

Social Media: Influences on Education

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[See table of contents](#)

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Griffin, M. & Zinskie, C. D. (Eds.). (2021) *Social Media: Influences on Education*, Information Age Publishing, 337 pages, 45,04 (paperback). ISBN 978-1-64802-655-3

Social Media: Influences on Education, edited by Marlynn M. Griffin and Cordelia D. Zinskie (2021), is a timely and comprehensive exploration of how social media shapes educational experiences for both students and teachers. For students, the book examines how social media fosters informal learning, enhances digital literacy, and encourages engagement with global issues such as equity and social justice. It also addresses critical challenges such as cyber-harassment, misinformation, and the importance of cultivating responsible online behaviour. For teachers, the book highlights how social media can support professional development, resource-sharing, and collaboration while also serving as a tool for advocacy and the development of 21st-century skills. By exploring both student and teacher perspectives, the book offers practical strategies and critical reflections on the transformative potential of social media in education.

The editors bring extensive expertise to this work. Griffin, a professor at Georgia Southern University, in Statesboro, Georgia, specializes in educational technology and the integration of digital tools in teaching and learning, with a focus on how these technologies influence instructional practices and professional development. Zinskie, also a professor at Georgia Southern University, has a research background in educational psychology, teacher education, and research methods, particularly the integration of technology into teaching and its impact on student outcomes. Together, they offer a robust foundation for understanding social media's role in contemporary education.

Griffin and Zinskie begin the introductory chapter by stating their surprise at the overwhelming response to their call for proposals at the outset of developing this

book. This enthusiasm brought together a diverse, multinational group of contributors whose work spans a wide range of topics and research studies. The resulting ten chapters, thoughtfully organized into four sections, explore distinct aspects of social media's influence on education, showcasing the depth and breadth of perspectives that emerged from this collaboration. The first section, *Youth and College Students*, examines social media's influence on younger learners, including its effects on school principals' leadership practices. It also addresses issues such as cyber-harassment among undergraduates and the intentional use of social networking sites by teacher candidates. The second section, *Professional Development in Content Areas*, focuses on how social media can function as a hub for teacher professional development through subject-specific knowledge sharing, often filling gaps caused by a lack of school infrastructure for in-service teachers. It also explores the opportunities for social media to be used as an instructional tool to address 21st century skills such as digital literacy through collaboration and meaningful participation. This section also examines the notion that there is an inundation of information and sometimes misinformation available on social media platforms; the authors thus identify a need for students to develop critical thinking skills to parse through and to also consider a context different than the one in which they live (e.g., in the study of history). The third section, *Higher Education Learning*, explores the role of social media in higher education, with considerations shared for how to intentionally incorporate social media into the classroom while considering learner needs. Additionally, the necessity of guidance and rules to support student learning through social networking sites was presented, to align particularly with student perceptions of learning and satisfaction. Finally, the *Social Justice and Activism* section examines social media as a platform for learning about social justice and driving activism and societal change. The importance of counterstories and their ability to give voice to marginalized populations was discussed as were the tensions between *passive* or *active* participation and *authentic* and *academic* engagement on social media. Lastly, there was an examination of social media's role in supporting teacher activist groups by enabling information sharing, community building, and collective support, especially amid the pressures of neoliberal policies and divisive current events.



To provide a balanced review of *Social Media*, it is important to critically examine both its strengths and limitations. Its strengths lie in its comprehensive coverage, spanning multiple educational levels—from K-12 schools to higher education and professional development among educators—that allow readers to gain a broad perspective on social media's influence across diverse learning environments. Thematic organization is another asset, with sections dedicated to youth and college students, professional development, higher education learning, and social justice/activism. This clear structure enables focused exploration of social media's varied impacts within each area. Additionally, the inclusion of both empirical and theoretical perspectives enhances the book's relevance for a wide audience, combining practical insights for educators with conceptual frameworks valuable to scholars. A particular strength is the emphasis on social media as a tool for activism and social change, offering a contemporary lens on digital platforms' potential to support educational and societal goals for equity. Practical applications for educators are woven throughout, providing actionable guidance on integrating social media into professional learning and classroom instruction. Overall, a notable strength is its balanced approach in addressing social media's impact and potential for both students and educators. This dual perspective is particularly valuable, as it highlights social media's role not only in shaping the experiences and development of young learners but also in supporting educators' professional growth and instructional strategies. By examining the influence of social media across these distinct yet interconnected groups, the book offers a more comprehensive understanding of the platform's educational implications.

However, the book's broad scope means certain topics may lack depth, which could leave readers looking for more detailed analysis on specific issues, such as adolescent development or the long-term effects of social media use. As with many edited volumes, there is some variability in the quality and depth of individual chapters, due to differences in contributors' approaches, affecting overall coherence. While the book addresses the challenges of social media, it could offer more concrete solutions to issues like cyber-harassment and digital distractions, making its guidance more practical for educators facing these challenges. Furthermore, the book tends to highlight social media's benefits, potentially underemphasizing critical challenges or negative impacts, such as privacy concerns



and mental health effects. Finally, its primary focus on U.S. educational contexts limits its applicability for international readers, or those seeking a more global perspective. Overall, the book provides a well-rounded examination of social media's educational impact, but it could benefit from deeper exploration of certain topics, more consistent quality across chapters, and broader international perspectives.

Building on the strengths and limitations of *Social Media*, several key areas for future research emerge, which could deepen understanding and address existing gaps in this field. Alternatively, existing research in these areas could be featured in a follow-up volume to *Social Media*. First, more in-depth studies are needed to better understand social media's unintended negative impacts, including digital distractions, cyberbullying, misinformation, and privacy concerns. The widespread accessibility of social media through various devices (e.g., cell phones, tablets, and laptops) raises concerns about its impact on learning—for instance, cell phones in classrooms can distract from instruction—and its potential to harm student mental health. These risks may lead to various personal and academic challenges, especially as students begin using social media at increasingly younger ages. Longitudinal research could help track these effects over time, focusing on students' well-being, academic performance, and engagement. Additionally, it is important to examine how students and teachers perceive, evaluate, and critically assess the overwhelming amount of information encountered on social media. Understanding these processes can help ensure the development of informed decision-making skills. Second, exploring culturally diverse and international perspectives is essential, as most current studies focus on U.S. contexts. Comparative research across countries could reveal how factors like technology access, cultural attitudes, and policies influence social media's role in education. Third, the potential of social media for social justice and activism within educational settings warrants further investigation, including frameworks for guiding educators in balancing advocacy with academic goals. Fourth, social media's use for professional development and teacher collaboration, particularly in under-resourced schools, could be studied to evaluate its long-term effects on teacher morale, effectiveness, and student outcomes. Fifth, identification of strategies to promote digital literacy and safe online behaviours among students



are critical. Research could develop and assess interventions that foster critical thinking and responsible social media use. Sixth, studies on social media's impact on cognitive and emotional development in young learners could inform age-appropriate guidelines, while longitudinal research might explore its influence on academic and career trajectories. Seventh, as AI-driven algorithms increasingly shape students' experiences on social media, research could examine their effects on exposure to information, learning resources, and peer influences. Eighth, examining long-term changes in educational practices and student behaviour stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic could provide insights into how pandemic-driven social media habits influence learning, mental health, and digital literacy. Finally, timely areas for research include examining social media bans in classrooms and identifying best practices for subject-specific integration, with case studies and experiments tailored to disciplines in the STEM, humanities, and arts fields.

In practical terms, *Social Media* offers educators, policymakers, administrators, and even students and their families valuable insights that can be applied across various educational settings. The book provides a well-rounded perspective that can inform and enlighten a broad audience. Students can gain a deeper understanding of the platforms they use daily, helping them make more mindful choices about their online interactions. For parents, the book offers a window into the ways social media has an impact on learning and development, equipping them with knowledge to support their children's educational and social media experiences more effectively. School counselors, social workers, and those involved in educational policy will find the book's insights relevant for addressing social media's role in student well-being, equity, and digital literacy. Ultimately, the book's breadth makes it a resource with practical takeaways for anyone invested in the responsible and informed use of social media within educational contexts.

In a world where social media has become an enduring part of our personal and educational landscapes, *Social Media* serves as a vital resource to help us thoughtfully navigate this complex terrain. By providing insights into both the opportunities and risks, the book encourages a more intentional approach to social media, supporting academic and personal well-being for students and



professionals alike. In the context of neoliberal pressures and shrinking traditional support structures, the book emphasizes the need for non-traditional mechanisms like social media to connect with others, share resources, and learn in meaningful ways. Social media has the remarkable opportunity to connect us with individuals and ideas beyond the borders of our classrooms, fostering a global exchange of knowledge and perspectives. However, it is ultimately how we choose to engage with these platforms that determines whether they help or harm, shaping both educational outcomes and personal well-being.

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