

Exploring the Negative Implications of Over-Reliance on Social Media Content Among Foreign Language Undergraduates

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Abstract—Social media has become an essential tool in foreign language (FL) learning, offering interactive, flexible, and engaging features that support grammar and vocabulary acquisition. However, while prior studies have explored its advantages and disadvantages, limited research has examined its specific negative implications, particularly on academic performance and cognitive processing. This study investigates why FL undergraduates excessively rely on social media for language learning and explores the negative effects of overuse through the lens of Cognitive Load Theory (CLT). A quantitative approach was adopted, using a 10-item Likert-scale questionnaire distributed via Google Forms to 70 purposively sampled undergraduate students to assess their perceptions. Findings indicate a divided perspective on its role. While students appreciate its benefits in enhancing engagement and accessibility, 70% expressed concerns about unverified information, and 41% reported frequent distractions. Additionally, 56% agreed that social media could hinder learning effectiveness, while 59% highlighted the lack of structured assessment as a challenge. Extraneous cognitive load results from distractions, unverified content, and multitasking, hindering language processing and deep learning. This study underscores the need for moderation and structured evaluation in integrating social media into FL education. Future research should explore how structured learning resources and strategies can enhance and regulate FL undergraduates' social media use, reinforcing pedagogically sound content to support language acquisition effectively.

Index Terms—technology, social media contents, foreign language education, grammar and vocabulary skills

I. INTRODUCTION

Oral communication, in particular, serves as the primary channel for connecting and interacting with society. Despite its importance, language teaching has always experienced challenges over the years with learning foreign languages for effective communication. While most teaching methods involve more writing and fewer speaking drills, foreign language students perform better when in writing exercises than in spoken interactions (Namaziandost et al., 2019). Namaziandost et al. (2019) note that the motivation to use social media among foreign language students is due to its interactive features, such as video and audio options, which makes language learning more engaging and enjoyable. Research suggests that students who primarily use social media for language learning may be outperformed by those who engage with more traditional methods. This was attributed to reasons which include but are not limited to distractions such as chatting with friends, playing irrelevant games, listening to music, or dealing with short ad pop-ups (Daggol et al., 2018). While social media has the potential to enhance learning, excessive reliance on its content raises concerns (Daggol et al., 2018; Siddiqui et al., 2016). Siddiqui et al. (2016) highlight that excessive use of social media and digital tools in language education can hinder students' engagement in proper face-to-face communication. Further studies (e.g., Mingle et al., 2015) report other concerns, including negative academic behaviors such as late assignment submissions, reduced study time due to distractions, and poor spelling habits influenced by social media trends. Similarly, Odabaş et al. (2018) report that prolonged use of electronic devices not only leads to physical strain but also contributes to inefficient time management.

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As social media has become increasingly integrated into various aspects of life, it serves as a hassle-free facilitator for language education. However, understanding its peculiarity and its people-oriented features is necessary to fully grasp its role in language learning and the negative implications of excessive use. While acknowledging the facilitative role of social media in language education, this study focuses on identifying the negative implications that arise when students become excessively dependent on social media content. By surveying foreign language (FL) undergraduates, it seeks to understand how excessive use of social media impacts their academic performance, particularly in grammar and vocabulary acquisition. The study also explores the underlying reasons for this reliance and examines the broader disadvantages that FL undergraduates may face due to excessive engagement with social media while learning a foreign language.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of literature provided below presents the role of social media in language learning and the potential drawbacks of excessive use.

A. *Social Media in Language Education*

The adoption of social media into language education denotes the level of development of language acquisition over the years. Its use in language learning has gained ground over the years, as both instructors and students recognize its effectiveness in facilitating language acquisition and addressing educational needs (Alfaki, 2018). According to Perez (2023), this development can be traced back to the early of the 21st century when the internet played a crucial role in introducing digital platforms such as online forums and discussion boards particularly structured to aid language learning. These platforms provided foreign language learners with opportunities to engage with fellow learners, receive proper guidance, and foster their proficiency in the target language.

Hu and Du (2022) explore the role of social media in language education and underscores the impact of the Web 2.0 era, which brought a transition into multimedia platforms in the late 2000s. These multimedia platforms facilitate communication, allowing users to express their ideas more effectively. Zhang et al. (2022) note the emergence of interactive language-learning applications such as Memrise and Duolingo in the 2010s. These applications gained popularity due to their gamified learning approaches to language acquisition, which increased accessibility and engagement by making language learning an enjoyable experience. Wong et al. (2017) emphasize that these applications promote the concept of 'mobile learning,' enabling students to practice language skills anytime and anywhere. Similarly, Alnujaidi (2017) highlights the importance of flexible and convenient access to language-learning resources, free from time and location constraints, underscoring the role of social media in advancing foreign language learning. Additionally, the combination of audio-visual elements and interactive exercises enhances conventional educational methods, making language acquisition more effective and engaging for FL learners.

Taskiran et al. (2018) highlight that social media fosters student's active participation in lessons and practice drills, while Achraf (2017) reports significant improvements in speaking skills among students who incorporate social media into their learning, compared to students who relied solely on traditional methods. Yunus et al. (2012) report other benefits including increased knowledge, willingness to study, and greater confidence in writing.

B. *Gap in Literature*

Considering these studies, FL undergraduates increasingly rely on social media for grammar and vocabulary development due to its interactive, flexible, and engaging features, which have been shown to enhance various aspects of language learning (Taskiran et al., 2018; Achraf, 2017; Yunus et al., 2012). While previous studies explored both the advantages and disadvantages of social media in language education (Alnujaidi, 2017; Alfaki, 2018), limited research has examined the specific negative implications of excessive reliance on social media content for language learning. Little attention has been given to how FL undergraduates' excessive use of social media impacts their academic performance, particularly in grammar and vocabulary acquisition. By addressing this gap, this study also investigates the underlying reasons for this reliance and examines the broader disadvantages that FL undergraduates may face due to excessive engagement with social media while learning a foreign language. Through the lens of cognitive load theory (CLT), this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the balance between the benefits and drawbacks of social media in FL language learning.

C. *Theoretical Framework*

In the process of determining the effects of social networking sites on the academic level of foreign language students, there are a few very useful theories. The cognitive load theory (CLT) is one of the most crucial theories. CLT is based on the fact that people are limited in the cognitive resources they need for assimilating information. This use of social media can overwhelm the resources, which causes a decrease in academic performance.

On the one hand, social media platforms very often function as a non-stop flow of information and entertainment, making a student forget about his or her language lessons. This is part of the multitasking that can increase cognitive load and therefore slow down the students' focus on language learning tasks. Additionally, cognitive overload due to information overload is one more way social media can contribute to this. Students tend to spend more time with their

social media feeds than usual instead of consuming information in larger amounts in a short period. This results in a decrease in their cognitive ability and they become exhausted mentally and are unable to concentrate on the language learning and class tasks.

Cognitive load theory (CLT) was developed as the result of research by educational psychologist John Sweller in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Sweller brought the CLT, which is a model to understand how the human mind processes information and how cognitive resources can be limited in learning environments, to the forefront. The theory posits that people have a limited “attention span” and that once this is reached, learning becomes less effective. The early research of Sweller was centred on the design of instructional materials and ways of minimising cognitive load to achieve maximum learning outcomes.

The tenets of Cognitive Load Theory revolve around the concept of three types of cognitive load: essential, superfluous, and relevant. Extrinsic cognitive load refers to the difficulties associated with the learning material or tasks themselves. For second language learners, memorising vocabulary, memorising grammar rules, and mastering pronunciation can cause a high intrinsic cognitive load. Extraneous cognitive load includes any additional cognitive overload induced by the educational environment that is not directly related to learning. When it comes to social media and its influence on academic performance, extraneous cognitive load can be a result of distractions, for instance, notifications, ads, and unnecessary content that can vie for students' attention and cognitive resources. Finally, content-related cognitive load describes the cognitive work involved with schema formulation and meaningful learning. When cognitive resources are used to manage the extraneous cognitive load, there are fewer capacities left for deeper processing and encoding materials for language learning.

Through the lens of cognitive load theory, the impact of social media on the academic achievement of FL learners is explained as high social media usage can lead to an increase in extraneous cognitive load and, eventually, poor learning. Keeping up with news feeds, notifications, and messages on social media can change students' attention and even make it harder for them to think deeply about language learning materials.

III. RESEARCH PROCEDURE AND METHODOLOGY

A. *Research Questions*

The following research questions, which were developed from the study objectives and the review of previous studies, are put forward to guide this paper:

- (A) Why do Foreign Language (FL) undergraduates excessively rely on social media contents to improve their grammar and vocabulary skills?
- (B) What are the demerits faced by FL undergraduates as a result of excessive reliance on social media contents to improve their grammar and vocabulary skills?

B. *Research Design*

The quantitative survey methodology was implemented during the process of this study. In order to achieve this effectively, an online survey was adopted as the primary instrument for data collection. The aim of the surveys was to gather information about students' perspectives on the reasons for excessive reliance on social media contents by foreign language undergraduates with reference to the negative implications faced by these FL undergraduates. The findings from this study will provide educational suggestions for FL instructors.

C. *Instruments*

The online survey was sent as a closed-end questionnaire to the 70 (Seventy) research participants. This online form was sent through emails as Google forms consisting of 10 (Ten) questions which aimed at assessing the perspectives of students about the negative implications of excessive reliance on social media contents to improve their grammar and vocabulary skills. The questionnaire was further subdivided into two sections; one was about the demographic data of the research participants, the second contained a Likert-type (summative scale) with 10 questions.

D. *Participants*

The study's participants were selected using a purposive sampling approach. Certain criteria were used to recruit the participants, including being within the age range of 16 to 35, being active users of social media, and providing their informed consent by completing a consent form. After selection, a total of 70 (seventy) undergraduate students participated in this study. As shown in Figure 1, the participants specialized in various fields, including Computer Science (60%), Information Technology (20%), Environmental Technology (16%), and Industrial Chemistry (4%).

Among the participants, 30 were males (42.85% of the sample), while 40 were females (57.15% of the sample).

The Demographic data of the participants is presented in Table 1.

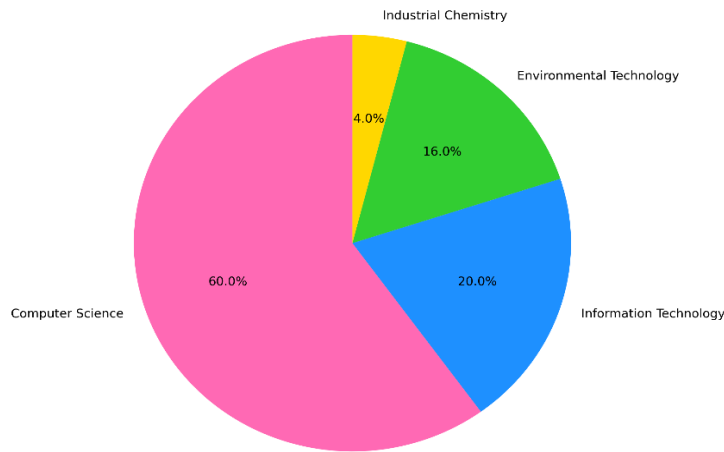


Figure 1. Distribution of Respondents by Specialization

TABLE 1
PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Category	Number of Participants	Percentage
Gender		
- Male Students	30	43%
- Female Students	40	57%
Total Participants	70	100%
Average Age Range	18 – 35 Years	-

E. Data Collection

Having been sent out through Google forms, a 100% response rate was recorded as the participants showed a good level of engagement and willingness to participate due to the anonymity of online surveys. In line with that, personalized emails were sent out to the participants to encourage their participation and submission through the right media provided.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This section contains the presentation of the data provided by the participants which will be presented based on the two developed research questions.

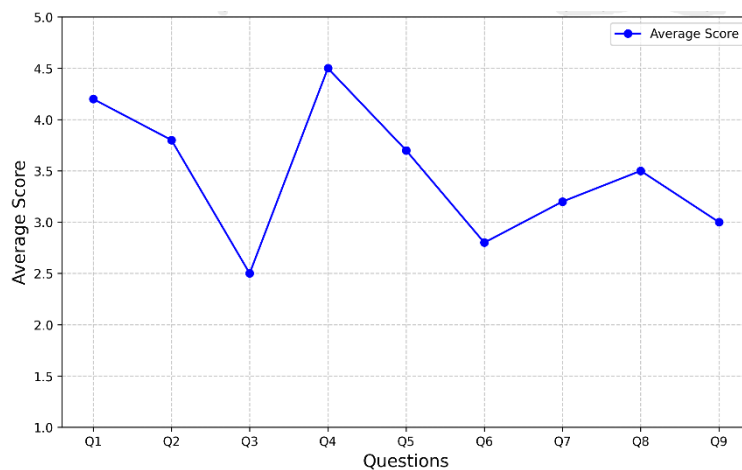


Figure 2. Trend of Responses to Social Media Use in Language Learning

(A) Why do Foreign Language Undergraduates excessively rely on social media contents to improve their grammar and vocabulary skills?

Five questions are contained under this research question; a pie chart is used to discuss the first part while the rest are presented in a table.

1. How frequently do you use social media content to improve your grammar and vocabulary skills?

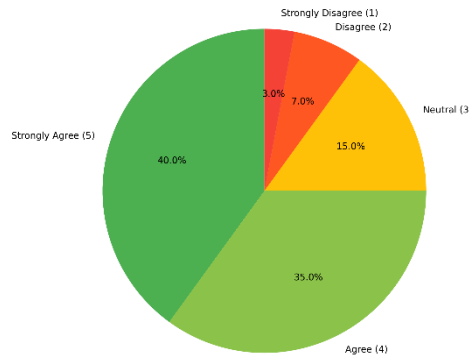


Figure 3. Agreement on Social Media Helping Assimilation (Q1)

The data from the survey item above is presented below:

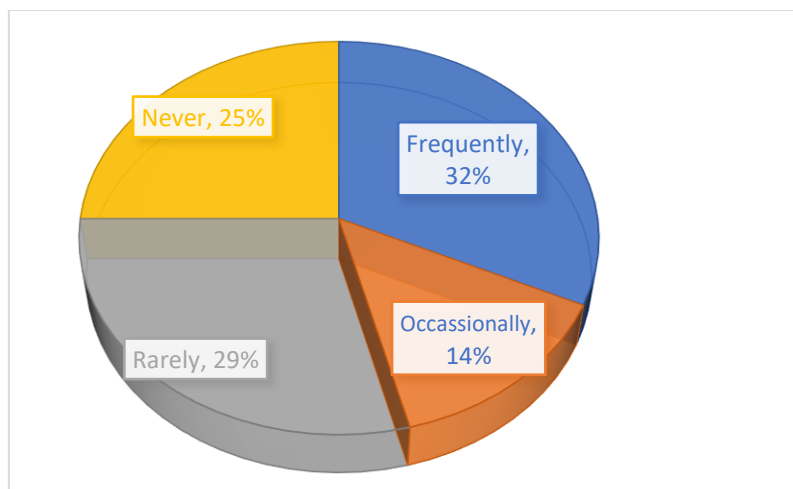


Figure 4. Usage of Social Media Contents in Language Learning

The pie chart above represents the responses of the participants on the frequency of their usage of social media content in the improvement of their grammar and vocabulary skills. From the information gathered after the survey, 32.86% of the participants admitted that they frequently utilize social media content for the improvement of their grammar and vocabulary skills. This indicates that a significant proportion of the participants actively make use of social media content to improve their grammar and vocabulary skills. Furthermore, 14.27% responded that they occasionally use these contents. This indicates that the ‘frequent’ group utilizes these materials more than the least engaged participants. Meanwhile, 29.65% of participants frankly stated that they had never used the contents of social media for language acquisition. This shows that in effect, a large pool of users does not commonly make use of social media content to advance their grammar and vocabulary skills. Eventually, 25.75% of the participants mentioned that they have never exploited social media content for the development of grammar and vocabulary skills. Participants with the largest group of 32.64% reported frequent use which indicates that they are actively and often make use of social media content to improve their grammar and vocabulary skills. The implication of these findings suggested that the utilization of social media content to improve their grammar and vocabulary skills may be influenced by different factors such as ease of use, goals, language proficiency level, individual preferences, perceptions and access to technology.

TABLE 2
USAGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENTS FOR LANGUAGE AND VOCABULARY SKILLS IMPROVEMENT

Item	5	4	3	2	1	Mean	Std. Dev
Do you agree that social media contents help FL Undergraduates to assimilate better?	29.35	21.08	20.86	21.03	7.68	3.18	1.86
Do you think that social media content is more easily accessible than the traditional sources?	41.64	39.72	13.07	5.57	-	4.96	0.73
Based on experience, do social media contents stand as your primary source for improvement of your language skills?	41.53	14.25	21.85	12.06	10.31	3.64	1.36
Do you struggle to concentrate while using social media content during your language education?	43.22	27.19	9.08	7.32	13.19	4.37	1.25

Strongly agree=5, Agree=4, Neutral=3, Disagree=2, strongly disagree=1

The above table shows the responses from the participants through the online survey concerning the reasons Foreign Language Undergraduates excessively use social media content to improve their language skills. As shown in the data presented above, the research participants in ways more than one acknowledged the impacts of social media content in foreign language education with regards to assimilation of knowledge. The majority of the participants constituted over 29% (strongly agree), while over 21% (agree) affirmed this. On the other hand, a total of 30% of the participants disagreed while over 20% were neutral. In line with the participants' perspectives on the comparison between social media content and traditional sources in terms of availability, a total of over 80% (both strongly agree and agree) of the responses attested that social media content is more easily accessible compared to the traditional sources of language education. Over 13% of the responses came back as neutral leaving the remaining 7% as respondents who disagree. Additionally, more than 44% of the participants rejected social media content as their primary source for improvement in language education, the remaining 56% was shared between the participants who agreed (35%) and more than 21% who remained neutral. When asked if they struggle with concentration when learning using social media content, 60% confirmed the challenges of concentration they face. Although the majority attested that they faced challenges, 31% refuted this claim leaving the remaining more than 9% of the responses neutral to this claim.

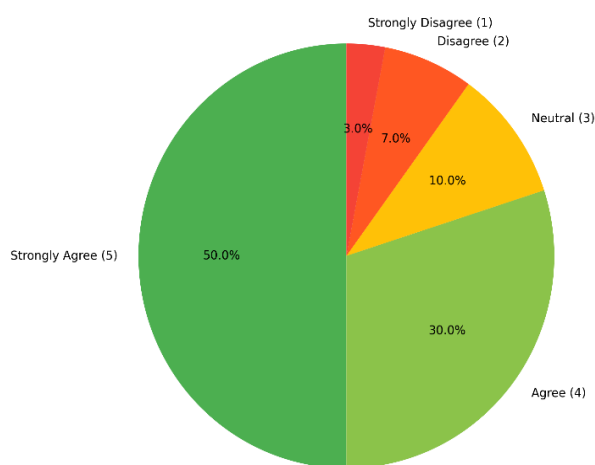


Figure 5. Accessibility of Social Media vs Traditional Sources (Q4)

(B) What are the demerits faced by Foreign Language Undergraduates as a result of excessive reliance on social media contents to improve their grammar and vocabulary skills?

The table below contains the survey questions which are under the above research question.

TABLE 3
THE DEMERITS OF EXCESSIVE RELIANCE ON SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENTS TO IMPROVE GRAMMAR AND VOCABULARY SKILLS

Item	5	4	3	2	1	Mean	Std. Dev
Do you think social media contents might contain information from unverified sources about language in excess?	53.25	17.47	20.09	8.02	1.17	4.28	1.32
Based on experience, do you get distracted easily when using social media content to improve language skills?	41.37	21.19	17.42	13.09	6.93	3.89	1.47
Does reliance on social media contents in excess impede the effectiveness of the learning process during language education?	29.85	27.75	34.65	5.19	2.56	3.27	2.08
Do you think social media contents present the optimal learning environment even without any means of assessment?	17.54	10.94	14.06	14.85	42.61	2.17	2.98
Does excessive social media content reliance affect your performance in other learning methods due to differences in methods?	30.53	10.75	8.35	29.55	20.82	2.89	2.16

*Strongly agree=5, Agree=4, Neutral=3, Disagree=2, strongly disagree=1

This table displays the responses collated from the data gathered from the research participants on the demerits of excessive reliance on social media content to improve grammar and vocabulary skills. The majority of the respondents (70%) affirmed that social media content might contain information from unverified sources about language. While a handful of respondents refuted the claim (10%), more than 20% remained neutral. As per their experience with distractions during their learning process, more than 21% refuted the claim, over 17% remained neutral while the majority of the respondents (41%) noted that they get distracted when they make use of social media content to improve their grammar and vocabulary skills.

Additionally, the majority of the respondents (56%) affirmed the third claim in this survey question which asked if social media content impeded the effectiveness of their learning process, meanwhile, 34% reported neutral while a small group of over 13% disagreed. Furthermore, a significant amount of the respondents (59%) refuted the claim that without assessment of progress made, social media content presented foreign Language Undergraduates with an optimal learning environment. In other words, without any standard method to test if any progress is made, they are of the view that it might all be an effort with latent results. Over 14% remained neutral while more than 27% attested to the claim in the fourth item.

In the fifth item, 40% of the responses received suggested the existence of a decline in performance in other learning methods due to excessive reliance on social media content. More than 8% of the respondents were neutral to this claim while more than 50% refuted the claim.

V. DISCUSSION

A. *Social Media as a Double-Edged Tool*

The survey results indicate that while social media content offers significant advantages for FL acquisition, excessive reliance on it can lead to negative implications. Findings suggest that FL undergraduates perceive social media as a more effective tool compared to traditional methods. This can be attributed to the various interactive features, such as visual and audio-based learning. Unlike traditional methods that emphasize writing practices, social media platforms provide dynamic content that facilitate better assimilation. The results confirm that video and audio materials contribute to more efficient understanding, as they present language in a more immersive and contextualized manner than written text alone (Taskiran et al., 2018; Achraf, 2017; Yunus et al., 2012).

As shown in data 2 presented above, the research participants acknowledged the impacts of social media content in FL education about the assimilation of knowledge. 29% (strongly agree), while over 21% (agree) affirmed this. On the other hand, a total of 30% of the respondents disagreed while over 20% were neutral. In line with the respondents' perspectives on the comparison between social media content and traditional sources in terms of availability, a total of over 80% (both strongly agree and agree) of the responses attested that social media content is more easily accessible compared to the traditional sources of language education. Over 13% of the responses came back as neutral leaving the remaining 7% as respondents who disagree.

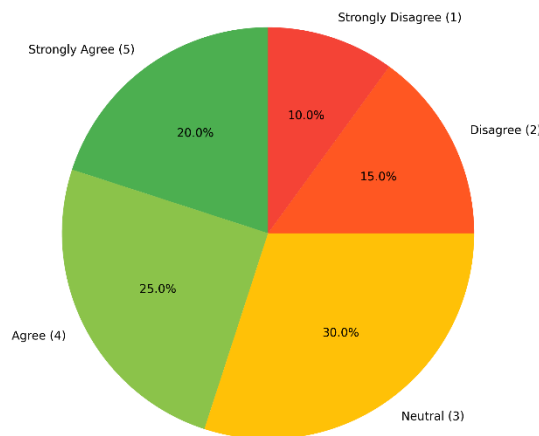


Figure 6. Distraction While Using Social Media (Q6)

Another key reason FL undergraduates rely on social media content is its ease of access (Castells, 2000). Features including a user-friendly, people-oriented interface, allow them to engage with content effortlessly. Survey findings indicate that a significant portion of respondents to the first set of questions pointed out that social media contents are taken as the primary source of improvement for grammar and vocabulary skills.

B. *Negative Implication*

While a large percentage of respondents (80%) agreed that social media is more accessible than traditional learning sources, confirming its role as a convenient learning tool (Alfaki, 2018; Wong et al., 2017), accessibility alone does not guarantee effective learning. Many students also acknowledged notable drawbacks, highlighting the negative implications of the excessive use of social media in FL education. Students reported issues related to distractions, unreliable content, and lack of structured assessment. A key issue identified is the high level of distractions associated with social media platforms. The distractions associated with social media content affects their levels of concentration during the learning process. When asked if they struggle with concentration when learning using social media content, 60% confirmed the challenges of concentration they face. Although the majority attested that they faced challenges, 31% refuted this claim

leaving the remaining more than 9% of the responses neutral to this claim. Junco (2012), Rouis et al. (2011), and Walsh et al. (2013) all highlight a common finding: excessive social media use negatively impacts academic performance. Distractions, poor time management, and reduced study time contribute to lower productivity and decreased learning outcomes. Survey results reinforce these findings. As per their experience with distractions during their learning process, more than 21% refuted the claim, over 17% remained neutral while the majority of the respondents (41%) noted that they get distracted when they make use of social media content to improve their grammar and vocabulary skills. Meanwhile, 34% reported neutral while a small group of over 13% disagreed.

Concurrently, the second set of research questions emphasizes the negative implications of excessive reliance on social media for language learning. While respondents acknowledged that social media platforms provide dynamic content that facilitate better assimilation, a significant number reported concerns about the high possibility of exposure to unverified sources about language education. More than 44% of the respondents rejected social media content as their primary source for improvement in language education, the remaining 56% was shared between the respondents who agreed (35%) and more than 21% who remained neutral. This implies that excessive reliance on these sources can result in the intake of false or misleading content, more likely affecting students' learning outcomes.

The availability of social media content still raises some challenges that can hinder the learning process and academic performance. While 70% of respondents acknowledged the presence of unverified sources and information about language in social media content, 41% admitted they often get distracted while using it for language learning. Additionally, 56% affirmed the third claim in this survey question, which asked if social media content impeded the effectiveness of their learning process, 40% believed excessive reliance on social media led to a decline in performance. Additionally, more than 8% of the respondents were neutral to this claim while more than 50% refuted the claim. A notable 59% of respondents refuted the claim that without assessment of progress made, social media content presented FL undergraduates with an optimal learning environment, emphasizing the need for structured evaluation. In other words, without any standard method to test if any progress is made, they are of the view that it might all be an effort with latent results. Meanwhile, 27% agreed with this claim, and 14% remained neutral.

The findings of this study align with Cognitive Load Theory (CLT) by illustrating how excessive reliance on social media for language learning can increase extraneous cognitive load, leading to distractions and reduced academic performance. This theoretical perspective provides a strong foundation for understanding how managing social media distractions and unverified information requires cognitive resources, leaving less capacity for deep processing and schema formation, which are essential for meaningful language learning. Through the lens of CLT, meaningful schema formation and deep processing are hindered when cognitive resources are dominantly used for managing extraneous load (e.g., distractions from social media) and lack of structured assessment. Moreover, without structured assessment, students may struggle to develop and reinforce language skills effectively, leading to weaker learning outcomes.

C. Mixed Perceptions on Social Media's Overall Impact on FL Learning

While distraction and reduced concentration suggest that social media content may decrease attention and hinder effective learning, 70% of respondents acknowledged concerns about unverified information, recognizing its potential to expose them to false or misleading linguistic rules that could affect their grammar and vocabulary development. Additionally, the 59% who disagreed with the notion that social media offers an optimal learning environment without assessment reflect the importance of structured evaluation in language learning. Perceptions of social media's overall impact on FL learning remain mixed. While 56% agreed that social media could impede the effectiveness of their learning process, 40% believed excessive reliance negatively impacted their performance in other learning methods, whereas over 50% refuted this claim. This divided perspective suggests that while some students recognize social media's potential drawbacks, others do not perceive it as significantly disruptive to their overall learning experience.

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings reveal a divided perspective on the role of social media in FL language learning. While many respondents acknowledge its usefulness, concerns about distractions, misinformation, and the lack of proper assessment highlight the risks of excessive reliance. By examining the challenges and drawbacks that arise when FL students become overly reliant on social media content for language learning, this study also suggests that the impact of social media varies based on individual usage habits, emphasizing the need for a balanced and moderated approach to social media. Integrating structured evaluation methods can help ensure that social media complements, rather than hinders, FL learning. Additionally, understanding FL undergraduates' perceptions and experiences with social media provides insights into its peculiarity and its people-oriented features, which is necessary to fully grasp its role in language learning and the negative implications of excessive use. Hundberger (2009) emphasized the importance of face-to-face teaching methods in fostering social interaction and allowing instructors to monitor FL students' psychological and physical well-being. Future research should explore how structured learning resources can enhance and regulate FL undergraduates' social media use, ensuring that it provides verified, engaging, and pedagogically sound content to support language acquisition effectively.

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