Usage and Influence of Social Media Platform for Forestry Education: A Study of College of Forestry, Sirsi, University of Agricultural Sciences, Dharwad

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DOI : 10.32344/jld/v11/i2/2025/39-52

Abstract

Based on a survey of 115 users of College of Forestry, Sirsi under University of Agricultural Sciences, Dharwad using questionnaire assesses the usage and influence of social media platforms for Forestry Education. It is found that YouTube is the most popular social media platform (79.1%, N=91), followed by WhatsApp (61.7%, N=71) and Instagram (46.1%, N=53). It is found that Videos/tutorials (78.3%, N=90) are the most commonly used educational content, followed by lecture notes (67.0%, N=77), Blogs (33.9%, N=39). It is observed from that the majority of the respondents (53.9%, N=62) participate in forestry-related webinars occasionally. And a large proportion of the respondents (72.2%, N=83) agree that social media made it easier to find information related to career opportunity in forestry. The different challenges faced by the respondents while using social media platforms is discussed. It shows that 21.7% (N=25) of respondents reported that the lack of reliable content is a significant



challenge while using social media for academic or professional purposes. The study concludes with several recommendations for authorities, teachers and librarian.

Keywords : Social Media Platform; Forestry Education; Usage; Influence; College of Forestry; Sirsi, Dharwad

1. Introduction :

Forestry education like any other disciplines is undergoing rapid changes in terms of its curriculum, pedagogy, deliver practices, etc. Digital revolution has literally changed the whole scenario of education delivery systems by offering several modes for learning as well as communicating with others. Social media platforms seem to be bridging the gap between conventional educational systems and modern digital world. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter (now X), Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube are not just for personal use or entertainment anymore. They have become a powerful medium for professional networking, learning and building communities. Forestry educators, researchers, policymakers and enthusiasts are increasingly recognizing the importance of these platforms in raising awareness, promoting sustainable practices and fostering collective action. Hence an attempt is made in this study to identify the use and influence of social media by students.

2. Review of Literature :

The study conducted by Behera (2015) observed that with 29 percent of the world's population using social media, platforms like Facebook can help in networking, awareness creation and environmental volunteerism in action. In India, there is a trend that rural regions are starting to tap into the digital scene, which means there is an increase in social media penetration that can be leveraged for biodiversity conservation. Ahmed et al.(2019) noticed that both students and teachers at educational institutions communicate through social media such as Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp. It was also found that 34% of social media users in India fall

under college going students, 27% social media users are male youths, and 12% social media users are school children. Chung, et al.(2020) found that young people agree and know the importance of living in eco-friendly environment and life style. But, regardless of seeking this information through social media, they hardly interact or share the social media posts. Bogdanou, et al.(2013) conducted study on use of the internet and social media in the forestry profession in the United Kingdom. The study found that social media can enhance communication between forestry professionals, policymakers, and the public. Sharma (2024) feels that social media allows students to connect with professionals and experts in their field of interest, providing insights into real-world applications of their studies (Sharma, 2024). Khan et al.(2020) found that Mobile devices and social media have become integral to students' academic success and career enhancement and approximately 67% of surveyed students acknowledged mobile devices and social media's role in academic performance.

3. Research Methodology :

The present study has been conducted to know the usage of social media platform among students, research scholars and faculty of forestry and also to know the impact of social media platform on teaching-learning process in forestry

Keeping in view the objectives of study a survey method of research was adopted using questionnaire developed through Google forms. Questionnaire were sent to 145 mails among randomly identified study population of COFS. 115 valid responses were received and the data was processed using SPSS V16 statistical software.

4. College of Forestry, Sirsi :

The College of Forestry, Sirsi is one of the premier institutes of forestry education in the country and a constituent college of University of Agricultural Sciences, Dharwad. University of Agricultural Sciences, Dharwad started a four-year Forestry Degree Programme from the academic year 1985-86.

Initially, the Forestry Degree Programme functioned as an independent Department of the College of Agriculture, Dharwad. Forestry Degree Programme was upgraded into a full –fledged college owing to the efforts of the public and the University after it was shifted to Sirsi. During 1997-98, Post-Graduate (PG) degree programmes were initiated at College of Forestry, Sirsi. At present Ph D, PG and UG programs in Forestry are being offered and 296 students are pursuing their studies. A total of 24 teaching and 18 non-teaching staff work in the college.

The library is housed in an independent building within the College campus. Over 20000 titles related to Forestry published by international and national publications are available for reference and are arranged as pet the standard library practices for easy retrieval. Access to e-resources (CeRA, E-Books, ONOS, Online Journals, Agristat, Krishikosh, Shodhaganga and so on) through EZproxy service is provided to all the students and staff of the college.

5. Results and Discussion:

Table 1: Type of users

Type	Frequency	Percent
Under Graduate	91	79.1
Post Graduate	15	13.0
Research Scholar	3	2.6
Faculty	6	5.2
Total	**115**	**100.0**

Table 1 depicts that majority of the respondents are undergraduates (79.1%, N=91), followed by postgraduates (13%, N=15), faculty (5.2%, N=6) and research scholars (2.6%, N=3).

Table 2: Age Wise Distribution

Age	Frequency	Percent
Less than 25 Years	106	92.2
26-35 Years	6	5.2
36-45 Years	1	0.9
More than 45 Years	2	1.7
Total	**115**	**100.0**

Table 2 shows that majority of the respondents (92.2%, N=106) fall in the age group of less than 25 years, 5.2% (N=6) belong to 26 to 35 years age group, 1.7% (N=2) are more than 45 years and only one (0.9%) belong to the age group of 36-45 years.

Table 3: Gender Wise Distribution

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	31	27.0
Female	84	73.0
Total	**115**	**100.0**

From table 3 it is observed that majority of the respondents are female with 73% (N=84), followed by male which is 23% (N=31).

Table 4: Field of study or expertise

Field of study or Expertise	Frequency	Percent
Forestry	82	71.3
Silviculture and Agroforestry	12	10.4
Forest Biology and Tree Improvement	9	7.8
Forest Resource Management	2	1.8
Forest Products and Utilization	6	5.2
Other than Forestry	4	3.5
Total	**115**	**100.0**



It is foundfrom table 4 that majority of the respondents have interest in forestry (71.3%, N=82) as field of study, followed Silviculture and Agroforestry by 10.4% (N=12), Forest Biology and Tree Improvement (7.8%, N=9), Forest Resource Management (5.2%, N=6).

Table 5: Social Media Platform : Usage N=115

Social Media Platform Used	Frequency	Percent
Facebook	13	11.3
Instagram	53	46.1
Youtube	91	79.1
Telegram	41	35.7
Whatsapp	71	61.7
Twitter/X	3	2.6
Linkedin	10	8.7
Research Gate	13	11.3
Academia.Edu	8	6.9

Table 5 reveals that YouTube is the most popular social media platform (79.1%, N=91),followed by WhatsApp (61.7%, N=71), Instagram (46.1%, N=53), Telegram (36%, N=41), Face Book and Research Gate (11.3%, N=13), Linked In with 8.7% (N=10), Academia.edu with 6.1% (N=8) among the study population. And Twitter/X (2.6%, N=3) is least popular one. We can note that the platforms that allow video content and easy communication are highly preferred.

Table 6: Time Spent on Social Media Platform

Duration Spent	Frequency	Percent
Less than 1 Hour	38	33.0
1-2 Hours	64	55.7
3-5 Hours	12	10.4
More than 5 Hours	1	0.9
Total	**115**	**100.0**

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JLD : Vol. 11. No. 2. August - 2025
www.jld.net.in
ISSN : 2395 - 518 X

Table 6 shows that most respondents spend 1-2 hours daily on social media (55.7%, N=64), with a notable portion (33%, N=38) spending less than 1 hour, 10.4% (N=12) spending 3-5 hours and 0.9% (N=1) spending more than 5 hours.

Table 7: Devices Used to Access Social Media Platform

Device Used	Frequency	Percent
Smartphone	94	81.7
Laptop	2	1.7
Tablet	1	0.9
All Three	18	15.7
Total	**115**	**100.0**

Table 7 shows that majority of respondents (81.7%, N=94) access social media via smartphone, followed by those using all three devices (15.7%, N=18), (1.7%, N=2) using laptop and (0.9%, N=1) using only tablet.

Table 8: Type of Educational Content Accessed

N=115

Educational Content	Frequency	Percent
Lecture Notes/Slides	77	67.0
Videos/Tutorials	90	78.3
Blogs	39	33.9
Infographics	6	6.1
Webinars	19	16.5
Informal Group Discussion/Podcast	8	7.0
News Relating To Forestry Development	21	18.3

From table 8 it is found that Videos/tutorials (78.3%, N=90) are the most commonly used educational content, followed by lecture notes (67.0%,N=77), Blogs (33.9%, N=39), News relating to forestry development (18.3%, N=21), Webinars (16.5%, N=19).Informal group discussion/podcast (7%,N=8) and infographics (6.1%,N=6) are the least used content types.

Table 9: Followers of Forestry-Related Pages

Followers	Frequency	Percent
Yes	62	53.9
No	53	46.1
Total	**115**	**100.0**

Table 9 shows that 53.9%, (N=62) of the respondents follow forestry related pages while, 46.1% (N=53) do not follow them.

Table 10: Participation in Forestry related webinars

Participation	Frequency	Percent
Frequently	16	13.9
Occasionally	62	53.9
No, But I am interested	27	23.5
No and I am not interested	10	8.7
Total	**115**	**100.0**

It can be observed from the Table 10 that the majority of the respondents (53.9%, N=62) participate in forestry-related webinars occasionally, while 13.9% (N=16) participate frequently, 23.5% (N=27) are interested but have not yet participated. Whereas, 8.7% (N=10) are not interested.

Table 11: Perceived benefits of Social Media

N=115

Statements	Frequency	Percent
Social media has enhanced my understanding of Forestry concept	67	58.3
Helps me stay updated with recent trends in Forestry	80	69.6
I find it easier to connect with Forestry Experts and Peers via social media	65	56.5
Social media provides better access to Learning Resources compared to Traditional Methods	58	50.4
I feel that discussion of social media is academically enriching	69	60.0
Social media has made it easier to find information related to Career Opportunity in Forestry	83	72.2

From Table 11 it is observed that a large proportion of the respondents (72.2%,N=83) agree that social media made it easier to find information related to career opportunity in forestry, also 69.6% (N=80) respondents are of the opinion that social media has helped them stay updated with recent trends in forestry, 60.0% (N=69) of them feel that discussion of social media is academically enriching, 58.3% (N=67) of the respondents are of the opinion that social media has enhanced their understanding of forestry concept, 56.5% (N=65) of the respondents find it easier to connect with forestry experts via social media, 50.4% (N=58) of the respondents agree that social media provides better access to learning resources compared to traditional methods.

Table 12: Participation in Social Media Groups

Participated in Social Media Groups	Frequency	Percent
Yes	72	62.6
No	43	37.4
Total	**115**	**100.0**

Table 12 reveals that 62.6% (N=72) of the total respondents have participated in social media groups whereas 37.4% (N=43) have not participated in any of the social media groups.

Table13: Usefulness of Social Media Groups

Usefulness	Frequency	Percent
Not Useful	30	26.1
Useful	80	69.6
Very Useful	5	4.3
Total	**115**	**100.0**

Table 13 observed that 69.6% (N=80) of the respondents found social media groups as useful, whereas 26.1% (N=30) found it not useful, and only 4.3% (N=5) of them found it very useful.

Table14: Encountering misleading information

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes, frequently	18	15.7
Yes occasionally	36	31.3
No	61	53.0
Total	**115**	**100.0**

From table14, it is observed that 53.0% (N=61) of the respondents have not encountered any misleading information on social media whereas, 31.3% (N=36) have noticed misleading information occasionally and 15.7% (N=18) have come across the misleading information frequently.

Table15: Application of knowledge/skills from social media

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	74	64.3
No	41	35.7
Total	**115**	**100.0**

Table 15 depicts that 64.3% (N=74) of the respondents have applied the knowledge or skill gained from social media to course work, field work or research, whereas 35.7% (N=41) have not.

Table 16: Replacing traditional learning methods by Social Media

Opinion	Frequency	Percent
Yes	61	53.0
No	54	47.0
Total	**115**	**100.0**

From table 16 it is observed that 53% (N=61) of the respondents are of the opinion that social media can replace traditional learning methods, whereas 47.0% (N=54) think that social media cannot replace traditional learning methods.

Table 17: Beneficial aspects of social media

Benefits	Frequency	Percent
Easy access to materials	75	65.2
Peer Learning Opportunity	39	33.9
Interaction with Forestry Experts	57	49.6
Quick Updates on News/Events	69	60.0
Informal Discussion	26	22.6
Sharing Personal Research Findings	37	32.2

From table it is observed that the majority of the respondents (65.2%, N=75) found easy access to materials as the most useful feature of social media. Also 60.0% (N=69) of the respondents appreciated the ability to stay updated with the latest news and events, 49.6% (N=57) feel that interaction with forestry experts gave significant benefits from social media, 33.9% (N=39) of the respondents voted for peer learning opportunity as a useful benefit from social media. 32.2% (N=37) of the respondents have found sharing personal research findings as useful with the help of social media, and 22.6% (N=26) of the respondents feel that informal discussion gives a significant benefit.

Table18: Challenges faced while using social media

N=115

Challenges Faced	Frequency	Percent
Lack of Reliable Content	25	21.7
Distraction from Academic Work	22	19.1
Limited Expert presence	19	16.5
Difficulty in Filtering Relevant Information	24	20.9
Time Management Issues	15	13.0
Data Privacy Concerns	3	2.6
Free Accessibility is not available	1	0.9



Table 18 shows that 21.7% (N=25) of respondents reported that the lack of reliable content is a significant challenge while using social media for academic or professional purposes. 20.9% (N=24) of respondents faced problem with filtering out irrelevant information amid the vast amount of content available,19.1% of respondents were of the opinion that social media often distracts them from their academic responsibilities,16.5% (N=19) feel that there is limited expert presence,13.0% (N=15) have faced time management difficulties,2.6% (N=3) have faced challenges related to data privacy, 0.9% (N=1) feel there is lack of freely accessible contents.

Table 19: Role of social media in the upcoming years

Role	Frequency	Percent
Will increase and become essential	89	77.4
Will remain same	23	20.0
Will decrease in importance	3	2.6
Total	**115**	**100.0**

It is observed from Table 19 that the majority of respondents (77.4%, N=89) believe that social media will increase its importance and become an essential tool in the next five years, 20.0% (N=23) of respondents think that the role of social media will remain unchanged. While, only 2.6% (N=3) of respondents believe that social media will decrease in importance.

Table 20: Overall Effectiveness of Social Media

Overall Effectiveness	Frequency	Percent
Excellent	23	20.0
Good	77	67.0
Fair	11	9.6
Poor	4	3.5
Total	**115**	**100.0**

Table 20 shows that the majority (67.0%, N=77) of respondents rated social media as good in terms of its overall effectiveness. 20.0% (N=23)

of respondents consider social media as excellent. At the same time 9.6% (N=11) of the respondents rated social media platforms as fair and only 3.5% (N=4) of respondents consider the effectiveness of social media platforms as poor.

6. Suggestions and Conclusions:

The study highlights the vital role social media plays in the academic and professional lives of students, research scholars and faculty, particularly in the field of forestry. The study found that the social media platforms like YouTube, WhatsApp and Instagram are used widely for academic purpose, networking and also to stay updated with the latest trends and to find information related to career opportunity in forestry field.

Moreover, the study reveals that while social media has several benefits, which includes easy access to educational content and interactive discussions, there are also challenges such as the misleading information, difficulty in filtering relevant content and distraction from academic work exist. In spite of the challenges, a majority of the respondents believe that social media is an effective tool in learning and can replace the traditional learning methods.

In this regard a policy on use of social media in the campus needs to be developed. Social media needs to be integrated into the curriculum in general and use of social media be promoted as a pedagogy for teaching – learning purpose. Social media groups need to be created by teachers to interact with student community. Webinars need be organized on various forestry related issues. Teachers are encouraged to create forestry related content on social media. Awareness programs have to be organized by the library on the use of social media. Media literacy programs have to be organized regularly by the library.

Since social media will continue to grow in importance in future, educational institutions and professionals should be aware of the strong merits of social media and at the same time mitigate the costs so as to maximize the utility of social media as an educative resource.



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