Social Media : An Emerging Research Tool
A case study of the faculty of Social Science at the University of Kashmir

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Abstract: Social media is no longer an informal interactive platform since it has reached a level where students and academicians alike have recognized its pervasive informational function. Now not only the use of social media by people but how social media affects the people is studied as well. The unique attributes of social media can enable researchers to get first-hand information about the sample under study and this represents a major paradigm shift in academics and research. The purpose of the study is to investigate whether social media is an emerging and reliable research tool. The paper seeks to analyse the views of scholars of the University of Kashmir on the academic uses and application of social media in the research field in particular. Is social media reliable enough to be used in research? Can we derive conclusions based solely on the data provided by social media? Are all social networks considered equally reliable? Are blogs considered more reliable than other social media platforms like facebook, twitter, etc? These are some of the questions that the paper answers using the viewpoints of the scholars of the faculty of Social Science at the University of Kashmir. Findings reveal mixed responses regarding the usage of social media as a tool used for academic research. Easy accessibility of social media, its huge reach to all almost sections of the society, its cost-effectiveness were some of the reasons that are considered to be a plus point when social media is used as a tool in the field of research. However, the same reasons were given by the respondents for its inferiority and the superiority of the traditional tools of research.

Key Words: Social media, research, network, Kashmir, scholars.

1. Introduction:

Social media offers tools that let people, as well as organisations, share information, ideas, etc depending upon their taste and interest. The online communication channels that are specifically for interaction, collaboration, and sharing of different types of content are collectively called social media. Different examples of social media include social networking, social bookmarking, facebook, twitter, linkedIn, pinterest, etc.

Researchers have to find, use and disseminate information and social media provide tools for such important tasks. Social media has many uses for society in general and the academic use of social media can be in the field of research. Social media can be a beneficial tool for researchers. It can work along with face to face communication and traditional communication like websites, journals, articles, etc. It can help the researchers to reach diverse audiences including that outside academia as well and it is an efficient tool to reach large audiences.

Dissemination of work, development of networks, building collaborations and finding information are some of the tools that help achieve communication goals.

2. Review of literature:

Chris Piotrowski (2015) in a study *Emerging research on social media use in education: a study of dissertations* writes that there has been wide academic and research interest in the application of Social Media modalities, as instructional tools, in contemporary educational settings. Although research on this topic has grown exponentially in recent years, very little is known about the breadth of research regarding social media in the scholarly literature, and few reviews of data-based, outcome studies on the social media-education nexus have appeared. The study is designed to address both these issues. First, the current analysis attempts to gauge the scope of the research domain of social media education typology by conducting a content analysis of dissertation research in this area. Second, a subset of these studies, with a focus on the empirical outcome, on the efficacy of social media in educational settings was examined. A keyword search of the term (Social Media) yielded 662 studies represented in ProQuest's Dissertations & Theses database. Based on the abstract of each study, the author tagged the reference with a descriptor that best represented the main topical focus of the research. The topical areas that garnered the most research attention, within the domain of social media, were (in rank order): political issues/social movements, marketing/business performance, and college-level educational issues. In total, educational applications of social media accounted for 12% of the

dissertation sample. The author summarized the major outcome findings of 29 dissertations that had a specific focus on social media -Education issues. Of these, only 2 studies reported any negative views by either students or faculty on the implementation of social media platforms for academic purposes. Instructors' lack of efficacy in Web 2.0 technology, privacy issues, and data overload were the major concerns noted. As these results are based on areas of investigatory interest of young researchers, the findings of the study provide a barometer of emerging trends regarding critical issues in Social Media-Education research.

The paper *Social Networks Overview: Current Trends and Research Challenges* (2010) investigates online social networks as an emerging multidisciplinary research field that bridges social science and multimedia computing. It introduced the most important aspects of social networks by considering four main aspects: state of the art overview, trends, challenges, and open questions. It focuses on the research and technological measures to be adopted and reflects the consolidated opinion of the members of the NextMEDIA project and the Future Media Networks (FMN) cluster with the collaboration with well-known experts, under the guidance of the Networked Media Systems Unit of the Information Society and Media Directorate General of the European Commission. The goal of the publication is to provide an initial baseline to build a discussion forum on the most critical issues related to social networks.

Social media outlets are becoming essential for academia, not just for the promotion of research but for research development as well. Andy Miah (2013) in an article *Top 5 social media platforms for research development* provides an overview of his top picks for the social media newbie and argues that if used well, these platforms will allow academics to digest more content, more quickly. The author argues that we must figure out how to use social media in a way that enriches academic working life, but in a way that also provides some added value.

The Use of Social Media for Research and Analysis: A Feasibility Study (2014) is a report of research carried out by the Oxford Internet Institute on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions. The report aims to explore how data generated by social media platforms can be used to support social research and analysis at the Department for Work and Pensions. The report combines a general review of all the possibilities generated by social media data with an empirical exploration assessing the feasibility of some solutions, focussing in particular on the examples of Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payment. The report argues that social media data can be useful for social research purposes in two key respects. Firstly, these media can provide indications of information-seeking behaviour. Secondly, they can provide indications of public opinion of specific policies or reactions to specific media events. The report does not focus on using social media for public relations or communications, rather it looks at its role in social research and analysis.

3. Study design and profile of the sample:

The study deals with analyzing the perception of research scholars of the Social Science in the University of Kashmir on the academic uses and application of social media particularly in the field of research. The questionnaire is taken as a tool of investigation for the analysis.

The questionnaire was distributed among 40 scholars through random sampling. Four research scholars from each department of the Faculty of Social Science at the University of Kashmir are taken as a sample. The Faculty of Social Science consists of ten departments i.e. Economics, History, Library and Information Science, Media Education Research Centre, Political Science, Psychology, Social Work, Sociology, Shah-i-Hamdan Institute of Islamic Studies and UNESCO Madanjeet Singh Institute of Kashmir Studies.

Survey through the questionnaire is the primary source of the study and articles, journals and research papers are the secondary sources of the study.

1.	Economics	4
2.	History	4
3.	Social Work	4
4.	Media Education Research Centre	4
5.	Political Science	4
6.	Psychology	4
7.	Sociology	4
8.	Library and Information Science	4
9.	UNESCO Madanjeet Singh Institute of Kashmir Studies	4
10.	Shah-i-Hamdan Institute of Islamic Studies	4
	Total	40

Table 1

Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents according to the departments; in the Faculty of Social Science. 4 research scholars from each department are chosen. The total number of respondents is 40.
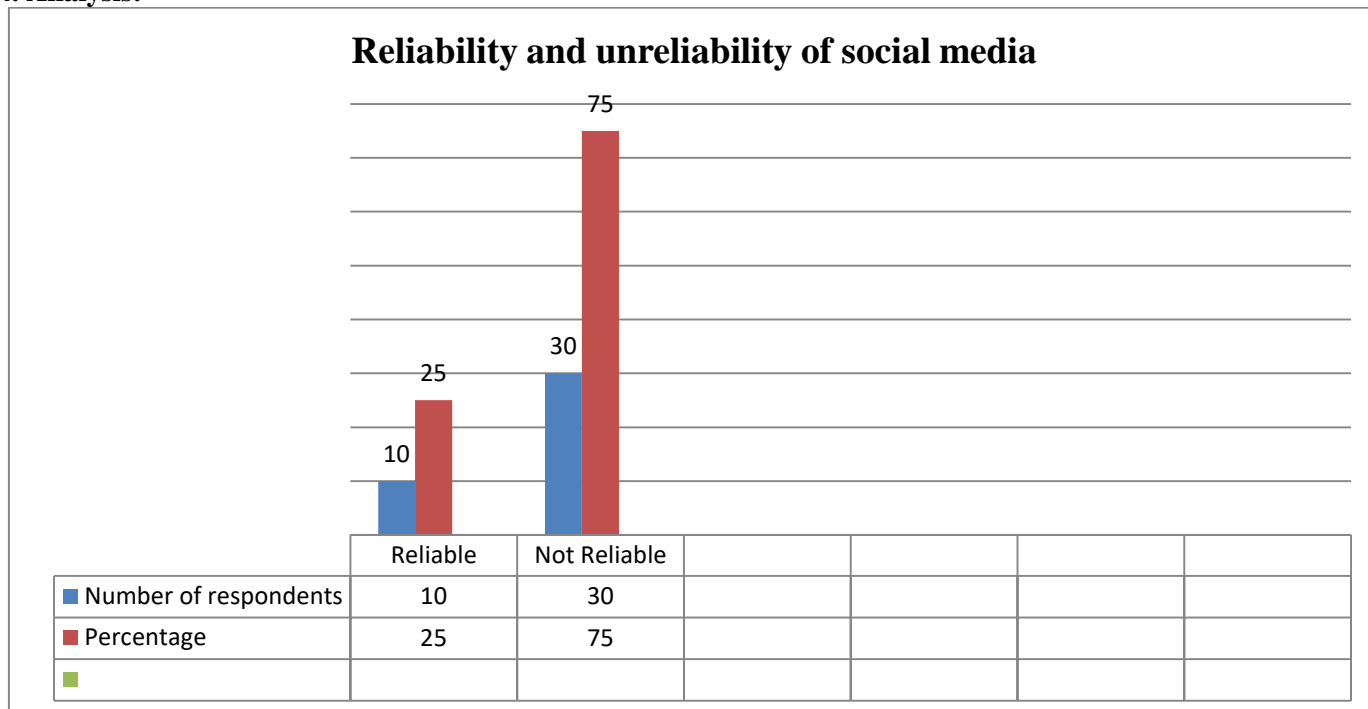
4. Analysis:

Reliability and unreliability of social media

	Reliable	Not Reliable				
■ Number of respondents	10	30				
■ Percentage	25	75				
■						

Figure 2

4.1 Reliability and unreliability of social media

The respondents were asked about social media being an emerging and reliable research tool. The findings show that 75% of the respondents do not consider social media a reliable tool of research and only 25 % consider it reliable.

4.2 Reasons for reliability or unreliability of social media

The respondents were asked about the reasons for the reliability or non-reliability of social media. Social media is accessible to all, easy to use, provides first-hand information and it does help the scholars at a lot especially the freshers. These are some reasons that the respondents gave in favour of the use of social media in research.

The main reason for the unreliability of social media is that anyone, whether knowledgeable or not, can post anything on social media. However few respondents gave other reasons, some consider it an unprofessional source since it doesn't follow the filtering methods to check plagiarism which is followed by traditional tools. Some consider it unreliable simply because social media is unlike books and journals which need a lot of knowledge, patience and time.
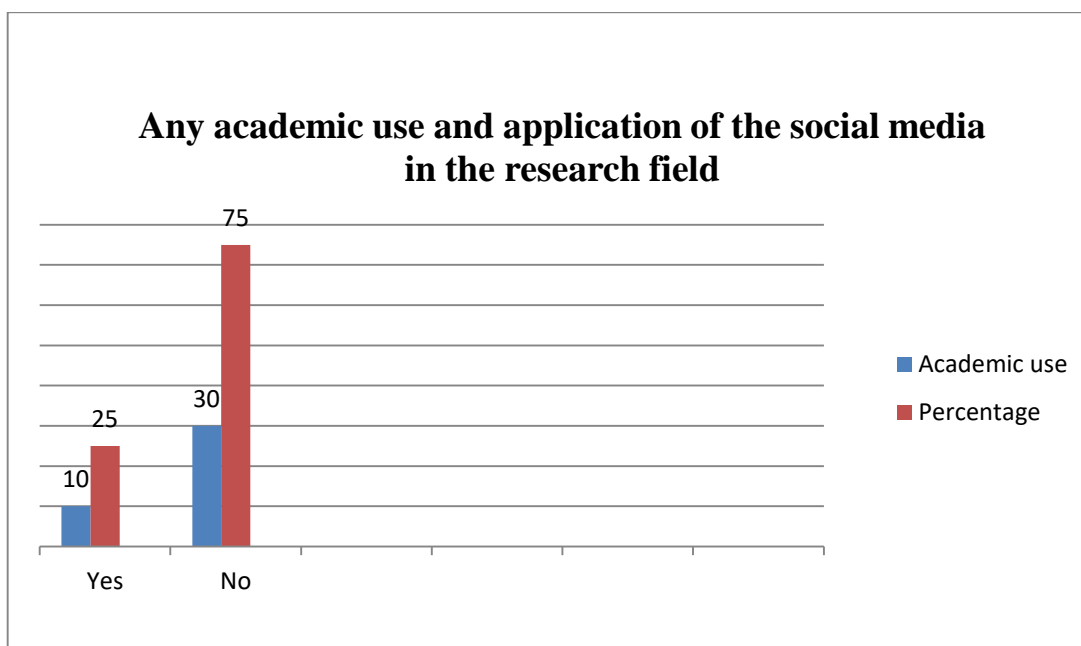

Any academic use and application of the social media in the research field

■ Academic use
■ Percentage

Figure 3

4.3 Any academic use and application of social media in the research field

It is found that 75% of the respondents believe that social media has certain applications in the research field while 25% believe that it has absolutely no use.

4.4 Academic uses and application of social media in the research field

From the returned questionnaires, it is found that social media is considered a source of information and offers easy data collection. Some respondents shared that if the information is taken from reliable social media, then it can be very well put to academic use. Some others shared that many professors in different universities have opened their blogs to share notes with the students which help to make the topic clearer. Some also believe that social media provide ideas to teachers and scholars who need new ideas to do research.
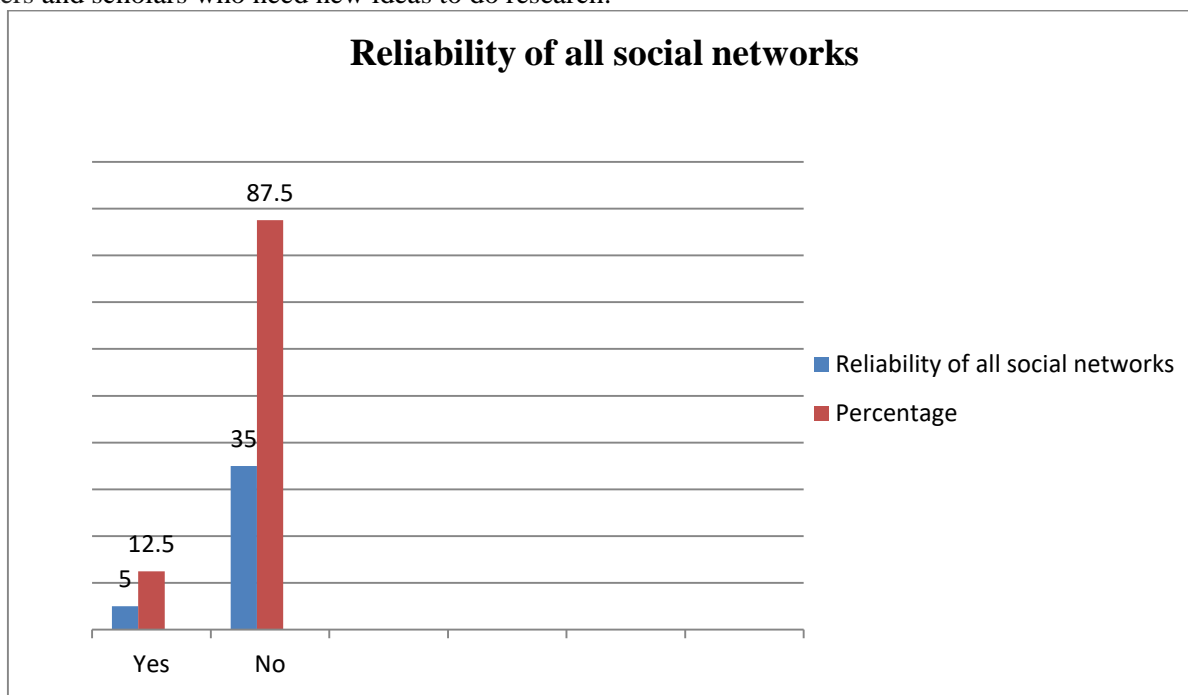

Figure 4

4.5 Reliability of all social networks

Findings show that 5 respondents i.e. 12.5% believe that all social networks are equally reliable while 35 respondents i.e. 87.5% believe that all social networks are not equally reliable.
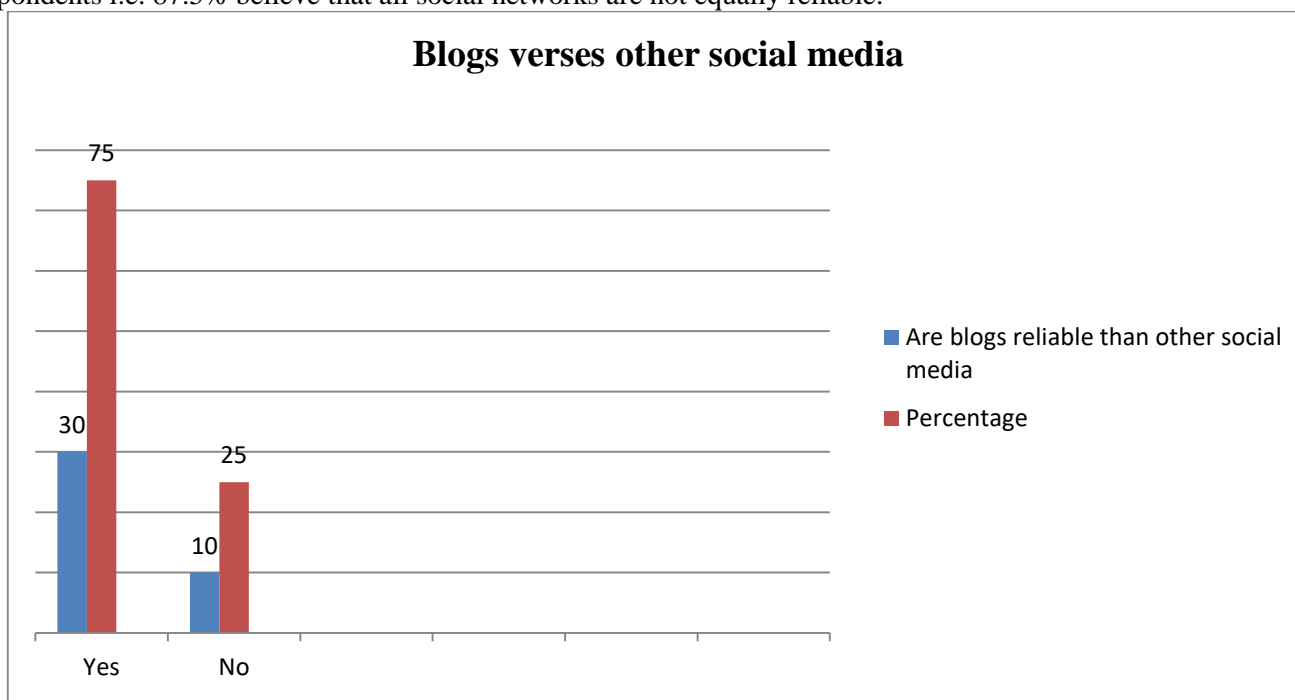

Figure 5

5. Blogs versus other social media:

The respondents were asked are blogs considered more reliable than other social media platforms like facebook, twitter, etc? The findings show that 75% of respondents consider blogs to be more reliable than other social media while 25% do not find any difference between the blogs and other social media in terms of reliability.

Many reasons were given by respondents about the reliability of blogs and other social media. Some of the respondents believe that social media is used by naive people as well but blogs are usually run by knowledgeable and experienced people, which naturally make blogs more reliable. Some respondents believe that blogs need brains and good vocabulary to keep it going and unlike social media like facebook, twitter, etc., blogs are written by those who are experts in their fields. Almost everyone, from children to young to old people have accounts on social media like facebook, twitter, etc. but very few people open a blog because blogs need more explanation.

Some respondents do not see any difference in reliability since they consider blogs as well as the other social media to be the same. They believe that either all social media are reliable or all are unreliable because a person who can write a facebook post can write also a blog post, which means they are both equally unreliable.

6. Conclusion:

The ubiquitous nature of blogs like blogspot or wordpress, social networking like facebook, twitter, linkedin has made it a powerful tool to gauge what and how people see issues related to politics, environment, society, arts, etc. One of the most important global leaps in recent human history is the Arab spring and social media played a significant role in it. Social media is an important platform to analyse the way researchers and people in general communicate and collaborate. Various studies show the huge scope that social media offers in various aspects of research. Social media provides a vast range of tools that can be helpful for a researcher to make an informed decision.

The unique attributes of all social media platforms include the following features: easy communication, wide reach, time and money-saving. Questionnaires can be distributed with much less hassle using social media. Respondents can be reached by the researcher easily. The research done can then be distributed on a mass level using social media as compared to the traditional ways of circulation. It saves travel costs, so research can be done on a large scale; hence it saves the limitation of finances to a large extent. Some respondents believe that the teachers in universities all across India extensively use social media as a source of information for notes, reading material, etc.

An interesting finding of the study is that the majority of the respondents considered social media to be unreliable yet the majority of them believe that there are academic uses and applications of social media particularly in the research field. The findings show that 75% of the respondents consider social media an unreliable tool of research and only 25 % consider it reliable. While as, paradoxically, 75% of the respondents believe that social media has certain applications in the research field while 25% believe that it has no use.

Traditional tools of research are deemed to be reliable because they are authentic and peer-reviewed. Since to get a paper published in a reputed journal it takes quite some time whereas on social media it takes a minute, therefore the time taken might more in traditional tools but are worth it because they are quality sources. Unlike social media, the research that is done using traditional research tools is supported by data rather than assumptions. Therefore, traditional tools are considered more genuine than modern tools like social media.

However, both the researches can be considered equally reliable and there is no reason to doubt any of the two methods if conducted objectively. Social media can be used as a source of information and rather than bluntly considering these sources unreliable and useless it is wise to think of making them better.

Interestingly, findings show that the qualities that make social media superior to the traditional tools of research were the same qualities given for its inferiority. Since anyone can post anything on social media and it is accessible to the masses without much hassle, it is the same reason why it is considered an inferior tool of research.

Social media is considered unreliable but still useful because every student does not have access to all journals, therefore social media acts as a facilitator. It is found that the majority of the respondents i.e. 75% consider social media to be completely unreliable but end up agreeing that it sometimes helps the researchers to get an outline of things. However, it is still not taken to be a final source for research.

It is found that using social media for gathering data is easier than gathering it manually. The researcher can take a large sample and unlike the traditional forms of gathering data, questionnaires can be sent to the respondents from a laptop or even from a smartphone. Since the manual collection is considered to be superior but tedious, therefore if the researcher has less time and money then data collection using social media is better. It saves time, effort as well as money of the researcher but it is believed that the validity of the data collected can be questioned.

Findings show that some of the respondents have never used social media for research while others have used only if it gives the source of data because once the source is given, the researcher can always go back to the source and check the authenticity.

7. Limitations and future scope of the study:

- The study is done only one faculty but it can be done on other faculties of the University of Kashmir as well.

- The study brings out the perception of scholars only. It would be interesting to analyse the perception of academicians and the students of the different disciplines in the University of Kashmir.
- A comparative study can be conducted between the University of Kashmir and the other Universities of Kashmir/India to know the perception of the reliability or unreliability of social media in the field of research.

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