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THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN INFORMAL LEARNING ACROSS AGE GROUPS

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Annotation: *This article examines how social media supports informal learning across different age groups, focusing on youth, adults, and older adults. Informal learning, defined as self-directed and non-institutional knowledge acquisition, increasingly occurs on platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn. Despite stereotypes associating social media with distraction, research shows that digital platforms have become important environments for microlearning, skills development, and collaborative knowledge sharing. This integrative review identifies how learning motivations, digital behaviors, and platform preferences differ by age group. The study concludes with implications for educators, policy-makers, and platform designers to optimize social media environments for safe, meaningful, and equitable learning experiences.*

Keywords: *informal learning, social media, age groups, digital literacy, lifelong learning.*

РОЛЬ СОЦИАЛЬНЫХ СЕТЕЙ В НЕФОРМАЛЬНОМ ОБУЧЕНИИ СРЕДИ РАЗЛИЧНЫХ ВОЗРАСТНЫХ ГРУПП

Аннотация: *В данной статье анализируется, каким образом социальные сети поддерживают неформальное образование на примере молодежи, взрослых и пожилых людей. Неформальное образование представляет собой процесс получения знаний, осуществляемый самостоятельно и вне рамок институциональной системы, который все шире распространяется на таких платформах, как YouTube, Facebook, Instagram и LinkedIn. Несмотря на то, что социальные сети часто рассматриваются как отвлекающий фактор, исследования показывают, что эти цифровые пространства становятся важной средой для микрообучения, развития навыков и совместного обмена знаниями. Данный интегративный обзор выявляет различия в учебной мотивации, цифровом поведении и использовании платформ среди различных возрастных групп. В заключение предлагаются рекомендации для педагогов, разработчиков образовательной политики и дизайнеров платформ по оптимизации социальных сетей как более безопасной, содержательной и инклюзивной образовательной среды.*

Ключевые слова: *неформальное образование, социальные сети, возрастные группы, цифровая грамотность, непрерывное образование*

TURLI YOSH GURUHLARI O'RTASIDA NORASMIY TA'LIMDA IJTIMOYIY TARMOQLARNING O'RNI

Annotatsiya: Ushbu maqola ijtimoiy tarmoqlarning norasmiy ta'limni qanday qo'llab-quvvatlashini yoshlar, kattalar va keksalar misolida tahlil qiladi. Norasmiy ta'lim – bu o'z-o'zini boshqaruvchi va muassasalardan tashqarida kechadigan bilim olish jarayoni bo'lib, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram va LinkedIn kabi platformalarda tobora kengayib bormoqda. Ijtimoiy tarmoqlar ko'pincha chalg'ituvchi vosita sifatida tasvirlansa-da, tadqiqotlar ushbu raqamli maydonlar mikrota'lim, ko'nikmalarni rivojlantirish hamda hamkorlikda bilim almashish uchun muhim makonga aylanganini ko'rsatadi. Ushbu integrativ sharh yosh guruhlari o'rtasidagi o'quv motivatsiyalari, raqamli xatti-harakatlar va platformalardan foydalanishdagi farqlarni aniqlaydi. Tadqiqot yakunida pedagoglar, siyosat ishlab chiquvchilar va platforma dizaynerlari uchun ijtimoiy tarmoqlarni yanada xavfsiz, mazmunli va teng imkoniyatli o'quv muhiti sifatida optimallashtirish bo'yicha tavsiyalar beriladi.

Kalit so'zlar: norasmiy ta'lim, ijtimoiy tarmoqlar, yosh guruhlari, raqamli savodxonlik, uzluksiz ta'lim.

INTRODUCTION

The rise of social media has transformed communication, information exchange, and everyday learning practices across all age groups. Informal learning - unstructured, self-directed, and integrated into daily activities - has always existed, but digital platforms have amplified its reach and possibilities. YouTube tutorials, TikTok explanations, Instagram infographics, Facebook communities, and LinkedIn professional discussions now function as vast learning ecosystems. Scholars emphasize that multimodal content, participatory culture, and algorithm-driven personalization deepen users' engagement with knowledge beyond formal educational boundaries. Because people at different life stages engage with technology in distinct ways, a comparative understanding of social media as an informal learning tool is needed.

Younger users are often viewed as adept digital navigators who learn rapidly from short-form multimedia. Adults increasingly use social media to enhance professional skills, access just-in-time information, and expand networks. Older adults adopt social media more selectively, exploring practical, health-related, or socially relevant content while overcoming barriers in digital literacy. Despite differing habits, all age groups benefit from accessible, low-cost learning opportunities available through social platforms. However, the same digital environments also expose learners to misinformation, distractions, and unequal

access to technology. The objective of this study is therefore to analyze how social media enables informal learning across age groups, what differentiates their experiences, and how these insights can support lifelong learning.

METHODOLOGY

This article employs a qualitative integrative review synthesizing research in digital literacy, communication studies, and educational technology. Sources were selected based on relevance to informal learning behaviors, social media engagement, and generational differences. The review structure is based on thematic analysis, frequently used in educational research, allowing synthesis of diverse findings into patterns across age groups. Data from studies on YouTube learning, educational trends, Facebook community practices, and LinkedIn professional use were examined to identify recurring topics such as self-directed learning, digital confidence, credibility evaluation, participatory culture, and community-based knowledge exchange.

The analytical framework centers on three dimensions: technological engagement (confidence and frequency of use), learning motivations (professional, academic, personal), and interaction with content (consumption, creation, sharing). These categories enable systematic comparison across youth, adults, and older adults. Although the study does not use quantitative measures, the integrative method provides a comprehensive interpretive overview grounded in scholarly findings.

RESULTS

Young users engage most intensively with social media for informal learning. Platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram facilitate rapid consumption of visually rich content that aligns with youth cognitive preferences for brevity and multisensory input. Young learners frequently access tutorials, academic explanations, coding lessons, and science demonstrations. Their learning behaviors reflect media-mediated multitasking and high adaptability to fast-changing digital trends. According to recent studies, youth perceive social media as both an entertainment tool and an accessible learning space where they can grasp new concepts quickly.

Participation is central to youth learning. Many create educational posts, share study tips, or reinterpret content through remixes, comments, and collaborative challenges. Influencers and peer-generated content significantly shape their learning pathways, sometimes more strongly than formal instruction. However, this informal learning environment exposes young users to misinformation and superficial understanding when content prioritizes speed over depth.

Adults use social media primarily for practical learning and professional advancement. LinkedIn, YouTube, Facebook groups, and online forums are common environments where adults access job-related information, training materials, entrepreneurship guidance, and technical tutorials. Adults often seek reliable, expert-generated content and demonstrate selective, goal-oriented learning strategies. YouTube's long-form tutorials are widely used for learning software, repairing household devices, understanding administrative procedures, or updating industry-specific knowledge.

Adults also participate in peer learning through professional networks, where they exchange experiences, advice, and resources. Communities of practice on social media strengthen professional identity and allow adults to remain updated despite busy schedules. Compared with youth, adults display greater caution in evaluating credibility but still face challenges such as content overload and algorithmic echo chambers.

The elderly approach social media with different priorities, focusing mainly on staying connected with family and peers. However, these interactions frequently lead to informal learning, especially regarding health management, technology use, and personal hobbies. Facebook groups, messaging apps, and YouTube play significant roles in older adults' learning routines. Research indicates that social media enhances their sense of belonging and supports active aging by keeping them mentally engaged.

Digital literacy challenges persist among older adults: difficulties navigating interfaces, assessing credibility, and coping with rapid technological change. Nevertheless, when supported by accessible content and community encouragement,

older adults benefit from step-by-step tutorials and community advice. Their learning style is more deliberate and selective, prioritizing relevance and clarity over speed.

DISCUSSION

The findings highlight that although all age groups engage in informal learning on social media, their motivations, behaviors, and outcomes differ significantly. Youth gravitate toward rapid, visually dynamic learning shaped by participatory culture. Adults prioritize practical, career-related learning and selective consumption of expert content. Older adults use social media primarily for social connection, which subsequently leads to targeted learning. These differences reflect broader generational patterns in cognitive preferences, digital experience, and social environments.

Social media's strengths include accessibility, diversity of information, personalization, and collaborative knowledge-building. Micro-learning formats are particularly effective for users who need quick solutions. The participatory dimension encourages creativity and peer support. However, social media also presents limitations: misinformation, low-quality content, distractions, cyber risks, and unequal digital literacy. Youth face risks of superficial understanding and exposure to unreliable information. Adults struggle with overload and maintaining focus. Older adults face usability barriers and vulnerability to misinformation.

To optimize social media for informal learning, platform designers should promote credibility indicators, clear categorization of educational content, and tools that support self-directed learning. Educators can integrate social media resources into teaching while guiding learners in evaluating digital sources. Policy-makers should address digital inequality by supporting access and literacy programs, especially for older adults and marginalized groups.

CONCLUSION

Social media has become a central environment for informal learning across all age groups. Youth, adults, and older adults each engage with platforms differently based on motivations, digital competencies, and learning needs. Despite challenges, social media expands opportunities for acquiring knowledge, developing skills, and participating in lifelong learning. As digital ecosystems continue to evolve,

understanding age-specific learning patterns is essential for creating inclusive, effective, and equitable learning environments. Strengthening digital literacy, promoting credible content, and designing user-friendly platforms will ensure that social media continues to serve as a valuable tool for informal learning at every stage of life.

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