



Social Networks and the Development of Students' Social Competences

Marija Marković

Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, Serbia

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3560-9468>

Zorica Stanisavljević Petrović

Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, Serbia

 <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9212-4286>

Dragana Pavlović

Corresponding author

Faculty of Philosophy, University of Niš, Serbia

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5115-8698>

Abstract: Social competencies of students are crucial for successful studying and further academic careers, as they encompass communication, teamwork, and collaboration skills. Social networks offer opportunities for interaction and the exchange of ideas with peers and mentors. Therefore, it is important to study the relationship between social networks and social competencies to better understand the opportunities and challenges faced by students.

The primary aim of this research is to examine students' perceptions of the impact of social networks on the development of their social competencies. A descriptive research method was employed, and data were collected using a specially designed assessment scale. The research sample is purposive, comprising students from the Faculty of Philosophy in Niš (N=314). The results indicate that students are generally ambivalent about the influence of social networks on their social development, suggesting the need for a deeper understanding of this relationship. Students primarily perceive social networks as communication channels used for maintaining contact and exchanging information. Additionally, students view social networks as potential platforms for collaboration with peers, as well as friends and other community members.

Keywords: social competencies, social networks, students, communication, collaboration

Received: 23.05.2024. Accepted: 30.05.2024

© Marija Marković, Zorica Stanisavljević Petrović, Dragana Pavlović, 2024. Published by the Institute for Education (Bucharest). This open access article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Licence CC BY, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited:

Citation:

Marković, M., Stanisavljević Petrović, Z., Pavlović D. (2024). Social Networks and the Development of Students' Social Competences. *Journal of Digital Pedagogy*, 3(1) 18-28. Bucharest: Institute for Education. <https://doi.org/10.61071/JDP.2455>

Introduction

The development of social networks is one of the most significant phenomena of the digital era, profoundly transforming how people communicate, share information, and establish connections. The origins of social networks date back to the late 1990s, when users first gained the ability to create profiles and add friends (Stokman & Doreian, 2013). In the early 2000s, blogs and forums became popular, allowing users to share their thoughts and ideas with a broader audience (Sajithra & Patil, 2013). The true rise of social networks began in 2003 and 2004 with the launch of LinkedIn, focused on professional networking, and Facebook, which quickly became a global platform for social interaction (Van Dijck, 2013). Following Facebook's success, other networks emerged, such as Twitter in 2006, introducing short messages (Weller et al., 2014), and Instagram in 2010, focused on photo sharing (Ting et al., 2015). With the development of smartphones, social networks adapted to the mobile environment, with apps like Snapchat and TikTok enabling the creation and sharing of short videos (Mittmann et al., 2022). These platforms have further democratized content creation, allowing anyone with a mobile device to become a creator. The development of social networks has facilitated fast and easy communication, global connectivity, and information dissemination, laying the groundwork for future innovations and changes in user preferences (Phua, Jin, Kim, 2017; Carr, Hayes, 2015).

The evolution of social networks has significantly impacted how students develop and utilize social competencies, such as communication skills, teamwork, empathy, and emotional intelligence. Social networks like Facebook, X (formerly known as Twitter), Instagram, and LinkedIn have become platforms where students can connect, communicate, and share information with peers, professors, and professionals worldwide. These platforms allow students to expand their social networks, which is crucial for developing social competencies. Through interactions on social networks, students have the opportunity to enhance their communication skills, as these platforms enable the exchange of ideas, discussions, and real-time collaboration (Hamadi et al., 2022). Presence on social networks helps strengthen relationships by sharing significant life events through status updates, photos, etc., while also enhancing their collaboration (Aichner et al., 2021). For instance, participating in group projects via social networks can improve their teamwork and collaboration skills, as they must coordinate activities, share tasks, and solve problems collectively.

Theoretical Approach

Social competencies are a crucial aspect of individual development, particularly for students, as they play a vital role in academic and professional success. These competencies include a range of skills such as communication, empathy, teamwork, conflict resolution, and emotional intelligence (Čurić, 2021; Mikanović, Popović, 2021). For students, the development of these skills begins during their education through interactions with peers, professors, and the broader social environment. Participation in group projects, seminars, and extracurricular activities enables students to enhance their social skills. For instance, working in teams requires effective communication, collaboration, and the ability to listen to others, while organizing and leading projects develops leadership abilities (Hughes, Jones, 2011). Empathy and emotional intelligence are particularly important for understanding and responding to the needs and emotions of others, essential for building quality interpersonal relationships. Additionally, conflict resolution through constructive dialogue and negotiation contributes to a more stable and productive work environment. Universities and educational institutions increasingly recognize the importance of social competencies, implementing programs and workshops to help students develop and apply these skills in various contexts. Through these activities, students gain not only academic knowledge but also practical skills essential for success in contemporary society and the labour market. Thus, social competencies become an integral part of their education, preparing them for future career challenges and everyday life.

Social networks offer students the opportunity to engage in various forms of communication, whether through text messages, video calls, or sharing multimedia content. These interactions not only enhance their technical skills but also their ability to effectively convey thoughts and ideas in different ways. In the digital world, where communication is often asynchronous, students learn to express their thoughts clearly and concisely and to respond constructively to feedback (Anderson, 2015).

Through collaborative projects on social networks, students develop skills such as sharing responsibilities, resolving conflicts, and decision-making. These skills are essential for successful teamwork and often overlap with professional

skills needed in future careers. For example, in a study by Hamid et al. (2015), students identified numerous positive outcomes from using social networks to interact with each other and their instructors.

Moreover, social networks allow students to develop professional contacts, which can be crucial for their careers. LinkedIn, for example, enables students to follow professionals in their field of interest, participate in relevant discussions, and access resources that can aid their professional development. These activities not only increase their visibility in professional circles but also provide learning and development opportunities through observation and interaction with more experienced colleagues (Davis et al., 2020).

Social networks can be an important digital tool in the formation of students' social competencies, but they must be used in a balanced and appropriate manner. When used correctly, social networks can play a significant role in building the skills necessary for success in the modern digital world. By providing opportunities for practical application of these skills in real situations and support through structured educational programs, universities can significantly contribute to the development of their students' social competencies. These platforms can enhance collaboration among students, provide access to diverse sources of knowledge, and connect them with experts in various fields, enriching the overall educational experience (Alhabash, Ma, 2017). In this way, social networks not only facilitate social interaction and communication but also contribute to the comprehensive development of students as competent and socially responsible individuals prepared for future professional challenges.

Methodological Approach

The aim of this research is to explore how students at the Faculty of Philosophy in Niš perceive the contribution of social network use to the development of their social competencies. The study involved 314 undergraduate students. The respondents' attitudes were analysed based on:

- study program (Psychology - PSY, Pedagogy - PED, Social Policy and Social Work - SPSW, Communication and Public Relations - CPR, and Journalism - JOU),
- average grade during studies (a) 6.00-6.99, b) 7.00-7.99, c) 8.00-8.99, d) 9.00-10.00),
- duration of presence on social networks (a) no profile; b) less than 1 year; c) more than 1 year, but less than 5 years; d) more than 5, but less than 10 years; e) more than 10 years), and
- frequency of accessing social networks (a) never; b) rarely (a few times a month); c) occasionally (a few times a week); d) often (several times a week); e) regularly (daily).

A total of 314 students participated in the study, with the largest number coming from Psychology (126), followed by Pedagogy (80). The Communication and Public Relations program (46) and Journalism (42) had nearly equal numbers of respondents, while the Social Policy and Social Work program had the fewest (20). In terms of academic performance, ten students had the lowest average grade of 6.00 to 6.99; 78 students had an average grade of 7.00 to 7.99; 149 students had an average grade of 8.00 to 8.99; and 77 students had the highest average grade of 9.00 to 10.00. The majority of respondents have been on social networks for more than 5 but less than 10 years (205), 87 respondents have been present for more than 10 years, while 22 respondents have been present for more than one but less than 5 years. Regarding the frequency of accessing social networks: 272 respondents access their profiles daily, 32 frequently, 6 occasionally, and 4 rarely.

The research posed the following objectives: To examine students' attitudes towards the contribution of social network use to the development of their social competencies.

To determine if there are statistically significant differences in respondents' answers based on the independent variables.

Accordingly, the following research hypotheses were formulated:

- It is assumed that students have positive attitudes regarding the contribution of social network use to the development of their social competencies.
- It is assumed that there are no statistically significant differences in respondents' answers based on the independent variables.

The research utilized a five-point Likert scale specifically constructed for this study, comprising 8 items. The numbers on the scale, titled *Students' Attitudes on the Impact of Social Networks on the Development of Social Competencies*

(SSDINSC), ranged from 1 – complete disagreement, 2 – partial disagreement, 3 – neutrality, 4 – partial agreement, to 5 – complete agreement with the given item. To determine statistically significant differences in respondents' answers based on the independent variables, an F-test was applied.

Results

Table 1 displays the attitudes of students (N=314) regarding the contribution of social networks to the development of their social competencies. For each statement in the study, the mean value of the students' responses (M), the standard deviation from the mean response (SD), and the degree of agreement/disagreement with the given statement are provided.

Table 1
Students' Attitudes Towards the Contribution of Social Networks to the Development of Social Competencies

Items	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
Using social networks contributes to the creation of an individual's social identity	3.42	1.14	7.0	13.4	2.83	32.8	18.5
I prefer using social networking sites over attending social gatherings	2.26	1.30	37.9	26.1	16.6	10.8	8.6
Using social networks strengthens interpersonal relationships	2.90	1.24	16.6	21.0	29.6	21.7	11.1
Social networks help maintain quality social relationships with relatives and friends	3.20	1.23	11.8	16.6	26.1	30.6	15.0
Social networks can improve communication among students	3.90	1.01	2.9	7.0	17.8	41.7	30.6
Social networks can enhance collaboration among students	3.95	0.96	2.5	5.4	16.9	44.6	30.6
Communication via social networks helps me relieve academic stress	3.33	1.16	8.3	13.4	33.1	27.7	17.5
It is important to me how my profile looks on social networks and how others perceive me in the virtual environment	3.04	1.30	17.2	15.9	27.7	23.9	15.3

Based on the analysis of the mean responses (M) of the respondents, it was concluded that students show indecisiveness regarding five items and slight agreement on two items concerning the contribution of social networks to the development of students' social skills.

The majority of responses (for five items) are concentrated around number 3 on the five-point Likert scale, indicating a neutral stance. There is mild agreement on two items, while the item regarding the preference for using social networking sites over attending social gatherings shows partial disagreement among respondents.

The highest number of respondents expressed agreement (partial 32.8% and complete 18.5%) with the statement that *Using social networks contributes to the creation of an individual's social identity*, with 2.83% undecided, and a small percentage disagreeing (7.0% completely disagree, 13.4% partially disagree).

In contrast to the previous item, the highest percentage of students disagreed with the statement *I prefer using social networking sites over attending social gatherings*, with 8.6% completely agreeing, 10.8% partially agreeing, 16.6% undecided, 37.9% completely disagreeing, and 26.1% partially disagreeing.

An almost equal percentage of respondents have positive attitudes towards the statement that *Using social networks strengthens interpersonal relationships* (11.1% completely and 21.7% partially) and express indecision (29.6%), while slightly more than a third of respondents disagree (complete 16.6% and partial 21.0%).

The majority of respondents have positive attitudes towards the statement that *Social networks help maintain quality social relationships with relatives and friends* - 15.0% completely agree and 30.6% partially agree, 26.1% are undecided, and about a third disagree with the statement (16.6% partially, 11.8% completely).

Most respondents have positive attitudes towards the statement that *Social networks can improve communication among students* (30.6% completely agree, 41.7% partially). Slightly less than one-fifth (17.8%) are undecided, while a smaller number of respondents disagree with the statement (2.9% completely, 7.0% partially).

Respondents similarly assess the statement that *Social networks can enhance collaboration among students*, with 30.6% completely agreeing, 44.6% partially agreeing, 16.9% undecided, 2.5% completely disagreeing, and 5.4% partially disagreeing.

The highest number of respondents expressed agreement (partial 27.7% and complete 17.5%) with the statement that *Communication via social networks helps students relieve academic stress*, 33.1% are undecided, while about a fifth disagree (8.3% completely, 13.4% partially).

Most respondents have positive attitudes towards the statement that *It is important to me how my profile looks on social networks and how others perceive me in the virtual environment* - 15.3% completely agree, 23.9% partially agree, 27.7% are undecided, and slightly more than a third disagree with the statement (15.95% partially, 17.2% completely).

The following tables present data on the statistical significance of students' responses concerning the independent variables: study program, average grade, duration of presence on social networks, and frequency of access.

Table 2

Statistical Significance of Differences in Students' Attitudes Regarding the Study Program

Items	Study program	M	SD	F	df	p
Using social networks contributes to the creation of an individual's social identity	PSY	3.50	1.07	0.81	4	0.52
	SPSW	3.10	1.25			
	PED	3.33	1.08			
	CPR	3.41	1.26			
	JOU	3.55	1.29			
I prefer using social networking sites over attending social gatherings	PSY	2.07	1.20	3.49	4	0.01
	SPSW	2.75	1.29			
	PED	2.46	1.35			
	CPR	1.91	1.23			
	JOU	2.60	1.41			
Using social networks strengthens interpersonal relationships	PSY	2.94	1.18	1.10	4	0.36
	SPSW	3.15	1.18			
	PED	2.68	1.16			
	CPR	3.07	1.39			
	JOU	2.90	1.39			
Social networks help maintain quality social relationships with relatives and friends	PSY	3.27	1.23	0.67	4	0.61
	SPSW	3.25	1.02			
	PED	3.01	1.17			
	CPR	3.30	1.21			
	JOU	3.24	1.43			
Social networks can improve communication among students	PSY	4.10	0.90	2.45	4	0.04
	SPSW	3.85	0.67			
	PED	3.66	0.97			
	CPR	3.80	1.26			
	JOU	3.90	1.14			
	PSY	4.13	0.83	2.38	4	0.05
	SPSW	3.80	0.77			

Social networks can enhance collaboration among students	PED	3.78	0.89			
	CPR	3.78	1.31			
	JOU	4.00	1.01			
Communication via social networks helps me relieve academic stress	PSY	3.31	1.18			
	SPSW	2.95	1.23			
	PED	3.40	1.05	1.39	4	0.24
	CPR	3.17	1.22			
	JOU	3.60	1.15			
	PSY	3.07	1.247			
It is important to me how my profile looks on social networks and how others perceive me in the virtual environment	SPSW	3.15	1.268			
	PED	2.84	1.326	1.08	4	0.37
	CPR	3.00	1.317			
	JOU	3.33	1.426			

Based on the data presented in Table 2, it can be concluded that the study program variable statistically significantly affects students' attitudes on the examined topic for only two items. Specifically, for the item *I prefer using social networking sites over attending social gatherings*, the calculated Post Hoc Test shows a difference in responses between psychology students and students of social policy and social work, pedagogy, and journalism; and between communication and public relations students and students of social policy and social work, pedagogy, and journalism. For the item *Social networks can enhance collaboration among students*, the calculated p-value is close to statistical significance, while the Post Hoc Test indicates a difference in responses between psychology students, who rate this statement somewhat more positively, compared to pedagogy students.

Table 3

Statistical significance of differences in students' attitudes regarding average

Item	Average grade	M	SD	F	df	p
I prefer using social networking sites over attending social gatherings	6.00-6.99	3.00	1.63			
	7.00-7.99	2.51	1.34	5.29	3	0.01
	8.00-8.99	2.30	1.30			
	9.00-10.00	1.81	1.09			

Based on the data listed in Table 3, it can be concluded that even the variable average grade during the course of study does not have a statistically significant effect on students' attitudes about the examined topic, except for one item. Only for the item *I prefer to use social networking sites than to attend social gatherings* was the calculated p-value of statistical significance.

The Post Hoc Test shows that for the mentioned item there is a difference in the answers between students with the highest average grade (9.00-10.00) and students in other categories, where these students evaluate the stated statement more negatively than other students.

Table 4

Statistical significance of differences in students' attitudes regarding duration of presence on social networks

Items	Duration of presence (in years)	M	SD	F	df	p
Using social networks contributes to the creation of an individual's social identity	1-5	3.09	1.38			
	5-10	3.43	1.08	1.06	2	0.35
	More than 10	3.48	1.23			
1-5	2.18	1.22	0.50			
5-10	2.22	1.28				

I prefer using social networking sites over attending social gatherings	More than 10	2.38	1.37			
Using social networks strengthens interpersonal relationships	1-5	3.00	1.27			
	5-10	2.84	1.24	0.67	2	0.51
	More than 10	3.01	1.23			
Social networks help maintain quality social relationships with relatives and friends	1-5	3.14	1.25			
	5-10	3.10	1.21	2.90	2	0.06
	More than 10	3.47	1.23			
Social networks can improve communication among students	1-5	4.09	1.06			
	5-10	3.86	1.04	0.69	2	0.50
	More than 10	3.95	0.91			
Social networks can enhance collaboration among students	1-5	4.09	1.06			
	5-10	3.91	1.00	0.57	2	0.56
	More than 10	4.01	0.83			
Communication via social networks helps me relieve academic stress	1-5	3.45	1.18			
	5-10	3.19	1.13	4.80	2	0.01
	More than 10	3.63	1.15			
It is important to me how my profile looks on social networks and how others perceive me in the virtual environment	1-5	2.55	1.18			
	5-10	2.86	1.29	11.86	2	0.01
	More than 10	3.59	1.22			

Based on the data presented in Table 4, it can be concluded that the variable of duration of presence on social networks statistically significantly affects students' attitudes on the examined topic for only two items. Specifically, for the item *Communication via social networks helps me relieve academic stress*, the calculated Post Hoc Test shows a difference in responses between students who have been on social networks for more than 10 years, who express slight agreement, compared to students who have been present for 5 to 10 years, who express indecision. For the item *It is important to me how my profile looks on social networks and how others perceive me in the virtual environment*, the calculated Post Hoc Test shows a difference in responses between students who have been on social networks for more than 10 years compared to students in the other two categories, with students in this category expressing slight agreement compared to the other students who show indecision in their assessment. For the item *Social networks help maintain quality social relationships with relatives and friends*, the calculated p-value is close to statistical significance, while the Post Hoc Test shows a difference in responses between students who have been on social networks for more than 10 years, who express a slightly higher level of indecision in their assessment, compared to students who have been present for 5 to 10 years.

Table 5

Statistical significance of differences in students' attitudes regarding frequency of accessing social networks

Items	Frequency of accessing social networks	M	SD	F	df	p
It is important to me how my profile looks on social networks and how others perceive me in the virtual environment	Rarely	2.25	1.89			
	Sometimes	1.67	0.82	3.15	3	0.02
	Often	2.88	1.13			
	Regularly	3.10	1.31			

Based on the data presented in Table 5, it can be concluded that the variable of frequency of accessing social networks during the day does not statistically significantly affect students' attitudes towards the impact of social networks on the development of their social competencies, except for the item *It is important to me how my profile looks on social networks and how others perceive me in the virtual environment*. The calculated Post Hoc Test shows a difference in responses between students who occasionally access social networks (who express disagreement in their assessment – M=1.67), compared to students who access them regularly (who express indecision in their assessment – M=3.10).

Discussion

The results of the study indicate that respondents are generally undecided about the contribution of social networks to the development of their social competencies. The reasons for this could be varied, including individual differences in perception, unclear perception, or scepticism regarding the impact of social networks on their social competencies. However, for some items, such as the statement that using social networks contributes to the creation of an individual's social identity, students expressed agreement (partial 32.8% and complete 18.5%). The data suggest that respondents perceive social networks as platforms for expressing identity, where they can freely express their interests, opinions, and lifestyle. This finding suggests that students largely view social networks as a channel for communication and network-building, which can be significant for the development of social competencies.

Interesting data were obtained regarding the statement that students prefer using social networking sites over attending social gatherings. For this statement, the highest percentage of students expressed disagreement, with 37.9% completely disagreeing and 26.1% partially disagreeing. Disagreement with this statement may indicate that students prefer real-life interaction and are aware of the importance of face-to-face communication for the development of social competencies. On the other hand, it is possible that students are sceptical about the quality of online interactions and believe that deeper social contacts are achieved through direct interaction rather than via media.

The results of the study indicate that most respondents have positive attitudes towards the statement that social networks can improve communication among students (30.6% completely agree, 41.7% partially agree). These findings suggest that the surveyed students perceive social networks as a useful tool for maintaining connections and exchanging information with peers, which is also supported by other studies (Pavlović, Stanisavljević Petrović, Mamutović, 2019; Obradović, Milosavljević, Vujović, 2017). Accordingly, it can be concluded that students consider social networks to be a useful digital tool that can make important information for studying more accessible and communication easier and faster, thereby directly impacting the efficiency of student communication.

Similarly, and in similar numbers, respondents assess that social networks can improve collaboration among students, with 30.6% of respondents completely agreeing, 44.6% partially agreeing, a smaller percentage showing indecision, and an even smaller percentage expressing disagreement with this statement. These results unequivocally indicate that most surveyed students see social networks as a useful tool that facilitates collaboration among students, which is also shown in the findings of other studies (Stanisavljević Petrović, Mamutović, 2018). Improvements in collaboration may relate to the potential of social networks for sharing and exchanging information, organizing group activities, projects, or other study-related activities. Moreover, the findings indirectly suggest that social networks have the capacity to enhance collaborative activities, particularly collaborative learning, as indicated by other research (Ansari & Khan, 2020).

The results show that the majority of respondents agreed (27.7% partially and 17.5% completely) with the statement that communication via social networks helps students relieve academic stress. These findings can be interpreted to mean that students might perceive social networks as a means of taking a break from academic obligations and engaging in informal communication with friends or viewing entertaining content, contributing to their sense of relaxation and stress reduction. Additionally, communication via social networks can help students feel less isolated and lonely, providing them with a sense of connection with others, which also helps reduce academic stress.

Regarding the results related to the appearance of profiles on social networks and the importance of being perceived by others in the virtual world, the findings show varied perceptions among students. While the majority of respondents have positive attitudes towards the statement that *It is important to me how my profile looks on social networks and how others perceive me in the virtual environment* (15.3% completely agree, 23.9% partially agree, 27.7% undecided), slightly more than a third of the respondents disagree with the statement (15.95% partially, 17.2% completely). These findings can be interpreted as reflecting individual differences in students' attitudes, stemming from personal characteristics, value systems, self-confidence, or experiences with social networks. Respondents who have developed a positive relationship with their online identity may tend to support this statement, while those with negative experiences or who are more sceptical may be more inclined to disagree.

The research data indicate that there are no statistically significant differences in students' perceptions concerning the variable of frequency of accessing social networks. Specifically, within this variable, only for the item *It is important to*

me how my profile looks on social networks and how others perceive me in the virtual environment does the calculated Post Hoc Test show a difference in responses between students who occasionally access social networks (who express disagreement – $M=1.67$) and students who access them regularly (who express indecision – $M=3.10$). The finding that there are differences in responses between students who occasionally access social networks and those who access them regularly suggests that there is a perception that how they present themselves on social networks is important for how others see them or how they see themselves in the virtual environment. Students who access social networks regularly express indecision about how others perceive them, which may indicate that they are aware of the importance of their social network profiles but are unsure about the exact impact or impression they create with their profiles.

Regarding the variable of average grade during studies, it was shown that there are no statistically significant differences in students' responses, except for the item *I prefer using social networking sites over attending social gatherings*. The calculated Post Hoc Test shows that for this item, there is a difference in responses between students with the highest average grade (9.00-10.00) and students in other categories, with these students rating the statement more negatively compared to other students. These findings can be interpreted as reflecting differences in priorities set by students with high average grades. Students with the highest average grades may place more value on the time spent studying, which may result in a lower desire to participate in social gatherings. Consequently, they may tend to rate the importance of social gatherings lower compared to the use of social networks.

The duration of presence on social networks is a variable with statistically significant differences in respondents' answers for two items. For the item *Communication via social networks helps me relieve academic stress*, the calculated Post Hoc Test shows a difference in responses between students who have been on social networks for more than 10 years, who express slight agreement, and students who have been present for 5 to 10 years, who express indecision. This result indicates that long-term use of social networks can influence the perception of the usefulness of communication through these networks in the context of academic stress, as well as how students express their attitudes on this topic. Differences in responses for the item *It is important to me how my profile looks on social networks and how others perceive me in the virtual environment*, according to the calculated Post Hoc Test, exist between students who have been on social networks for more than 10 years and students in the other two categories, with students in the former category expressing slight agreement compared to other students who show indecision.

The obtained results for the variable related to the study program affiliation clearly show the existence of statistically significant differences in students' responses about the impact of social networks on the development of social competencies. Specifically, for the item *I prefer using social networking sites over attending social gatherings*, the calculated Post Hoc Test shows differences in responses between psychology students and students of social policy and social work, pedagogy, and journalism, as well as between communication and public relations students and students of social policy and social work, pedagogy, and journalism. These findings can be interpreted primarily as differences in digital literacy and technology use across different study programs. Additionally, the findings may reflect the content of the study programs, with communication and public relations students likely having more knowledge about the importance of online presence on social networks due to their curriculum. However, it is surprising that psychology students have a greater tendency for online interaction and using social networks as a means of connection and expression, while students of social policy and social work, pedagogy, and journalism value physical presence and face-to-face interaction more. The existence of these differences can be interpreted in terms of the practical needs of the study programs, suggesting that in social policy and social work, as well as pedagogy and journalism, there is a greater emphasis on real interactions and working with people.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the research, it can be concluded that students are generally undecided about how social networks contribute to their social development. This outcome highlights the complexity of the issue regarding the impact of social networks on individuals' social competencies. However, the findings indicate that the surveyed students perceive social networks primarily as a communication channel, which can indeed be significant for the development of social competencies. This perception suggests that social networks have become an integral part of social interaction, especially among the student population, who actively use them to communicate with peers and the broader community.

Social networks provide students with the opportunity to actively participate in various social situations, such as group discussions, events, and activities, which can contribute to the development of social competencies. According to the research findings, it can be concluded that there is no doubt that social networks offer opportunities to enhance collaboration among students. Such collaboration creates a space for the development of various social skills, including teamwork skills and better adaptation to online environments.

However, the research also shows that the surveyed students approach communication on social networks critically and are aware of the importance of direct communication, which they highly value. Despite the potential of social networks in the realm of communication, a larger number of respondents still appreciate face-to-face interaction, which involves direct contact and presence. It is encouraging that direct communication remains the preferred choice for students, especially considering its contributions to deeper understanding and connection among participants, which are undoubtedly crucial for the social competencies of future academics.

Based on the obtained results, it can be concluded that the independent variables of average grade and frequency of accessing social networks do not have a significant impact on students' perceptions of the influence of social networks on the development of their social competencies. In this regard, the study program affiliation and the duration of presence on social networks have a more significant impact.

The results obtained in this study can be considered valuable as they highlight students' attitudes towards social networks and their influence on the development of social competencies. The findings emphasize students' general perceptions of how using social networks affects their communication and collaboration, which can be useful for understanding general trends and potential impacts on students' social development. However, due to this generality, the research also has certain limitations, as it does not provide a detailed insight into the effects of individual social networks. Individual networks have their specific characteristics and functionalities and can influence the shaping of students' social competencies in various ways. From this perspective, the findings can serve as a good starting point for future research aimed at a more detailed examination of specific social networks and their specific contributions to the development of social competencies in the student population.

References

- Aichner, T., Grünfelder, M., Maurer, O., & Jegeni, D. (2021). Twenty-five years of social media: a review of social media applications and definitions from 1994 to 2019. *Cyberpsychology, behavior, and social networking*, 24(4), 215-222. <https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2020.0134>
- Akram, W., & Kumar, R. (2017). A study on positive and negative effects of social media on society. *International journal of computer sciences and engineering*, 5(10), 351-354.
- Anderson, K. E. (2015). Getting acquainted with social networks and apps: Snapchat and the rise of ephemeral communication. *Library Hi Tech News*, 32(10), 6-10. <https://doi.org/10.7282/T3P84DVR>
- Ansari, J. A. N., & Khan, N. A. (2020). Exploring the role of social media in collaborative learning the new domain of learning. *Smart Learning Environments*, 7(1), 9. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40561-020-00118-7>
- Alhabash, S., & Ma, M. (2017). A tale of four platforms: Motivations and uses of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat among college students?. *Social media+ society*, 3(1), 2056305117691544.
- Carr, C. T., & Hayes, R. A. (2015). Social media: Defining, developing, and divining. *Atlantic journal of communication*, 23(1), 46-65. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15456870.2015.972282>
- Ćurić, A. (2021). Teacher education students self assesment of their social competencies in the context of sustainable development. *Školski vjesnik: časopis za pedagogijsku teoriju i praksu*, 70(2), 197-220. <https://doi.org/10.38003/sv.70.2.9>
- Davis, J., Wolff, H. G., Forret, M. L., & Sullivan, S. E. (2020). Networking via LinkedIn: An examination of usage and career benefits. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 118, 103396. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2020.103396>
- Hamadi, M., El-Den, J., Azam, S., & Sriratanaviriyakul, N. (2022). Integrating social media as cooperative learning tool in higher education classrooms: An empirical study. *Journal of King Saud University-Computer and Information Sciences*, 34(6), 3722-3731.
- Hamid, S., Waycott, J., Kurnia, S., & Chang, S. (2015). Understanding students' perceptions of the benefits of online social networking use for teaching and learning. *The Internet and higher education*, 26, 1-9. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.iheduc.2015.02.004>

- Hughes, R. L., & Jones, S. K. (2011). Developing and assessing college student teamwork skills. *New directions for institutional research*, 2011(149), 53-64. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ir.380>
- Mikanović, B., & Popović, K. (2021). Konstrukcija i provera skale socijalne uključenosti i isključenosti studenata [Construction and verification of the scale of social inclusion and exclusion of students]. *Istraživanja u pedagogiji*, 11(2), 351-358. <https://doi.org/10.5937/IstrPed2102351M>
- Mittmann, G., Woodcock, K., Dörfler, S., Krammer, I., Pollak, I., & Schrank, B. (2022). "TikTok is my life and snapchat is my ventricle": A mixed-methods study on the role of online communication tools for friendships in early adolescents. *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, 42(2), 172-203. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02724316211020368>
- Obradovic, N., Milosavljevic, I., & Vujovic, M. (2017). Instagarm as a new platform for media content-students' stance. In: *The International Scientific Conference eLearning and Software for Education* (181-196). Carol I National Defence University. <https://doi.org/10.12753/2066-026X-17-027>
- Pavlović, D. Stanisavljević Petrović, Z. Mamutović, A. (2019). Potentials of Facebook in higher education. *Balkanske sinteze*, 6(1), 47-53. <https://doi.org/10.46630/bs.1.2019.04>
- Pavlović, D., Momčilović, N., Petrović, D. (2017). Facebook as logistic support to linguistic interaction, *Facta Universitatis, Series: Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education*, 1(2), 127-135), <https://doi.org/10.22190/FUTLTE1702127P>
- Phua, J., Jin, S. V., & Kim, J. J. (2017). Uses and gratifications of social networking sites for bridging and bonding social capital: A comparison of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat. *Computers in human behavior*, 72, 115-122. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2017.02.041>
- Sajithra, K., & Patil, R. (2013). Social media—history and components. *Journal of Business and Management*, 7(1), 69-74.
- Stanisavljević Petrović, Z., Mamutović, A. (2018). Stavovi studenata o upotrebi društvene mreže Facebook [Students' attitudes about the use of the social network Facebook]. In: *Digitalne medijske tehnologije i društveno obrazovne promene 8*, (ed.) Pralica, D. Šinković, N. , 405-417. Novi Sad: Filozofski fakultet
- Stokman, F. N., & Doreian, P. (2013). Evolution of social networks: processes and principles. In *Evolution of social networks* (pp. 233-250). Routledge.
- Ting, H., Ming, W. W. P., de Run, E. C., & Choo, S. L. Y. (2015). Beliefs about the use of Instagram: An exploratory study. *International Journal of business and innovation*, 2(2), 15-31.
- Van Dijck, J. (2013). 'You have one identity': Performing the self on Facebook and LinkedIn. *Media, culture & society*, 35(2), 199-215. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443712468605>
- Weller, K., Bruns, A., Burgess, J., Mahrt, M., & Puschmann, C. (2014). Twitter and society: An introduction. *Twitter and society [Digital Formations, Volume 89]*, xxix-xxxviii.