initial codes, the sub-themes can be identified after the initial codes have been corrected. By defining the sub-themes, the themes can be created after sorting the sub-themes. It is important to define sub-themes and themes to ensure there is no overlap in data between themes. Once the themes and sub-themes are completely identified, all data needs to be verified by an expert panel. The expert panel consists of a qualitative expert who has 5 years of experience in conducting qualitative research. There are 5 themes and 10 sub-themes that are needed to evaluate. The expert panel has approved the results for the themes and sub-themes. Table 3 shows the themes and sub-themes after making a thematic analysis that includes authors, year, country, themes, and sub-themes.

Table 3. The Themes and Sub-themes after the thematic analysis process

No	Author	Year	Country	Information Challenges		Student Learning Difficulties		Ethical and Security Concerns		Pedagogical and Communication		Accessibility and Social	
				IQI	IO	AFP	TCB	ACII	DPS	TIC	LOC	UAR	SCB
1	Breunig, K. J.	2016	Norway	/									
2	Freedman, R. A., <i>et al</i>	2016	United States		/						/		
3	West, S	2017	United States	/		/			/				
4	Al-Hunaiyyan, A., Alhajri., <i>et al</i>	2018	Kuwait			/							/
5	Ha, L., Joa., <i>et al</i>	2018	United States		/	/							
6	Park, C. S.	2019	United States	/	/								
7	Liu, L., Chen, L. T., Li, W.	2019	United States		/					/			
8	Benson, V., Hand., <i>et al</i>	2019	United Kingdom			/							
9	Raza, S. A., Qazi, W. <i>et al</i>	2020	Pakistan		/	/							/
10	Hassell, L. A., Peterson., <i>et al</i>	2021	United States	/			/						
11	Prabhath, S., Dsouza., <i>et al</i>	2021	Saudi Arabia	/		/	/						
12	Ilan, S.	2022	China	/			/						
13	Zhou, W., Nakatsubo	2022	China		/								
14	Alderaibi, G. M., & Bugis, B. A.	2023	Saudi Arabia	/	/								
15	Awoke, Y. A., & Zikargae, M. H.	2023	Ethiopia	/	/	/		/					
16	Fuchs, K., & Aguilos, V	2023	Thailand						/	/			
17	Tandrayen-Ragoobur, V., <i>et al</i>	2023	Africa	/		/							/
18	Tennakoon, H., Hansen., <i>et al</i>	2023	United Kingdom	/				/	/		/		
19	Al-Hail, M., Zguir, M. F., <i>et al</i>	2024	Qatar		/	/		/	/	/	/		
20	Al Mulhim, E. N., <i>et al</i>	2024	Saudi Arabia	/	/	/	/				/		
21	Badah, A. M., Mafarja, <i>et al</i>	2024	Palestine			/							
22	Sharma, V. K., & Begum, S.	2024	India			/	/				/		
23	Na, M., Jill, L. S. S., <i>et al</i>	2024	China			/				/			
IQI – Information Quality Issues				TCB – Technical and Cognitive Barriers				TIC – Teaching and Instructional Challenges				UAR – Unequal Access to Resources	
IO – Information Overload				ACII – Academic Honesty				LOC – Lack of Communication				SCB – Social and Cultural Barriers	
AFP – Attention and Focus Problem				DPS – Data Protection and Online Safety									

All articles and data have been organized based on the research question to identify the students' difficulties utilizing social media for education. All information that has been gathered from the article addressing the research question has been organized into a table. The tables help in visualizing the data to make it clearer and easier to understand the information. The other explanation will be discussed in the results and discussion

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 The Selection of Articles

In this study, the total of eligible articles is 23 articles from three prominent databases, which are ScienceDirect, Web of Science, and Scopus. 5 themes have been developed after conducting the thematic analysis. The themes consist of the following: information challenges, student learning difficulties, ethical and security concerns, pedagogical and communication barriers, and accessibility and social barriers. As a result of further analysis, the data were categorized into 10 sub-themes. Based on the 23 articles, 13 countries have conducted the studies: the United States, the United Kingdom, Saudi Arabia, Norway, Kuwait, China, India, Pakistan, Thailand, Ethiopia, Africa, Qatar, and Palestine. Of all of the 23 articles, two papers have been published in 2016, one was published in 2017, two were published in 2018, three were published in 2019, one was published in 2020, two articles were published each in 2021 and 2022, and five were published each in 2023 and 2024.

3.2 The Themes and Sub-Themes

3.2.1 *Information Challenges*

Information challenges can be more crucial when students learn on social media and must filter relevant academic content from various pools of online information. In this theme, the study obtained two sub-themes. One of the sub-themes was information quality issues. In a study by researchers Breunig (2016); Park (2019); West (2017), information without quality can lead to a lack of confidence to share with others and make the information more difficult to extract when presenting to others. Distribution of low-quality content (Alderaibi et al., 2023) can create a limitation in understanding the information for their learning and not attract the students to the educational materials (Han, 2022; Prabhath et al., 2022). Another study by Tandrayen (2023) highlighted those students who found it more difficult to absorb the information and knowledge in their learning matters in the subjects Mathematics and Soft Science, in which students prefer face-to-face sessions to learn the subject in class. Students can become more confused with the relevance and quality of the educational content when the instructor keeps re-uploading the same content on the hosting websites, such as YouTube, and uses the material in the class sessions (Tennakoon et al., 2023).

Next, the second sub-theme was information overload. Most students are active on social media to find the material for their learning matter and encounter multiple different discussions on one topic (Freedman et al., 2016) and over-proliferation of information during a hot discussion (Raza et al., 2020), making it difficult for students to understand the important information that has been discussed (Awoke et al., 2023). The effects of inaccurate or misleading content from various information sources can make the information irrelevant and not grab the reader's attention, because the information processed with social media can be very diverse and unaware of facts and knowledge (Alderaibi et al., 2023; Awoke et al., 2023; Park, 2019). Utilizing social media in educational settings, the students choose to avoid notifications such as emails from the school or university, which can lead to perceived information overload or email overload, causing work disengagement and unmotivated students' productivity (Ha et al., 2018). Students who are actively on social media platforms such as Instagram or TikTok usually get more notifications and requests

from other followers, which can cause social overload, making them face a high volume of messages and communications from others, which can waste their time responding to others on social media (Al Mulhim et al., 2024; Raza et al., 2020).

3.2.2 Student Learning Difficulties

In this theme, students face numerous difficulties when utilizing social media for educational purposes. These difficulties in the first sub-theme are attention and focus problems. Under this sub-theme, distraction among students using social media can separate them from education because they are more obsessed with their online connections rather than exploring the advantages of social media for their learning matters and also grabs their attention when they use social media for personal use (West, 2017). In another study by Awoke (2023); Benson (2019); Ha (2018) highlighted that the distraction of social media can encourage students not to participate in activities related to academics, which can cause lower student knowledge, physical, and social performance, leading to a lack of concentration and productivity in academics when students spend all their time on social media. Most of the students use social media for entertainment purposes (Raza et al., 2020) by participating in fun activities such as gaming or chatting with other friends to satisfy their entertainment needs. These causes can increase students' time spent on social media and make students more dependent on social media (Han, 2022). Waste of time and resources can happen when students freely rely too much on social media to watch any videos that are not related to educational purposes, without any control from the educator (Al Mulhim et al., 2024; Sharma et al., 2024).

The second sub-themes are technical and cognitive barriers. Students have difficulties adapting to the changes in the learning curve and need to use new methods or tools, making them prefer to learn in traditional ways, which is face-to-face sessions, when they face a technical problem during learning (Hassell et al., 2021; Prabhath et al., 2022). Most students have problems when utilizing social media for educational purposes when they are faced with poor connectivity to the internet and device failure (Al Mulhim et al., 2024). On the other hand, educators face the same problems, such as the failure of power supply and technical glitches, making the teaching and learning process more difficult for students to understand the knowledge and material educational content (Badah et al., 2024). Without knowledge of digital skills, the use of technology in teaching and learning sessions becomes inefficient because educators and students do not have any idea how to use technology in the classroom (Badah et al., 2024; Sharma et al., 2024).

3.2.3 Ethical and Security Concern

The integration of social media into education can present challenges for students, particularly in terms of ethical and security concerns. Academic honesty becomes one of the sub-themes in this theme. A study by Awoke (2023) highlighted that academic fraud can happen when students use social media to cheat in examinations or tests, which can harm the quality of education and can cause the student's academic performance to become lower and decrease their confidence in learning, while teachers provide confidential information to their students through social media by giving hints for the upcoming exam. The other drawbacks of using social media can violate academic integrity by sharing unauthorized resources for academic fraud and plagiarism (Al-Hail et al., 2024; Tennakoon et al., 2023).

Furthermore, data protection and online safety have become more concerns for the students. Social media can damage a student's reputation, which can affect their image or personal life (West, 2017). The personal space of students has been compromised when they use personal social media for educational needs, while the students are concerned about their data privacy to avoid being exposed when using personal social media for their work (Fuchs et al., 2023). Another cause of using social media for education can raise more concerns over personal data and privacy, and the potential for cyberbullying for students (Al-Hail et al., 2024).

3.2.4 Pedagogical and Communication Barriers

Teaching and instructional challenges are one of the sub-themes for educators. Educators need to decide on how to create teaching and learning for their students, especially in a dynamic learning environment (Benson et al., 2019). Educators need to train and gain knowledge about the use of social media to avoid creating dissatisfaction and ineffectiveness of social media among educators (Al-Hail et al., 2024; Hassell et al., 2021). Educators also need to teach the impact of social media on students so that students know how to utilize social media properly (Fuchs et al., 2023).

The next sub-theme is the lack of effective communication. It is difficult for students to interact with educators using social media rather interacting on campus face-to-face can decrease student learning experience and the quality of learning material (Freedman et al., 2016; Tennakoon et al., 2023). Lack of human interaction can impact students' ability to understand the content of the messages, which leads to ambiguity for students and also creates a gap in communication between students and educators due to the lack of physical presence (Al Mulhim et al., 2024; Al-Hail et al., 2024). At the same time, the use of social media for educational purposes can potentially lead to misunderstanding or misconceptions when students and educators are unaware of nonverbal cues in communication (Sharma et al., 2024).

3.2.5 Accessibility and Social Limitations

In this theme, two sub-themes make it difficult for students to use social media in education. One of the sub-themes was unequal access to resources. It is more challenging for students to adapt to an online learning environment when they are from low-income groups (Tandrayen et al., 2023). Students cannot have access to the technology to access social media for their learning matters. Next, another sub-theme was social and cultural barriers. Using social media in the education system can significantly impact students' attitudes, which can change their behaviour towards the use of social media (Al-Hunaiyyan et al., 2018). Additionally, students utilize social media for entertainment and other activities. Most students intend to use social media as role models to others and represent themselves to their followers rather than discover the potential of using social media for their academic (Raza et al., 2020). All the themes and sub-themes have been explained for students' difficulties utilizing social media for education. Fig. 2 shows the themes and sub-themes for this study.

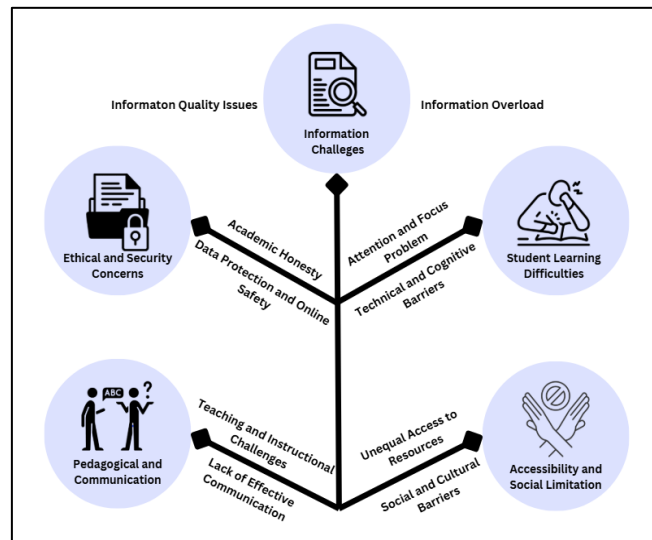


Fig. 2. The Themes and Sub-Themes

4. CONCLUSION

This scoping review explored the challenges of students in utilizing social media for education. All difficulties have been categorized, which are: information challenges, student learning difficulties, ethical and security concerns, pedagogical and communication barriers, and accessibility and social limitations. The 23 eligible articles were collected from three databases, which are ScienceDirect, Web of Science, and Scopus. All articles that have been selected aim to address the research questions. The study reveals that while social media can create new learning opportunities, most students encounter low-quality information and information overload, making it difficult for students to filter accurate educational material. The distraction and learning curve difficulty make the learning experience more complicated. Beyond the academic concerns, ethical and security concerns, such as academic honesty, data privacy, and cyberbullying, create barriers for students to feel safe and engage with learning materials. Next, pedagogical and communication barriers highlighted the challenges for educators and students utilizing social media in a learning environment, which can create limitations in communication and skill issues in using social media. Accessibility and social limitations, including their low economic and digital literacy gaps, restrict students' abilities to explore the benefits of social media as a tool for educational purposes. This study is suitable for educators, academic researchers, and future researchers interested in understanding the issues of students' challenges in utilizing social media for education.

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6. CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors agree that this research was conducted in the absence of any self-benefits, commercial or financial conflicts and declare the absence of conflicting interests with the funders.

7. AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Ilman Zulkhakim Zulkifli contributed to the conceptualization of the study, literature search, data extraction, thematic analysis, and preparation of the original manuscript draft. Nahdatul Akma Ahmad supervised the study, contributed to the research design, validated the thematic analysis, reviewed the manuscript, and provided critical revisions. Norziana Yahya contributed to the review of the methodology, validation of findings, manuscript revision, and final approval of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

8. DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI IN THE WRITING PROCESS

The authors declare that generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools may have been used solely to support language refinement during the preparation of this manuscript. Such tools were used only to improve grammar, sentence structure, clarity, and overall readability. All aspects of the research, including the study design, data collection, data extraction, analysis, interpretation of findings, and final academic decisions, were conducted, reviewed, and approved by the authors. The authors take full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, originality, and scholarly content of this manuscript.

9. DATA AVAILABILITY/SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

The data and/or supplementary materials supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request, where applicable.

10. ETHICS STATEMENT

The authors declare that this study did not involve human participants or animal subjects. Where applicable, all procedures were conducted in accordance with relevant institutional guidelines, safety requirements, and ethical standards.

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