

The Influence Of Twitter On Social Support Among University Students

Imran Ssemuddu

ORCID iD: 0000-0001-5009-9107

Email: ssemudduimran@gmail.com

Department of Communication International Islamic University Malaysia

Prof. Dr. Saodah Wok

ORCID iD: 0000-0002-4398-7760

Email: drsaodah@gmail.com

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Abstract

Social media has become a large part of modern-day lives, especially in the use of Twitter among young adults globally. As such, this study aims to analyze the relationships that Twitter usage, attitude, and social experience may have with social support among university students. The study is guided by social support theory, and it adopts a quantitative research design using the survey method with a questionnaire as the research instrument for data collection. A total of 250 university students from International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) participated in the study. The findings of the study indicate that students do use Twitter for social support among them. The levels of Twitter usage, attitude, social experience, and social support were found to be high. The study also found significant relationships between Twitter usage, attitude, and social support. However, the social experience in using Twitter was insignificant for social support. Thus, the social support theory used in this study is partially supported. Suggestions for future research are also provided.

Keywords: Twitter Usage; Social Experience; Attitude; Social Support; Social Support Theory; Students

Introduction

Twitter has gained popularity since its launch in 2006, with an average of 368 million active users as of 2022 [1]. Twitter encourages extended learning and knowledge sharing among students. There is a rational relationship between the use of Twitter and its influence on social support among students. Numerous researchers have found Twitter to be one of the largest and most popular social media platforms available [2]. Twitter facilitates the exchange of ideas, communication, collaboration, connections, and social support among people from

diverse backgrounds [3]. Twitter users can create and receive information anywhere and anytime. Twitter is easily accessible via mobile devices like smartphones, tablets, and personal computers.

Additionally, research indicates a lack of social support among university students [4]. Social support focuses on the level of students' confidence that they can obtain help [5]. This support is vital in promoting a better quality of life and good mental health, encouraging interactions among students during their social adaptation [6].

Objective of the Study

The main objective of this paper is to examine the influence of Twitter usage on social support among university students.

The specific objectives are: (a) to find out the usage of Twitter among university students; (b) to determine the levels of Twitter usage, attitude, social experience, and social support in using Twitter among university students; and (c) to determine the relationships that Twitter usage, attitude, and social experience may have with social support among university students.

Twitter usage, attitude, social experience, and social support

Twitter is among the top platforms that educators have conveyed preference in their classroom activities, and it is ranked alongside other popular social networking site platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and LinkedIn. Many people use Twitter to keep updated with their friends, family, and news besides following celebrities/stars [7]. Twitter is an important educational resource that encourages networking, research and collaboration among students especially those that share common interests. There is a rational relationship between the use of Twitter and social support among students. Twitter also facilitates supportive relationships publicly and privately on a wide range of topics to everyone worldwide. Private communication is made possible by means of direct private messages. The increased use and popularity of social media, including Twitter, means that university students can use social media platforms to garner social support from friends and family. The social interaction processes and patterns of information exchange taking place on Twitter positively influence the sense of community among students [8]. Similarly, it facilitates teaching through play, and generating ideas and thus Twitter is considered a good platform for teachers, students, and parents to increase productivity and responsiveness.

Attitude towards Twitter in regards to its usage in the classroom and outside is based on the use of Twitter for sharing information, offering suggestions, and requesting assistance. Other reasons include making connections with others, engaging in public commentary, exploring digital personality presence, and seeking new networks. There is a positive attitude towards Twitter as a platform for microblogging where students spend their time sharing educational information, videos, news, quotes, photos, and memes [9]. This avenue provides a dimension of how Twitter is used and perceived by students. Some university instructors also use Twitter for personal and professional use, and they have encouraged their students to use it.

Previous studies have established the influence of Twitter on social support among university students for microblogging practices in informative settings [10]. Understanding the role of social support in promoting psychological well-being is crucial for university students, as social support is one of the determinants of students' social adaptation. Twitter, just like other social media platforms, is seen as a tool that links students and allows them to socialize in diverse online communities, as well as allowing them to practice actual online communications.

Student affairs professionals have plenty of opportunities to leverage technology in order to help students engage with their institution, enhance their learning, and improve their academic and psychosocial experiences. There are relationships between the usage of Twitter (behaviour) and social support, attitude towards Twitter and social support, and social experience in using Twitter and social support. Social support on Twitter is in the form of groups that have accounts and readily offer care to persons who approach them. For instance, there are Twitter social support accounts created specifically for university students by their student union to manage and offer support and care, as well as linking students to university management. Indeed, Twitter has turned out to be an increasingly public means by which individuals, lecturers, and university management have organized social support.

Social support theory, which is applied in this paper, focuses on the social support individuals rely on that provides social networks for coping with negative events [11]. The theory resonates with this study due to the importance of social support as an interpersonal resource that enables individuals to cope with anxiety and stress. Social support theory describes the link between social support and mental health, reflecting the role of specific supportive actions in enacting support and providing assistance to help the affected individual overcome stress.

Conceptual framework

This paper suggests that the usage of Twitter, social experience in using Twitter, and attitude towards Twitter are related to social support among students. To test these relationships, the independent variables (usage of Twitter, social experience in using Twitter, and attitude towards Twitter) and dependent variable (social support) are proposed in the conceptual framework (Figure 1) below.

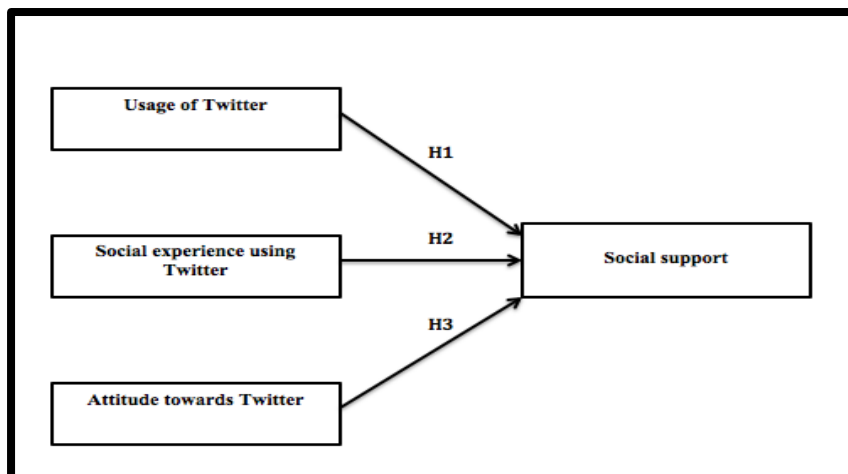


Figure 1. A conceptual framework for the influence of Twitter on social support among university students. Based on the conceptual framework, the following hypotheses have been developed:

H1: There is a positive relationship between the usage of Twitter and social support.

H2: There is a positive relationship between social experiences in using Twitter and social support.

H3: There is a positive relationship between attitude towards Twitter and social support.

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research design, using the survey method with a questionnaire as the research instrument for data collection. In total, 250 university students from International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) participated in the study. The data collection instrument items for students' Twitter usage, social support, and attitude towards Twitter were selected from [12], [13], [14], and [15]. The questionnaire items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *Strongly disagree* to 5 = *Strongly agree*. All the variables were found to be reliable with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding .70. Data were analyzed using zero-order followed by simple multiple regression to determine the relationships between the independent and dependent variable in order to accept or reject the hypotheses.

Findings

The majority of the respondents were female Malaysian students who were 22–25 years old and pursuing a degree. More Malaysian (61.6%) than international (38.4%) students participated in the study. Overall, the students regarded Twitter usage highly in a positive and motivating way for them to acquire social support. No relationship was found between the social experience in using Twitter and social support (Table 1). However, the relationships between Twitter usage and social support ($r = .514$, $p = .000$) and attitude towards Twitter and social support ($r = .620$, $p = .000$) were found to be statistically significant. The students also believed that the social experience in using Twitter in terms of proficiency is great for obtaining information, news, and ideas, although it does not necessarily translate to obtaining social support. In addition, the findings indicate that students often use Twitter for information search (ideas and news) and social support among them. The levels of attitude, social experience, and social support were found to be high, indicating that the higher the university students' attitude and social experience in using Twitter, the higher the social support.

Table 1.

Zero-order and bivariate correlation between variables

Variable (N = 250)	Social Support	Twitter Usage	Social Experience	Attitude
Social Support	1			
Twitter Usage	$r = .514^{**}$, $\rho = .000$	1		
Social Experience	$r = .097$, $\rho = .124$	$r = .162^{**}$, $\rho = .010$	1	
Attitude	$r = .620^{**}$, $\rho = .000$	$r = .663^{**}$, $\rho = .000$	$r = .141^{**}$, $\rho = .026$	1

Conclusion

This paper examined the usage of Twitter among university students. One sample *t*-test was used to analyze the levels of Twitter usage, attitude towards Twitter, social experience in using Twitter, and social support among university students. Correlation analysis was employed to determine the relationships that Twitter usage, attitude, and social experience might have with social support among university students. Using Twitter can provide social support, and the study found significant relationships between two of the independent

variables (Twitter usage and attitude) and social support among university students. University students viewed Twitter as a channel for obtaining ideas and information that is easy to use during their free time. Twitter is a great platform for networking, resourceful for up-to-date on current events, connecting with experts, and information sharing on papers, and articles. The findings found that in terms of social experience, students used Twitter to obtain social support from friends and to learn, facilitating the acquisition of knowledge during their studies. Further, the study found that social experience in using Twitter is useful but inadequate to guarantee students can obtain social support. A recent study (16), noted that Twitter is a source of social support among individuals facing loneliness. This is in agreement with our study that students in universities use Twitter for support.

Finally, future research could use the qualitative research design, for example, by employing focus group discussions (FGD) and in-depth interviews to obtain more detailed information and to understand the issue of using Twitter for social support. We also suggest the findings of the study be examined further and turned into policies to benefit students and administrators of universities. A meta-data analysis should be done on social media effects on social support and attitude among students. Ideally, a meta-data analysis would offer panel data to extensively assess the effects or outcomes of Twitter use and determine whether its participation in media use leads to social media use (Twitter/X).

Declarations/Compliance with Ethical Standards

Funding

The authors declare that there are no financial implications or funding given to the authors for this study. Also, the authors have no conflict of interest regarding this study.

Consent to Publish

The authors affirm that human research participants provided informed consent for publication of their views in this study.

Data Availability Statement

The authors affirm that all the data used for analyses in the study is available on request

Consent to participate

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study before filling out the questionnaire.

Disclosure of potential competing interests

The authors certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

Imran Ssemuddu

PhD candidate in communication at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). He conducts research on media use, political communication, new media, and intercultural communication. He gained a BSc (Hons) in Information Technology from Asia Pacific University Malaysia/Staffordshire University UK and a Master of Human Science in Mass Communication from IIUM. [Email: ssemudduimran@gmail.com]

Saodah Wok

Was a professor at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) before retiring in 2022. Saodah Wok was listed in Who's Who in Asia (2007) and Who's Who in the World (2008). Her research interests are in organizational communication, new media, journalism, health communication, women's studies, and people with disabilities.

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