



REVOLUTIONIZING EDUCATION THROUGH INSTAGRAM IN THE POST-COVID ERA

Bahar Graefenⁱ,

Nadeem Fazal

College of Pharmacy,
Chicago State University,
Chicago, USA

Abstract:

The (coronavirus disease of 2019) COVID-19 pandemic has brought about unprecedented changes in education, leading to the exploration of unconventional learning tools. This study investigates the use of the popular social media platform Instagram as a means of facilitating self-directed learning. A survey was conducted among university students with 500 respondents participating anonymously. 63% of the respondents were female, and 85.2 %, were aged under 30. Only 7.6% of participants reported negative mental health issues relating to Instagram use, while the majority revealed positive attitudes, competitiveness, and strong focus on their educational goals. Instagram served as a platform for students to form small or large social circles in which they supported one another by addressing their educational needs, assisting each other with challenging assignments, and engaging in small group study sessions and quizzes. Notably, most respondents (65.4%) indicated that they use educational Instagram pages as a source of knowledge and learning, while a significant portion (34.6%) mentioned that while they access the platform with the intention of learning, they also encounter unnecessary or irrelevant posts, resulting in time wastage. In conclusion, this paper suggests that while Instagram may not be the ideal tool for deployment within a teacher's arsenal, it can serve as an effective source of peer mentoring and support in the post-COVID educational world.

Keywords: higher education, innovative pedagogy, social media, learning success, Instagram

1. Introduction

The Coronavirus pandemic that began in early 2020 required endless changes to the education system. As per UNESCO, on April 1st, 2020, schools, and higher education institutions (HEIs) were shut in 185 nations, affecting 1 542 412 000 students, or 89.4% of

ⁱ Correspondence: email bahar.graefen@gmail.com

all students (Marinoni et al., 2020; Ekizer, 2021). COVID-19 had an impact on teaching and learning at almost all higher education institutions globally, with two thirds of them reporting that classroom education had been replaced by distance learning. Teachers and students alike faced unprecedented difficulties in maintaining effective teaching and learning environments as schools and universities closed and remote learning became the norm (Marinoni et al., 2020). Access to technical infrastructure, competences, and pedagogies for distance learning, as well as meeting the specific and diverse requirements of fields of study were the primary obstacles that the transition from face-to-face to distance teaching presented (Marinoni et al., 2020). The need for novel strategies to engage and motivate students in this rapidly changing scenario quickly became clear. The aim of this study is to provide insight into how undergraduate students used Instagram in educational settings while taking into consideration the value of social networking sites like Instagram as pedagogical resources, particularly in encouraging self-regulating learning after the COVID-19 pandemic. By undertaking a survey of college students, our study also tried to figure out more about students' experiences and results connected with using Instagram. Educators and lawmakers who want to adapt to the rapidly altering educational landscape might find it beneficial to learn how Instagram affects students' learning.

2. Literature Review

As a communication and engagement tool, social media has historically been ignored by educational institutions, with many schools and universities failing to recognize its potential (Tess, 2013). However, of late, an ever-increasing number of schools and colleges have started to see the benefit of utilizing online entertainment to interface with their partners, provide updates and data, work with information more, and draw students in via their networks. Because of this utilization of virtual entertainment or social media platforms as well as their mobile applications in schooling, teachers will quite often incorporate them as a tool for educational purposes since many well-known online entertainment applications also have extensive learning potential (Erarslan, 2019). Self-directed learning may be encouraged by social media use, preparing students to independently search for answers and make decisions (Singaram et al., 2022). When supported in a homeroom setting, these online entertainment skills can be directed and refined to create better learning results and basic mindfulness. Web-based entertainment additionally gives students more opportunities to associate and team up beyond the actual homeroom. The implication is that high-school students and undergraduates everywhere can begin to encounter the internationally linked world some time before they enter the labor force. The fact that most educators themselves are avid social media users for personal as well as professional reasons contributes to their awareness of the potential of social network sites and their smartphone applications (Erarslan, 2019).

Meta Platforms, an American company, owns the photo- and video-sharing social networking service Instagram. The application permits clients to use channels to transfer media that can be altered and coordinated by hashtags and geographical labeling. Posts

can be shared publicly or with followers who have been preapproved. Users can follow other users to add their content to a personal feed, view trending content like photos, and browse other users' content by tag and location ("Instagram," n.d.). Currently, 17.6% of the total population utilizes Instagram. 73% of U.S. youngsters say that Instagram is the best way for brands to contact them about new items or advancements. In 2021, Instagram users used the platform for an average of 30 minutes per day. 25% of U.S. teens say Instagram is their favored online social media tool (SMPerth, n.d.).

Instagram was fundamentally intended for diversion and social connection. However, an unforeseen use emerged as it began to be recognized as a tool that could be employed for educational purposes. Instagram provides a one-of-a-kind opportunity to investigate such platforms' potential as non-traditional learning tools due to their large user base and visually appealing interface. The utilization of Instagram in educational settings has already yielded several novel concepts that merit exploration. Making a dedicated Instagram account for an educational setting and posting updates on tasks, projects and planned activities promotes open communication and keeps students informed. Additionally, study materials can also be shared. Instagram's picture and video editing tools may also be used to make educational postings (Sari & Wahyudin, 2019).

Promoting students' use of Instagram to post their assignments, projects, or presentations may encourage them to interact with a larger audience and show off their creativity. In addition, it may give them more self-assurance and a sense of success. Students acquire and remember information more effectively when it is offered to them in the format of diagrams, step-by-step instructions, or other visual aids. Instagram can assist students in collaborating on tasks for assessment. It provides a forum for discussions or exchange of knowledge and can help expand the learner's network (Sari & Wahyudin, 2019; Carpenter et al., 2020). To motivate students, to help them relax and to cope with stress during studying it is recommended to share photos or inspirational phrases on Instagram, encouraging them to take breaks and promoting self-care.

During the remote learning period imposed by COVID-19 it was essential to look at alternative strategies for assisting students with learning and feeling better while the outbreak presented a unique set of limitations (König et al., 2020). There were strong arguments in favor of using Instagram because of its enormous accessibility, popularity, and characteristics that might promote educational cooperation and participation (Richter et al., 2022).

3. Material and Methods

3.1 Study Design

A study was carried out to collect quantitative data on the importance of Instagram, daily time spent on the platform, types of Instagram pages followed, and participants' views on the role of Instagram in education. The purpose of the questionnaire was to get input from participants anonymously. It consisted of both closed-ended questions, employing Likert scales and multiple-choice items, as well as open-ended questions assessing

Instagram's role in supporting an independent research project. The answers focused on an extensive spectrum of topics such as mental wellness, support for higher education, productivity, engaging with up-to-date material, and the potential disadvantages of using Instagram. The study was conducted at Chicago State University.

3.2 Participants

Students (n = 500) from Chicago State University (CSU) were invited to participate in an anonymous online questionnaire hosted on SurveyMonkey. The participants were selected by implementing a convenience sample strategy.

3.3 Collection of Data

Researchers sent an email to students inviting them to participate in the study. The online survey closed after a total of 8 weeks after two follow-up emails were sent at three-week intervals. Students were not offered a reward or incentive for participating in the study. The respondents were provided with detailed instructions on how to complete the survey and were guaranteed that the results would be treated confidentially. Age, gender, and level of previous degree were all collected as demographic data.

3.4 Statistical Analysis

The statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS software version 20.0 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA).

4. Results

In total, 500/1502 (33%) of students completed the survey. Most participants were female (N = 315, 63%) as compared to male (N = 185, 37%). Table 1 shows the age of the participants (% of respondents). The highest proportion of respondents are aged 25 and under. The least common age of respondents is age 36 or older. Results are based on 500 responses. Students participated across all years of study: the first year (N = 142, 28.4%), second year (N = 94, 18.8%), third year (N = 135, 27%), and fourth year (N = 129, 25.8 %).

The question "Are you an active user of Instagram?" was asked of a total of 500 participants. The results of this study demonstrate that most participants (N = 391, or 78.2%) defined themselves as active users, while only a minority (N = 68, or 13.6%) were not active users, and a smaller proportion (N = 41, or 8.2%) mentioned that they use Instagram rarely.

The students were asked to evaluate the importance of Instagram in their life on a 5-point scale. The results of this question can be seen from Table 2 (% of respondents) (MV = 2.36, SD = 1.11).

Participants who completed the survey were asked the question "Do you think Instagram is useful?" Based on the outcomes, a significant percentage of participants (N = 24, 4.8%) agree that Instagram is extremely helpful, while the majority (N = 410, 82%) agree that may be useful in different ways. On the other hand, 66 participants, or 13.2% of the total, consider Instagram to be a waste of time.

Table 3 points out how much time the students spend on Instagram during the day.

The survey question, "Do you think that keeping Instagram in this way endangers the mental health of young people?" was addressed to participants. The results of this survey show that almost half of the respondents (N = 245, 49%) think that Instagram threatens young people's mental health. There is a need for more research here because a significant majority of individuals (N = 217, or 43.4%) indicated that they neither agreed nor disagreed, whereas only 38 respondents, or 7.6%, did not consider Instagram to present an issue to young people's mental health.

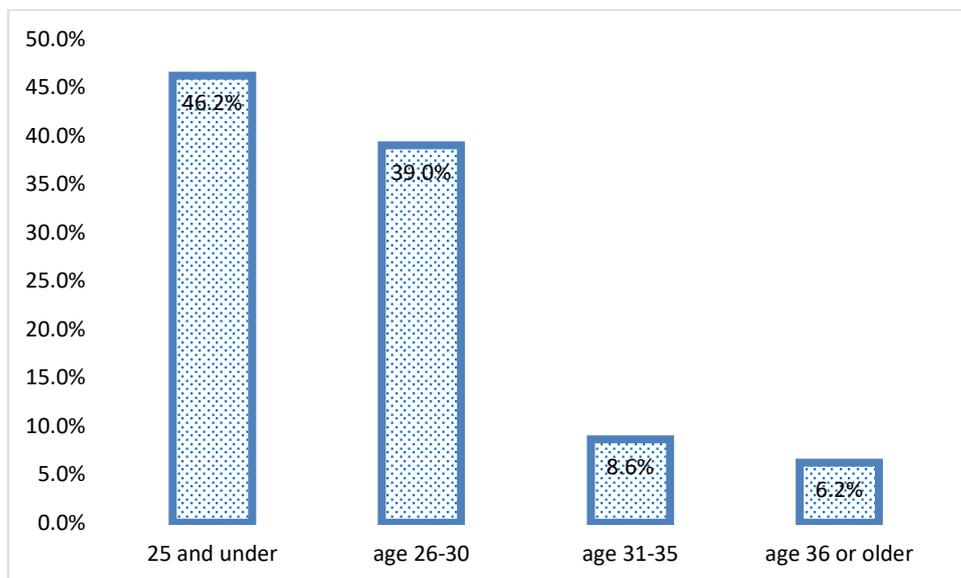


Table 1: Participants' age distribution for the total sample

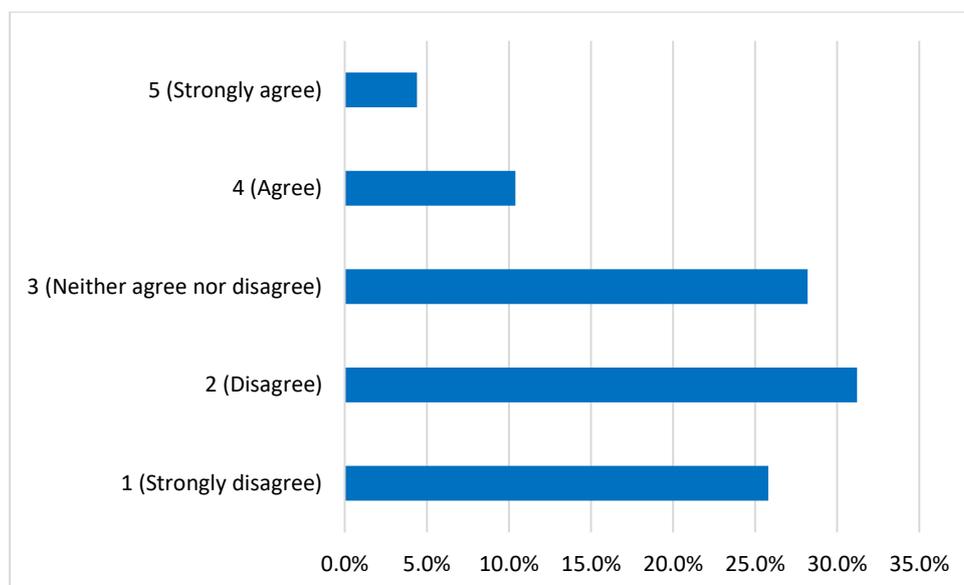


Table 2: Evaluating the importance of Instagram

To determine the proportion of respondents who consider themselves social media addicts, we evaluated the data in our research. The results illustrate that, among the

respondents, 208 persons (41.6%) believed that they had a social media addiction, while 292 respondents (58.4%) stated that they did not.

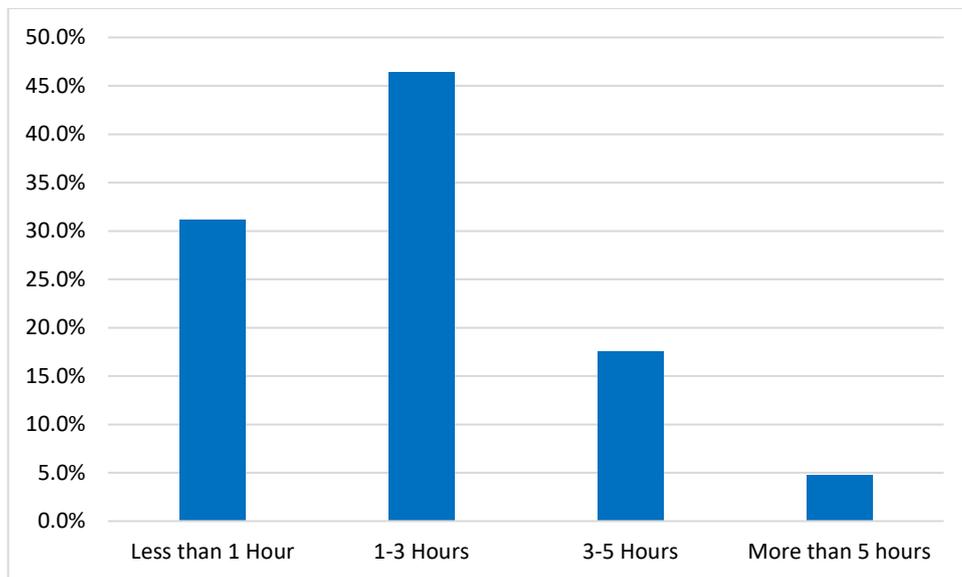


Table 3: Daily Time Spent on Instagram by participants (%)

According to the results for the question “Do you use educational pages on Instagram?”, most participants (N = 327, 65.4%) reported using educational Instagram pages as a source of knowledge and learning. On the other hand, a critical number of students (N = 173, 34.6%) demonstrated that they do not use educational pages on Instagram.

According to Table 4, Instagram is the second most frequently used social media platform among students.

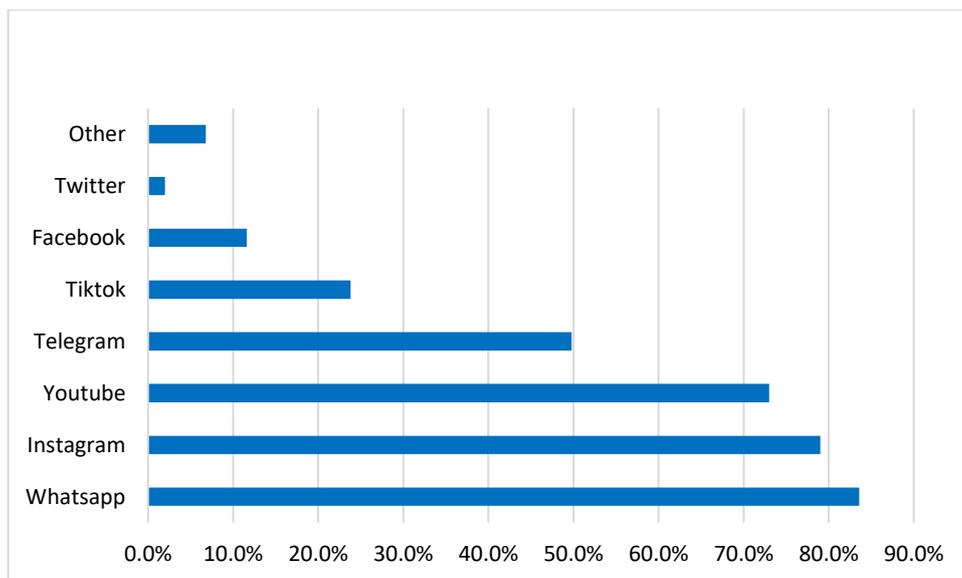


Table 4: Most Frequently Used Platforms in the Post-COVID Era

The types of Instagram pages which the students use is presented in Table 5.

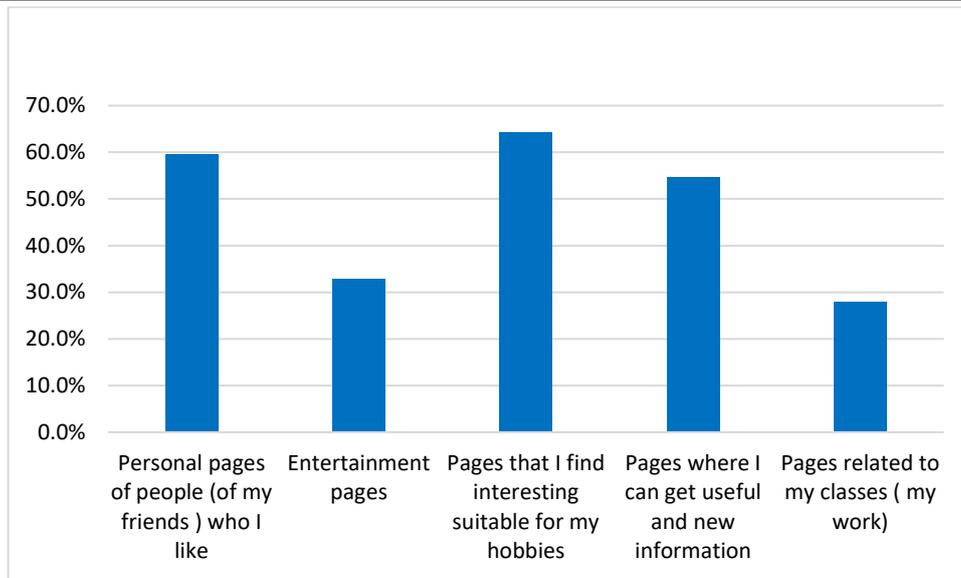


Table 5: Types of Instagram pages followed among students

Students' responses were analyzed to figure out the primary reasons why they used Instagram. The outcomes reflect that the vast majority (N=377, 75.4%) of respondents use Instagram to enjoy their free time. Furthermore, a significant number of participants (N = 252, 50.4%) mentioned that they use Instagram for learning new knowledge, while a lower percentage (N = 36, 7.2%) indicated they use Instagram for managing their businesses. Only a small percentage of respondents (N = 41, 8.2%) reported that they intended to make new connections on Instagram.

To gain more insight into participants' views on Instagram's place in education, participants' answers to the question "Do you think Instagram can replace other learning portals?" were gathered and examined. The results show that a significant proportion of respondents (N = 436, 87.2%) think Instagram should only be used as a supplemental tool and not as a replacement for other learning portals. However, a minority (N = 64, 12.8%) express the opinion that Instagram can succeed as a comprehensive learning resource when used correctly.

Table 6 pointed out the role of Instagram in education.

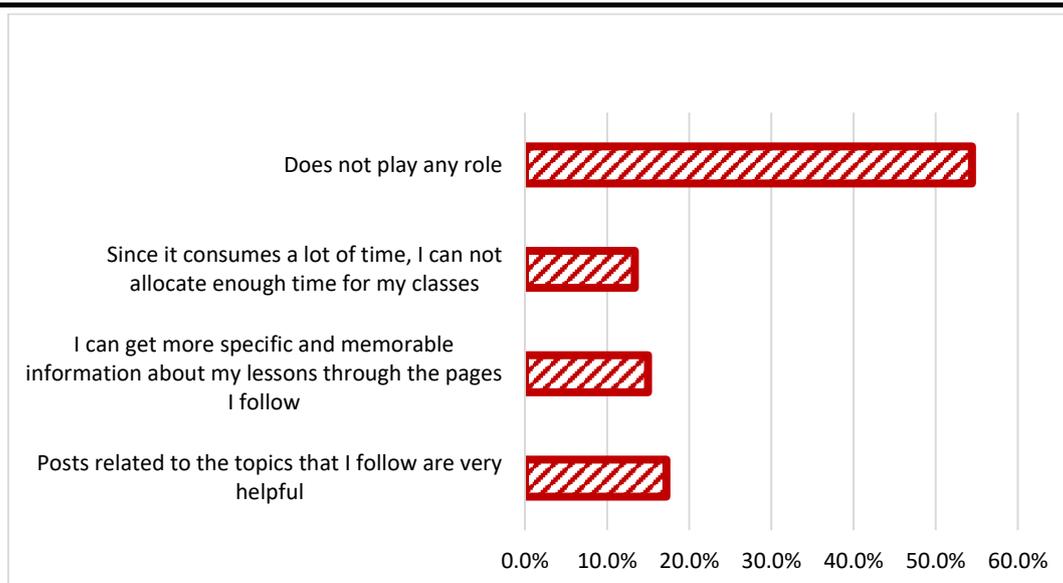


Table 6: The role of Instagram in education

5. Discussion

The COVID-19 epidemic has brought about a period of enormous change in education and triggered the use of novel teaching methods. To maintain ongoing education while dealing with the challenges caused by physical isolation and extended closures, educators and students had to quickly adapt to new approaches to learning. One of the major developments was the increasing popularity of online learning tools and platforms. In these trying times, these platforms developed into online campuses where learning developed and took place. Irregular teaching methods also became more popular as educators looked for novel methods to engage students. The pandemic also inspired teachers to use social media websites and online forums for pedagogical objectives.

The COVID-19 pandemic led educational institutions to adopt novel teaching methods (Hodges, 2020). Despite the reality that these tools developed out of need, they additionally provided new opportunities for improving education. To establish a hybrid classroom that includes the best benefits of both online and in-person training, it is possible that many of these unusual learning technologies will continue to be included in regular in-person educational settings as we gradually recover from the pandemic.

The results of this study shed light on Instagram's potential in the post-COVID educational setting as a non-traditional learning tool. Instagram has a clear benefit as a learning tool that can promote peer mentoring and working together. Students had the opportunity to address their educational requirements, assist with evaluation tasks, and participate in small group-focused discussions and assessments through sharing information. Peer-to-peer support improved learning opportunities while also creating a sense of community among students. This was essential at a time when an outbreak made it challenging for students to engage with one another personally.

Furthermore, the results of the study confirm that a significant majority of participants were active Instagram users. Instagram may be able to change education in

the post-COVID period because of its high user rates. Given such significant engagement, it seems clear that Instagram is becoming a more and more popular platform for social networking. The large number of users that are regularly active additionally shows that using Instagram for learning might have the potential to reach an extensive audience and represent a way to engage students in an easy-to-access setting.

According to the data presented in Table 4, Instagram is the second most used social media address among the students asked. This outcome reflects the platform's popularity and recognition among students in the post-COVID period. Instagram might also be an effective social media network for educational purposes due to its visual focus, the requirement for interactive skills, and the simplicity of use. These features combined with Instagram's ranking mean it may have the potential to change education. Using Instagram's existing popularity among students could make it easier to present educational knowledge and engage students in a way that is suited to them.

The results show that 4.8% of respondents found Instagram to be highly useful, demonstrating that they are interested in Instagram's ability to change education in the post-COVID era. In addition, most participants (82%) agree that Instagram could be beneficial in several areas, indicating broad interest in its potential educational advantages. These results show that Instagram offers capabilities and features that may be used to enhance educational opportunities as well as engage students. On the other hand, 13.2% of participants considered Instagram to be a waste of time. This point of view highlights the need to prove the platform's effectiveness. Instagram offers interactive and visual elements which could boost engagement but there are also challenges regarding distractions and superficial material that may need to be resolved before it can be successfully incorporated into educational environments.

The results on how students view the impact of Instagram on their psychological well-being reveal an enormous concern. 49% of participants stated that Instagram was a risk for young people's mental wellness. This conclusion highlights the need for more analysis and research to assess the possible negative effects of Instagram on mental health, particularly among young people. The study presents issues regarding the possible effects on users' mental well-being and learning experiences. The majority of respondents (65.4%) reported utilizing educational pages on Instagram as a source of knowledge and learning. This indicates recognition of the platform's potential for educational content and highlights the opportunity to harness Instagram's popularity for educational purposes.

It is interesting to consider that more participants (54.6%) identified blogs that provide relevant and useful information. This indicates an awareness of Instagram's value as a knowledge and learning platform. It is essential to keep in mind that just over one fifth of participants (27.8%) reported using pages related to studies, highlighting the need for further research into how to integrate educational content into Instagram.

Participants' answers to the question as to whether Instagram could eventually take the place of other learning portals provide valuable insight regarding their views and ambitions. A large percentage of respondents (87.2%) believed that Instagram should only be utilized as supplementary to existing educational resources instead of replacing

them completely. On the other hand, some respondents (12.8%) agreed that Instagram could potentially be a useful universal learning tool when used efficiently. This point of view highlights the unexplored opportunities and creative ideas that could be explored to make use of Instagram for educational purposes. However, the disparity in viewpoints generates significant issues for educators and executives. Hence, a balanced strategy that combines Instagram's strengths with those of other popular learning platforms might enhance its advantages and balance out/alleviate the weaknesses of each.

The results show an important gap between participants' actual use of Instagram and its capacity as a teaching tool, since half of participants (54.4%) indicated that Instagram had no impact on their educational objectives. This highlights the value of effective time-management strategies and mindful use of Instagram to avoid undesirable alternatives from negatively affecting courses of study. Furthermore, it is crucial to analyze critically whether Instagram's functionalities and design can support educational targets and support beneficial educational experiences.

6. Conclusion

Further research could focus on the characteristics of the platform that students find useful or wasteful to explore Instagram's potential for educational use. When using Instagram as an educational tool, educators may obtain significant insights by understanding the fundamental reasons for their views. Examining Instagram's impact on student engagement and learning could provide information on the application's effectiveness and impact on the development of teaching methods in the future. Additionally, a qualitative study could investigate students' particular observations and views on how Instagram has influenced their daily lives with the goal of gaining insight into the factors underlying their opinions. This could disclose specific features of Instagram that contribute to a student's perception of its value and offer ideas for how these elements might be used to enhance the learning process. Additional study is essential to comprehend in more depth the experiences and viewpoints driving these opinions, as well as to identify potential advantages of the use of Instagram that might support and boost student mental health. To give a more in-depth and unbiased overview of social media addiction and its impact on educational experiences, qualitative research methods might be significant. Universities must focus on creating outstanding, attractive, and helpful learning materials for Instagram if they are to deploy the app's educational value more effectively.

The results highlight the need to conduct additional research on Instagram's potential benefits for education. To attempt to bridge the gap between participants' current views on Instagram's role and its unfulfilled potential as a revolutionary educational tool, teachers and educational institutions should be thinking about methods. To maximize the platform's role in students' learning experiences, this could involve promoting educational materials on the platform, promoting engagement with subject-specific websites, and demonstrating ethical use standards.

In conclusion, the outcomes of this study show that, in the post-Coronavirus educational setting, Instagram may act as an effective tool for individuals to learn. It can encourage teamwork and boost efficiency. However, significant thought should be given to time management and reducing the possible drawbacks of excessive multitasking and distraction. By using Instagram, teachers can harness the potential of social media to help improve students' academic efforts and allow them to achieve success in a rapidly changing educational context.

6.1 Limitations

One of the study's limitations is the sample population, which was selected from one university only. As a result, generalizing the study's findings is not possible. In addition, the study's response rate was 33%. Another limitation is that because this study was quantitative, a more detailed understanding of the students' responses may have been obtained by implementing a qualitative data collection and analysis method. In addition, students who participate in an online survey may use online resources more frequently than those who do not, thereby skewing the results.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to acknowledge and thank the students who took the time to participate in the study.

Funding

No funding was received for this research study.

Availability of data and materials

The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

About the Author(s)

Bahar Graefen, MD, MScPH, PhD is Fulbright Scholar and working as Postdoctoral Visiting Researcher at Chicago State University. She is a member of the American Association of Immunologists (AAI), American Society for Microbiology (ASM) and American Public Health Association (APHA).

Nadeem Fazal, MD, PhD is Professor of Microbiology & Immunology at Chicago State University. He is a member of the American Association of Immunologists (AAI) and American Society for Microbiology (ASM). His areas of expertise include Immunology, Microbiology, Cell Biology, and Infectious Diseases.

References

- Carpenter, J. P., Morrison, S. A., Craft, M., & Lee, M. (2020). How and why are educators using Instagram? *Teaching and teacher education*, 96, 103149.
- Ekizer, F. N. (2021). The Impact of Covid 19 on English Language Learners: A Qualitative Case Study. *Language Teaching and Educational Research*, 4(1), 76-92.
- Erarslan, A. (2019). Instagram as an Education Platform for EFL Learners. *Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology-TOJET*, 18(3), 54-69.
- Hodges, C., Moore, S., Lockee, B., Trust, T., & Bond, A. (2020). The difference between emergency remote teaching and online learning. *EDUCAUSE Review*, 27.
- "Instagram." (n.d.). In Wikipedia. Retrieved May 25, 2023, from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Instagram>.
- König, J., Jäger-Biela, D. J., & Glutsch, N. (2020). Adapting to online teaching during COVID-19 school closure: teacher education and teacher competence effects among early career teachers in Germany. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 43(4), 608-622. doi: 10.1080/02619768.2020.1820272
- Marinoni, G., Van't Land, H., & Jensen, T. (2020). The impact of Covid-19 on higher education around the world. *IAU global survey report*, 23, 1-17.
- Richter, E., Carpenter, J. P., Meyer, A., & Richter, D. (2022). Instagram as a platform for teacher collaboration and digital social support. *Computers & Education*, 190, 104624.
- Sari, F. M., & Wahyudin, A. Y. (2019). Undergraduate Students' Perceptions Toward Blended Learning through Instagram in English for Business Class. *International Journal of Language Education*, 3(1), 64-73.
- Singaram, V. S., Naidoo, K. L., & Singh, S. (2022). Self-Directed Learning During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Perspectives of South African Final-Year Health Professions Students. *Advances in Medical Education and Practice*, 1-10.
- SMPerth. (n.d.). Instagram statistics [Webpage]. Retrieved May 25, 2023, from <https://www.smpertth.com/resources/instagram/instagram-statistics/>.
- Tess, P. A. (2013). The role of social media in higher education classes (real and virtual)—A literature review. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 29(5), A60-A68. doi: 10.1016/j.chb.2012.12.032

Appendix

Abbreviations

CSU: Chicago State University;

HEI: Higher education institution;

SPSS: Statistical Package for the Social Sciences;

USA: United States of America.

Creative Commons licensing terms

Author(s) will retain the copyright of their published articles agreeing that a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0) terms will be applied to their work. Under the terms of this license, no permission is required from the author(s) or publisher for members of the community to copy, distribute, transmit or adapt the article content, providing a proper, prominent and unambiguous attribution to the authors in a manner that makes clear that the materials are being reused under permission of a Creative Commons License. Views, opinions and conclusions expressed in this research article are views, opinions and conclusions of the author(s). Open Access Publishing Group and European Journal of Education Studies shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability caused in relation to/arising out of conflicts of interest, copyright violations and inappropriate or inaccurate use of any kind content related or integrated into the research work. All the published works are meeting the Open Access Publishing requirements and can be freely accessed, shared, modified, distributed and used in educational, commercial and non-commercial purposes under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License \(CC BY 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).