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Evaluating Awareness and Practices of Knowledge Sharing through Social Media among Research Students at the University of the Punjab, Lahore

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Abstract

Social media has become a vital tool for academic collaboration and knowledge dissemination among research students. This study aimed to evaluate the awareness and practices of knowledge sharing through social media among research students at the University of the Punjab, Lahore. A quantitative research design was employed, and data were collected from 350 research students (150 males and 200 females) enrolled in M.Phil. and Ph.D. programs across various departments. The results revealed that the perceived level of awareness regarding knowledge sharing through social media was reported as good, with mean scores ranging from 3.24 to 3.95 for different attributes. The level of knowledge sharing practices through social media was also found to be high, with mean scores above 3.00 for most dimensions. The highest scores were obtained for sharing stories, success stories, newsletters, and videos, while the lowest mean score was attained for examination preparation. Independent sample t-tests showed no significant gender differences in awareness and practices of knowledge sharing through social media. ANOVA results indicated that age did not significantly affect participants' perspectives on awareness and practices of knowledge sharing. The findings contribute to improving information sharing practices and provide recommendations for enhancing social media skills among research students.

Keywords: Knowledge Sharing; Social Media; Research Students; University of the Punjab; Awareness; Practices; Academic Collaboration.

Introduction

Social media has become a vital tool for academic collaboration and knowledge dissemination. Research students, particularly those at the University of the Punjab, Lahore, engage with platforms such as Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, and ResearchGate to share research findings, discuss academic ideas, and collaborate with peers globally. These platforms facilitate connections with scholars, professionals, and institutions, promoting the exchange of valuable knowledge. Despite the extensive use of social media for academic purposes, limited research has focused on how research students at the University of the Punjab utilize these platforms for knowledge sharing, and their awareness of its academic benefits. While social media's role in networking and career advancement is well-documented, its potential as a tool for scholarly communication and collaboration remains underexplored in Pakistan, especially among research students.

The integration of social media into educational settings has significantly influenced knowledge sharing among students. Sivakumar et al. (2023) found that social media not only serves for social interaction but also facilitates educational purposes, with features like file sharing and student engagement driving information exchange. This highlights social media's potential to enhance student motivation and academic performance. Naeem (2019) further emphasized that social media can foster a knowledge-sharing culture, improve communication, and encourage participation in research activities, which is crucial for universities aiming to promote a collaborative environment. Additionally, studies indicate that factors such as information self-efficacy, positive social outcome expectations, and enjoyment of sharing influence students' willingness to share information on social networking sites (Kim et al., 2015). These factors, along with the perception of sharing with weak ties, play a role in facilitating knowledge exchange among students.

Although much has been done to explore social media's use in various sectors, including academia (Kane et al., 2014; Lam et al., 2016), research on knowledge sharing through social media specifically in higher education, particularly among research students, remains scarce (Al-Kurdi et al., 2018). In Pakistan, while there has been some focus on the use of social media for creativity and addressing challenges among medical students (Imran et al., 2019), research on knowledge sharing among research students remains limited. This study aims to fill this gap by evaluating the awareness and practices of research students at the University of the Punjab regarding knowledge sharing through social media. It will assess their familiarity with the opportunities that social media offers for academic collaboration, the extent of their engagement in sharing research outputs, and the factors influencing their practices. The findings will contribute to improving information sharing practices and provide recommendations for enhancing social media skills among research students.

Research Objectives

- To determine the level of awareness about knowledge sharing through social media among the research students in the University of the Punjab, Lahore
- To find out the level of knowledge sharing practices through social media adopted by the research students in the University of the Punjab, Lahore

Literature Review

The practice of social media or social networking tools for information communication in higher education has generated a great debate among researchers around the world.

Numerous researches have been produced to determine the effects of these technologies on SM users in reference to knowledge sharing. This review briefly discusses the contributions of previous research regarding the importance of knowledge, knowledge sharing or transfer through social media generally among the individuals and particularly among the research students. Social media acts as a robust platform for knowledge sharing among research students. It fosters engagement by connecting formal and informal learning settings, thereby expanding opportunities for collaborative learning and academic growth. For institutions, incorporating social media into their teaching and research methodologies can significantly enhance the quality and scope of knowledge exchange and collaboration among students and faculty alike.

Social media refers to online platforms and programs that let users produce, distribute, and interact with one another's material. These platforms enable users to communicate and connect with people, groups, and organizations all around the world. Social networking sites (like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram), video-sharing websites (like YouTube and TikTok), blogging platforms (like WordPress and Medium), and messaging apps (like WhatsApp and Snapchat) are just a few examples of social media platforms. The many social interactions that users can participate in are made possible by the distinct features and functionalities that each platform offers (Manca, 2018; Nawaz & Samdani, 2021).

Different social media platforms offer a variety of features and functionalities. The majority or all of the following five characteristics can be found in social media generally, according to Zhang, Johnson, Seltzer, and Bichard (2010). Participation is the first defining characteristic. Everyone who is interested in using social media is encouraged to communicate and respond so that everyone can actively participate in producing, consuming, and analyzing media material. Openness is the second trait that all people share. The majority of social media platforms welcome feedback, criticism, and contributions. In actuality, social media provides a public forum for social interaction and cooperation. In social media, contributors can quickly access, offer, share, and use information. Conversation is the third feature. Social media can be seen as a reciprocal discourse, whereas traditional media was focused on broadcasting. The fourth characteristic, Community, illustrates how social media helps communities connect effectively. Communities may actually trade interests that they share. The majority of social media platforms try to increase their connection by linking to other websites, services, and individuals as the final and fifth characteristic. Similar to this, Panahi, Watson, and Partridge (2016) asserted that social media elements are connected to the goal of knowledge exchange. Six of these aspects can be categorized; the first is peer-to-peer communication. In contrast to the previous method of connecting users, it depicts connecting one to many in a collaborative manner. The ability to connect with others quickly, in real time, and on a global scale is the second aspect, which is also regarded as social media's key feature. According to Sharma and Madhusudhan (2017), connectivity is essential for the transfer of knowledge. The third component is networking, which is the use of social media to connect people, share personal information and online profiles, form groups, strengthen bonds, and share knowledge and experiences. The fourth component, which focuses on multimedia, comes next. This key function of social media programs enables users to gather, save, and share various content types, such as text, image, and video, in a cooperative manner. The last characteristic of social media is called user-friendliness, which denotes how simple it is to

access and that anyone may engage and make friends on any social networking site (Zhang et al., 2010). Despite the numerous advantages described above, these social media technologies have a few drawbacks. For instance, Gruzdt, Staves, and Wilk (2012) noted that because social media platforms are so easily accessible to the general public, privacy protection is seen as a critical problem when using them.

Knowledge sharing and the dissemination of content are evolving into significant social desires as social media continues to play a significant role in changing social values, norms, and cultures (Chukwuere & Chukwuere, 2017; Qadir, Safder, & Sumra, 2019). According to Terzi, Bulut, and Kaya (2019), social media has altered how people connect, communicate, and socialize during their learning processes. This includes college students. According to Abbas, Aman, Nurunnabi, and Bano (2019), SMTs have given students the ability to participate in social debate by posting comments, uploading images, and other means, as well as to share content with their classmates and the wider community.

Students at universities in particular are affected by social media in today's world (Stathopoulou, Siamagka, & Christodoulides, 2019). As a result, SMTs and networking sites have revolutionized how people interact with one another and share information (Dalol, Islam, & Humayun, 2021; Suseno, Laurell, & Sick, 2018). Additionally, support of famous SNTs like FB, ResearchGate, Academia, Slide Share, and Twitter and so on, by the use of SMTs for communicating, conducting research study, sharing knowledge, and providing information among researchers has dramatically increased (Nawaz & Samdani, 2021). According to previous studies, virtual communication and the exchange of documents have the second and third biggest positive effects on knowledge sharing (KS) among people, students, workers, and other groups after social media (Y. A. Ahmed, Ahmad, Ahmad, & Zakaria, 2019).

Despite the fact that prior research highlights that social media has become a ubiquitous tool for people and integral part of libraries. However, more research is needed to understand how the integration of social media into libraries services can promote user services to diverse groups such as information delivery, user engagement, outreach, instructions, collections, and access facilitating knowledge sharing. Particularly, further research is required to provide empirical evidence on the role of social media in knowledge sharing and collaboration, its potential to promote knowledge sharing, and how it can be effectively integrated into knowledge sharing practices.

Knowledge is a significant and valuable entity for individuals, society and economy (Miśkiewicz, 2018). Knowledge itself, and the ability to create and utilize knowledge, are considered as an important source for sustainable future of individuals (Mikalauskiene & Atkočiūnienė, 2019). Knowledge is essential for human progress and development in every aspect of life. It empowers individuals to make informed decisions, solve problems, create new ideas, disuse innovations, and understand their social and cultural values (Anand, Centobelli, & Cerchione, 2020; Winchester & Salji, 2016). To make knowledge useful for individuals, society, institutions and organizations, it should be shared among the individuals and groups (Farnese, Barbieri, Chirumbolo, & Patriotta, 2019). Therefore, encouraging knowledge sharing is the main objective of knowledge management (Yip & Ng, 2019). Knowledge sharing is an important activity in any field of human life such as education, learning, teaching, and a key asset for research and innovation (Alshahrani & Rasmussen Pennington, 2020).

The idea of knowledge has been researched and examined for ages. For learning to take place, knowledge—whether implicit or explicit—must be communicated between people, whether they are students, employees, or both (Dei & van der Walt, 2020). However, sharing of knowledge is still difficult because of various reasons. The types of knowledge conveyed, the selection of suitable methodologies, and the situations in which knowledge is shared are a few of these. For more than 20 years, several methods that promote information sharing have been discussed in the literature (Ahmad, 2018; Singh, Thomas, & Numbudiri, 2021). According to the literature, KS activities have moved from in-person settings to online (social media) platforms that facilitate social interactions, deployment, and learning at both the individual and team levels. The entire structure of human society may ultimately profit from this (Al-Kurdi, El-Haddadeh, & Eldabi, 2020; Fullwood, Rowley, & McLean, 2019). Knowledge sharing (KS) has been characterized in a variety of ways by various academics. Yeboah (2023) characterizes knowledge sharing as a two-stage process: firstly, information sharing assumes "externalization" which can take many types, such as codifying or explaining the knowledge in an intellectual knowledge system; and secondly, information sharing assumes an act of "internalization" which can take many forms, such as learning by doing or reading books. At least two people are needed to share knowledge. It also happens when someone is motivated to assist others and learn from them in order to develop new talents. (Charband and Jafari Navimipour, 2018).

Amayah (2013) asserts that knowledge-sharing can also take place when someone is motivated to collaborate with others to find solutions to issues, create novel ideas, or put policies or procedures into place. While Dalkir (2017) viewed knowledge sharing as a three-phased process, Asrar-ul-Haq and Anwar (2016) defined it as an activity in which contributors are involved in the multiparty method of contributing, transferring, and applying knowledge. The dissemination and conveyance of knowledge by a knowledge sender constitutes the first phase. The transmission's completion constitutes the second phase, and the effective assimilation of the knowledge by the recipient constitutes the third and final step.

In general, it can be said that knowledge sharing is all about collaborating among individuals. This group could consist of participants and members of formal organizations, such as coworkers at a job, or informal organizations, like friends. The contact may involve two or more people in either group. Utilizing existing information to boost group performance is the goal of this communication and knowledge exchange (Cheng, Ho, & Lau, 2009; Nair & Munusami, 2020). In light of the aforementioned definitions of knowledge sharing, this study defines it as an activity that involves transferring knowledge among individuals, groups of friends, families, or organizations. The key component of education's ongoing development process is knowledge sharing. According to Eid and Al-Jabri (2016) and Yu, Lu, and Liu (2010), it is crucial for converting a person's process improvement into real learning. Sharing knowledge is a particular type of cooperation, affiliation, and effectiveness. It entails engaging in conversation with others while maintaining interactive ties with friends and classmates at the institution (Hamid, Ishak, & Yazam, 2015).

The development and facilitation of connections and relationships between students and their classmates, as well as the creation of chances for both internal and external activities, are thus expected outcomes of knowledge sharing in universities (Hamid, Yusof, & Nadzir, 2016). Similar to this, knowledge-sharing exercises might involve groups of students at higher

education institutions. These student groups come from various origins and have a variety of skills, expertise, and experiences. To complete the needs of the assigned activities and so create a new environment, they collaborate and share their knowledge.(Annansingh, Howell, Liu, & Baptista Nunes, 2018).

Materials and Methods

Demographic Information

Gender Distribution

According to table 1 the female participants were, 200 and their percentage was 57%, while the male participants were 150 and their percentage was 43%.

Table.1 Gender wise distribution

		<i>f</i>	%
Gender	Male	150	42.9%
	Female	200	57.1%
Total:		350	100%

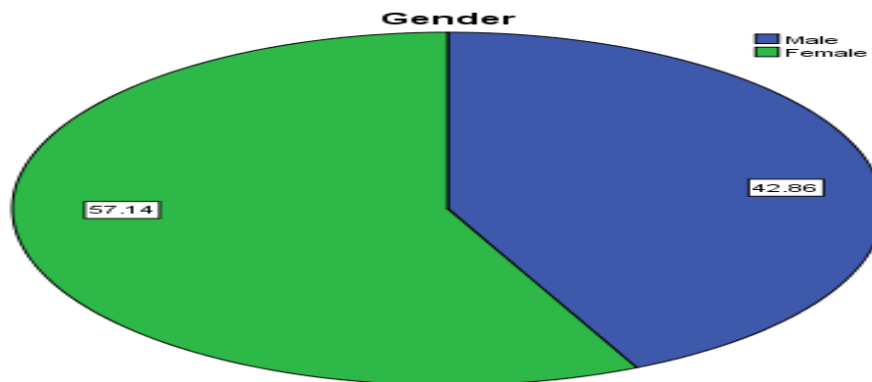


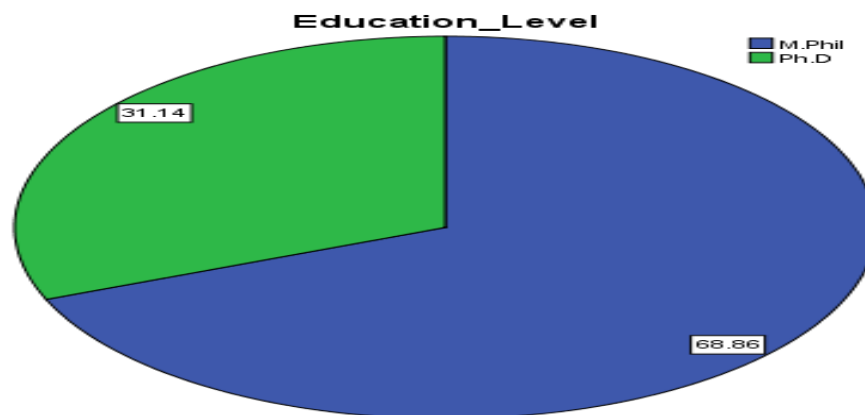
Fig 1: Gender wise distribution

Educational Level

According to table 2 the academic qualification of participants, the 241 participants were registered in Master of Philosophy degree program, and their percentage was 69.9% and 109 participants were enrolled in doctor of philosophy degree program and their percentage was 31.1%.

Table 2 Educational Level

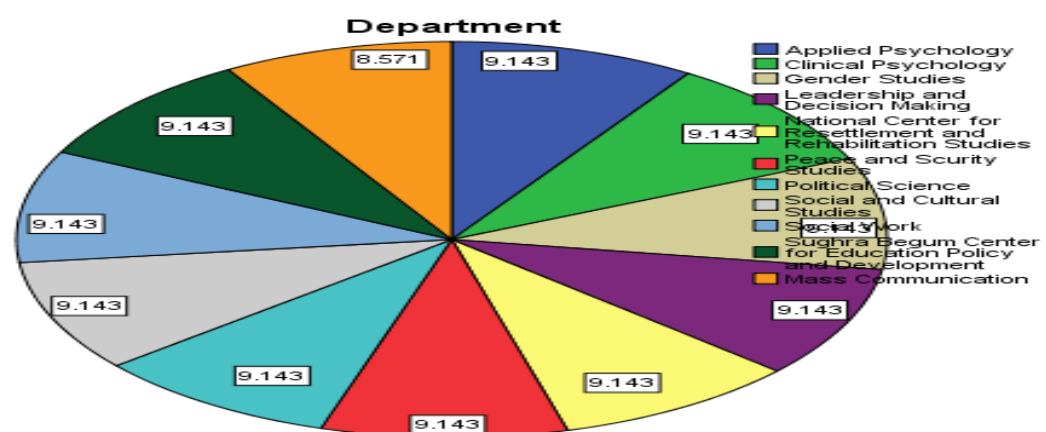
		<i>f</i>	%
Education Level	M.Phil	241	68.9%
	Ph.D.	109	31.1%
Total:		350	100%

**Fig.2: Educational Level****Department wise distribution of Respondents**

According to participation from the department, the participants ratio was almost equal that is 32 from each department and their percentage was (9%) from each department. The participation from Mass Communication was 30 and their percentage was 8.6%.

Table 3 Department wise distribution of Respondents

		<i>f</i>	%
Department	Applied Psychology	32	9.1%
	Clinical Psychology	32	9.1%
	Gender Studies	32	9.1%
	Leadership and Decision Making	32	9.1%
	National Center for Resettlement and Rehabilitation Studies	32	9.1%
	Peace and Scurity Studies	32	9.1%
	Political Science	32	9.1%
	Social and Cultural Studies	32	9.1%
	Social Work	32	9.1%
	Sughra Begum Center for Education Policy and Development	32	9.1%
	Mass Communication	30	8.6%
Total		350	100.0%

**Fig 3: Department wise distribution of respondents**

Awareness about Knowledge Sharing through Social Media

The results revealed that the perceived level of awareness regarding knowledge sharing through social media by research students in University of the Punjab, was reported that the mean scores of Slide Share, Presentation Sharing, Email, External Social Networking practices, Messaging Services and Video Sharing was 3.95, 3.90, 3.88, 3.87, 3.87 and 3.65 respectively. It shows that the respondents were aware at the level of good. The mean score of attributes Group Chat, Google Docs and Professional Blog was 3.32, 3.29 and 3.24 respectively and it shows that the level of awareness of respondents were satisfactory.

Table 4: Awareness about Knowledge Sharing through Social Media

	M	SD
1. Slide Share	3.95	1.218
2. Presentation Sharing	3.90	1.123
3. Email	3.88	1.421
4. External Social Networking practices	3.87	.952
5. Messaging Services	3.87	1.202
6. Video Sharing	3.65	.726
7. Group Chat	3.32	1.097
8. Google Docs	3.29	1.017
9. Professional Blog	3.24	1.075

(N=350)

Level of Knowledge Sharing Practices through Social Media

The results of the Videos, Journals & Articles, Photos, Posters, Visuals, Text messages, E-Books, Blogs, Website, Assignments, Presentation and Examination Preparation shows that mean values 4.00, 3.99, 3.97, 3.94, 3.83, 3.79, 3.67, 3.67 and 3.63 respectively and it shows that respondents were used these "often". The result of attributes Workshop, conferences and Discussion of academic issues mean values are 3.47, 3.46, and 3.13 respectively and it shows that respondents used these attributes for knowledge sharing sometimes. The mean values of attributes Success Stories, Status update and Community meetings. Stories and Newsletters are 2.49, 2.48, 2.04 and 2.01 respectively and it shows that respondents used these attributes rarely.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics (n=350)

	M	SD
1. Videos	4.00	1.025
2. Journals & Articles	3.99	.980
3. Photos, Posters, Visuals	3.97	1.012
4. Text messages	3.94	1.254
5. E-Books	3.83	1.087
6. Blogs, Website	3.79	1.055
7. Assignments	3.67	1.032
8. Presentation	3.67	1.089
9. Examination Preparation	3.63	1.076
10. Workshop, conferences	3.47	.999
11. Discussion of academic issues	3.46	1.136
12. Success Stories	3.13	.946
13. Status update	2.49	1.248
14. Community meetings	2.48	1.092
15. Stories	2.04	.934
16. Newsletters	2.01	1.009

The results discovered that the perceived level knowledge sharing practices through social media by research students in University of the Punjab, was conveyed as often as the mean scores of all dimensions of social media is higher than 3.00. The highest score was obtained for Stories blog followed by success stories, Newsletters, and Videos. While the lowest mean score was attained for Examination Preparation.

Over all Descriptive Statistics

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics (350)

Indicators / Dimensions	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Deviation
Awareness of knowledge sharing	2	5	3.88	.461
Practices of knowledge sharing	2	5	3.87	.355

Table 6, shows that mean value measuring awareness of knowledge sharing (3.88), with standard deviation (.563), shows that there is high level of perceived awareness of information sharing via social media. Thus, it pointed out that majority of respondents were on the predetermined scale and perceived that there was high or good level of awareness of information sharing on social media. Additionally, the practices of knowledge sharing scale had a mean value of (3.87) and a standard deviation of (.355), indicating that there is a high level of perceived knowledge sharing practices on social media. According to results, it can be perceived that the majority of respondent's stands on pre-determined scale and can perceived that there was a high or positive level of information sharing activities on social media.

Overall t-test for Gender**Table 7: Independent sample t-test on participants' views about knowledge sharing through social media with regard to gender**

	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig.(p)
Awareness of knowledge sharing	Male	150	3.85	.428	.755	348	.451
	Female	200	3.89	.484			
Practices of knowledge sharing	Male	150	3.87	.343	.380	348	.704
	Female	200	3.89	.364			

An independent sample t-test was used, according to Table 7, to determine the gender-based mean score difference. The findings showed that gender has no discernible influence on the subscale measuring awareness of information sharing through social media ($t = .755$, $p = .451 > .05$). It is concluded that both females as compared to males' participants, had shown almost similar perspective towards awareness of knowledge sharing through social media, at university level. The results revealed that gender does not significantly affect in perspective towards practices of knowledge sharing through social media subscale, as the $t = .380$, $p = .704 > .05$. It is concluded that both females as compared to males' participants, had shown almost similar perspective towards practices of knowledge sharing through social media, at university level.

Overall ANNOVA for Education Level**Table 8: ANOVA for perceived knowledge sharing through social media scale on the basis education level groups of participants**

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Awareness of knowledge sharing	Between Groups	.032	1	.032	.150	.699
	Within Groups	74.029	348	.213		
	Total	74.061	349			
Practices of knowledge sharing	Between Groups	.044	1	.044	.346	.557
	Within Groups	43.835	348	.126		
	Total	43.879	349			

Table 8 describes that the F-value (.150) with $p = .699$, found for awareness of knowledge sharing subscale, further, the F-value (.346) with $p = .557$ got for practices of knowledge sharing. Therefore, it is concluded that having different age does not affect significantly in perspective towards awareness of knowledge sharing via social media, practices of knowledge sharing.

Results and Discussion

This study aimed to evaluate the awareness and practices of knowledge sharing through social media among research students at the University of the Punjab, Lahore. The findings reveal that research students exhibited a high level of awareness regarding the use of social media

for knowledge sharing. Platforms like SlideShare, Presentation Sharing, and Email received the highest mean scores, indicating that students are well aware of using these tools for sharing academic materials. This aligns with previous studies, such as those by Sivakumar et al. (2023), who emphasized social media's role in fostering academic collaboration. However, the awareness scores for tools like Google Docs and Professional Blogs were lower, suggesting that students are less familiar with these platforms for academic collaboration. This highlights the need for universities to introduce a broader range of social media tools in academic settings and educate students on their benefits for knowledge exchange.

When examining the practices of knowledge sharing, the results indicate that research students frequently use social media for sharing multimedia content, such as Videos, Journals, and Photos, with mean scores of 4.00, 3.99, and 3.97, respectively. These findings are consistent with the work of Chatterjee et al. (2020), who found that multimedia sharing is a popular form of academic communication on social media. Students also frequently share text messages, e-books, and assignments, which highlights the extensive use of social media as a tool for disseminating academic content. However, certain activities, such as sharing knowledge through workshops, conferences, and academic discussions, were used less often, suggesting that students may not fully leverage social media for more formal academic exchanges. This pattern of use reflects findings from Stathopoulou et al. (2019), who noted that more structured academic interactions may not always align with the informal and real-time communication styles typical on social media platforms.

The study also found that gender had no significant impact on students' awareness or practices of knowledge sharing through social media, as indicated by the independent sample t-test results. Both male and female students reported similar levels of engagement with social media for academic purposes. This contrasts with some studies (e.g., Kim et al., 2015) that have observed gender-based differences in social media use. Similarly, there were no significant differences between students at the M.Phil. and Ph.D. levels in terms of their awareness or practices, suggesting that knowledge sharing through social media is perceived similarly by students at different academic stages. Several factors were identified as influencing the willingness of students to engage in knowledge sharing on social media. These include information self-efficacy, the perceived social benefits of sharing, and the enjoyment of engaging with others. These findings are in line with Kim et al. (2015), who highlighted that students are more likely to share information if they feel confident in their ability to use social media tools and believe it will lead to positive outcomes. This self-efficacy, combined with the social nature of platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp, motivates students to share academic content and engage in collaborative learning. However, the relatively low engagement with collaborative tools such as Google Docs and Professional Blogs suggests that students may not fully recognize the potential of these platforms for academic collaboration, despite their familiarity with more commonly used social media tools.

Conclusion

This study aimed to explore how research students at the University of the Punjab, Lahore, use social media for knowledge sharing. The findings reveal that the majority of participants rated their level of information sharing on social media as high or good. Both male and female students exhibited similar perspectives regarding the awareness and practices of knowledge sharing through social media. Additionally, the study found that age did not significantly

influence students' awareness or practices of knowledge sharing. While students demonstrate a strong awareness and active engagement in knowledge sharing through social media, there is considerable potential to expand their use of diverse tools for academic collaboration. The study highlights the need for universities to integrate social media literacy into academic curricula, helping students fully leverage the various platforms available for scholarly communication. Educational institutions should also foster an environment that encourages the use of social media in more formal academic contexts, promoting a culture of knowledge sharing. By doing so, universities can create a more collaborative and innovative academic community that utilizes social media to its fullest potential for knowledge dissemination.

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