



# Practices and perceptions of social media's risks, ethics, and regulations on campus: A model from Cairo University

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** Many concerns have emerged over how “social media sites” are used, governed, and managed at colleges and universities. News stories, predominantly negative, have highlighted the unprofessional interactions of professors and students. This study investigates professors' perceptions of the ethical issues of online communication with their students. Consequently, the approach to studying social media policy needs to be refined to the point where data can be leveraged to inform clear and well-supported university 'decision makers.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The study, based on a qualitative design and using semi-structured interviews (20 interviews), analyzed the concerns, required controls, and nature of the information that a sample of Cairo University staff indicated.

**Findings:** As more cases emerge in the university that involve students, staff, leaders, and employees, the study of freedom of speech and ethics of social media in the future become a must to frame well the implications and ethical consequences of the conundrums calls for SNS policies based on a liberal ethical framework.

**Originality/value:** The current study sought to fill a significant gap in the circulation of university information and the management of relations between university members through SNS. It should uncover how important and urgent it is to regulate social media use or inappropriate behaviors on campus. Additionally, it should shed light on how the efforts to regulate these types of technology help or hinder the educational experience on campus. Which policies seem to be more effective? Are there any unintended consequences of attempting to regulate social media use?

**Keywords:** higher education, Cairo University, campus freedom of speech, social media policy, online expression, academic community, legal entitlements, ethical discourse

## INTRODUCTION

The rapid evolution and growing popularity of digital technologies, especially the emergence of social media, have created new possibilities and challenges for teaching and learning. The traditional notion of the “teacher” and the “student” as separate and distinct roles in a classroom environment has been transformed (Cistulli & Snyder, 2022). Professors and students can now interact through social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat. These new interactions, including sharing information, communicating, and socializing, have created a rich, complex, diverse educational environment.

However, the benefits of this new environment come with a potential downside, represented by the possible blurring of boundaries between personal and professional lives on social media. While some teacher-student relationships evolve into positive friendships, others remain strictly professional. Moreover, teacher-student interactions on social media platforms have become increasingly prevalent, shaping educational dynamics beyond the traditional classroom, which may highlight professors' authority over students, which

can be amplified or distorted online. Power imbalances may affect communication and influence students' behavior. Unethical behaviors exhibited by professors, such as cyberbullying, insensitive communication, or privacy violations through social media, can significantly impact students' learning experiences and overall well-being and vice versa. These potential risks and ethical dilemmas underscore the need for a thoughtful and comprehensive approach to using social media on campus; the public visibility of these interactions demands ethical scrutiny.

One notable concern of professor-student interactions is the lack of respect for professors' privacy on social media platforms. Students may feel emboldened to intrude upon their professors' personal lives, sharing or distributing private information or even engaging in harassment. For instance, the anonymity and perceived distance provided by social media may lead to instances of cyberbullying directed toward professors, which can cause significant emotional harm, undermining their authority and emotional well-being (Mishna et al., 2021).

Another unethical behavior observed is manipulating professor-student relationships for personal gain. Some students may attempt to exploit the more informal tone of social media interactions to pressure professors into favorable treatment, such as grade changes or special accommodations. This manipulation challenges the integrity of the academic relationship, where mutual respect and fairness should be paramount (Camas Garrido et al., 2021). Moreover, inappropriate forms of communication, including unprofessional messages or sharing offensive content, have become increasingly prevalent as students feel less restrained in their interactions online compared to traditional face-to-face settings.

Additionally, the ease with which students can share content online raises severe concerns over intellectual property violations, such as disseminating lecture notes, recordings, or research materials without consent (McKie, 2021). Moreover, the informal nature of social media has sometimes led students to express derogatory remarks or inappropriate critiques of their professors in public forums, potentially damaging the professors' reputations or professional standing (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2022).

This situation requires professors to distinguish between friendly engagement and appropriate distance (Warnick et al., 2016). With these changes, questions arise about what ethical responsibilities professors should maintain in these new settings and how teacher-student relationships should be appropriately conducted via social media.

This extra investigation brings attention to the perspectives of university professors regarding codes of conduct and acceptable behavior regarding the utilization of social media. Professors are gatekeepers of academic integrity; therefore, they play a critical role in establishing and enforcing ethical standards within the academic community. Their perceptions of social media risks, ethics, and regulations directly influence students' behavior and contribute to creating an ethical learning environment. Understanding how they perceive these issues allows a deeper insight into how academic integrity is maintained in the digital age. Moreover, they influence institutional policies as they often participate in decision-making processes regarding campus regulations. Power dynamics and asymmetry in power relations, where professors are in a position of authority over students and are more vulnerable to certain social media risks, distinguishing their experiences from those of students. By prioritizing professors' viewpoints, this study addresses a gap in the existing literature, which predominantly focuses on students, offering a more comprehensive and institutionally informed understanding of social media's impact on higher education.

While professors were mindful of their profession's existing codes of conduct, it is imperative to emphasize its significance whenever the opportunity arises. Integrating codes of conduct and ethical guidelines into the students' curriculum has become necessary to ensure that academia's intensive use of social media and campus life is protected with the crucial knowledge and skills to uphold appropriate conduct.

Together, the research questions of the current study are designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how professors at Cairo University navigate the complex terrain of social media. The study addresses their personal experiences and explores how their perceptions can inform broader institutional policies, thereby contributing to the ongoing discourse on social media's ethical and responsible use in higher education. Integrating social media into education has significantly transformed educator-student dynamics, requiring a deeper examination of how these changes influence communication and the educational process within a localized context. As social media increasingly blurs the boundaries between personal and

professional spheres, it is essential to understand professors' perceptions of the risks associated with this overlap, particularly regarding reputational impact. Privacy concerns are also central to this investigation. Via exploring cyberbullying and harassment, the study delves into how professors navigate these risks in digital environments where power dynamics can exacerbate their vulnerabilities. Lastly, the importance of establishing an ethical social media framework on campus is highlighted.

### Purpose of the Study

This study explores professors' perceptions of ethics in using social media and how it relates to their professional practices. Through in-depth, qualitative exploration, the research seeks to identify how professors balance their rights to expression with their ethical responsibilities to maintain professional standards in their use of social media. By focusing on the perceptions of practicing professors rather than identifying specific rights or wrongs, the study will help explore the complex, natural world environment in which professors must make decisions about how they present themselves online and the content they publish. The study will ask for insights from the professionals themselves and seek to identify emergent themes and possible changes in practice that have been signaled in the profession's literature. The study is anticipated to provide valuable insights to several critical stakeholders in the educational, academic, and professional fields for professors.

### Research Questions

1. **Bridging worlds:** How has integrating social media into academic settings transformed educator-student dynamics and impacted the educational process at Cairo University?
2. **Boundary navigation:** How do professors perceive the risk of blurring personal and professional boundaries on social media?
3. **Privacy preservation:** What concerns do professors have about their privacy when interacting on social media platforms?
4. **Cyberbullying and harassment:** How do professors navigate the risks of cyberbullying and harassment in online spaces where power dynamics are present?
5. **Digital footprint:** How do professors perceive the importance of developing and implementing an ethical social media framework on campus, and what are their views on its role in fostering professional and responsible online interactions?

## THE LITERATURE REVIEW

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### The Digital Tightrope & The Privacy Pandora's Box

Social media platforms have recently gained significant attention as vital tools for communication and collaboration, driven by the rise of Web 2.0, which emphasizes user participation in content co-creation and multimedia sharing (Gruzd & Mai, 2020). Scholars have recognized the educational potential of these platforms, emphasizing their capacity to enhance student learning in both formal and informal settings. One key aspect is their role in cultivating functional and critical digital literacy, which refers to the ability to use digital tools effectively and critically evaluate digital content (Ayoubi, 2024).

Scholars have recognized the educational potential of these platforms, emphasizing their capacity to enhance student learning in both formal and informal settings through co-creation, extended communication, and the cultivation of functional and critical digital literacy (Ayoubi, 2024).

Specific social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram are increasingly used in education. For instance, Facebook groups can be used for self-directed learning, where students can share resources and discuss topics of interest. Twitter can be a platform for personalized instruction, where teachers can provide individual feedback and guidance. LinkedIn and Instagram can enhance resource accessibility, providing various educational materials. These platforms also foster new forms of collaboration and digital citizenship (Perez et al., 2023). Additionally, they facilitate teacher-teacher and teacher-parent communication while fostering learning communities (Suphasri & Chinokul, 2021).

Beyond classroom applications, social media enables professors to discuss various educational policies, share diverse resources, and disseminate best practices to a broader audience (Prestridge, 2019). These could include discussions on curriculum development, sharing teaching materials, and disseminating innovative teaching methods. At a professional level, social media engagement is not just beneficial but critical in promoting professional development and community involvement. It offers reflective practice and innovation opportunities, ultimately improving teaching quality (Klein, 2020; Kukulska-Hulme et al., 2022).

While the educational benefits of social media are widely acknowledged, it is crucial to consider the ethical challenges they present. For instance, Carpenter and Harvey (2019) underscore the importance of regulating teacher interactions on social media. This underscores the need for a responsible and productive approach to ensure positive outcomes for the broader educational community. It is a reminder that while the learning potential is vast, it must be harnessed with care and consideration. This caution does not maintain the enthusiasm for social media in education but ensures its responsible and effective use.

Ethical challenges in social media communication often revolve around confidentiality, consent, and digital etiquette issues. Ten Have (2019) highlights the risk of unintentionally disclosing sensitive information and potential misunderstandings in online interactions. They recommend adopting clear consent protocols and using secure platforms for academic communications.

Opria and Momanu (2023) studies explore the complexities of digital etiquette. They argue that social media's informal nature can lead to lapses in professional conduct. Their research suggests that training on digital etiquette and ethical communication is essential for educators and students to mitigate these risks.

The scoping review by Golder et al. (2017) revealed a promising landscape where academics primarily utilize social media for research dissemination and personal reasons, with untapped potential for teaching. The review illuminated significant benefits, including enhanced communication, expanded opportunities, and enriched student learning. However, it also underscored the need to address substantial barriers and challenges, such as lack of awareness, skill, confidence, and ethical and privacy issues, to harness the power of social media in academia fully. This suggests that educators unlock many opportunities for their students and themselves with the right approach (Golder et al., 2017).

The systematic review by Li and Wong (2021) delved into the potential of social media to enhance student learning, teaching, knowledge sharing, community building, and collaborative learning in higher education. They found that social media can facilitate two-way communication, knowledge sharing, community building, and cooperative learning, significantly improving the student learning experience. However, they also identified some challenges, such as the blurring of boundaries between public and private spheres, the uncertain effectiveness of knowledge construction, the need for instructors to develop more skills, and the necessity for integration with instructional design. These findings suggest that educators, as critical stakeholders, can shape the future of social media use in education by addressing these challenges in their teaching practices (Li & Wong, 2021).

The study by Chugh et al. (2021) focused on the types and purposes of social media usage by professors and students. The study found that not all professors and students currently use social media, and those who do primarily use it for research dissemination and personal reasons, mainly for career and network development. The study also revealed that many professors and students do not use social media for teaching and learning, primarily due to a lack of awareness, skill, and confidence in using this emerging technology (Chugh et al., 2021)

Some examples of ethical dilemmas professors face when using social media are Whether to accept or decline friend requests from current or former students and how to manage the boundaries between professional and personal relationships on social media platforms (Mustafa & Ahmad, 2016). Whether to express their personal or political opinions on social media and how to balance their right to free speech with their responsibility to maintain a respectful and inclusive learning environment (Planbook Blog, n. d.). Whether to use social media for research or teaching purposes, and how to obtain informed consent, protect privacy and confidentiality, and avoid coercion or deception of research participants or students (Mustafa & Ahmad, 2016).

These ethical considerations are theoretical and have real implications for students' trust and privacy and the educational environment's integrity. The nature and boundaries of professor-student relationships on

social media and their decisions to connect or not to connect, the potential threats and harms that may occur when professors and students expose their personal information and opinions on social media platforms and become victims or perpetrators of cyberbullying and online harassment were also themes of study by in Veletsianos et al. (2020) (as cited in Farrell, 2021) found that professors and students have different expectations and preferences regarding their social media interactions. They face various challenges in maintaining a balance between professionalism and personalism, privacy and openness, and formality and informality. They strongly advocated for professors and students to communicate and clarify their expectations and boundaries before engaging on social media (Farrell, 2021; Peled, 2019).

What instructors post on their social media profiles influences students' perceptions of teacher credibility. Students in social media relationships with professors are more concerned about their own social media privacy (Cistulli & Snyder, 2022) and are less likely to trust their professors and the university. Social media applications significantly influence the relationship between students and lecturers, with students reporting positive impacts on their interaction with lecturers. It is crucial for professors to become proficient in using social media before incorporating it into the classroom, and social media should be used strategically rather than as busy work.

Student-professor social media relationships have been studied in terms of privacy and trust. One study found that students in social media relationships with professors are more concerned about their privacy and are less likely to trust their professors and the university (Cistulli & Snyder, 2022). Another study explored the role of trust in the student-lecturer relationship and identified factors that build trust, such as entrepreneurship education based on trust in student-lecturer relationships.

These findings underscore the importance of managing trust and privacy in student-professor social media relationships and the potential consequences of neglecting these factors in educational settings. This highlights the need for educators to be cautious and considerate when navigating social media interactions with their students.

### **The Ethical Compass and the Risk Gauntlet**

Maintaining appropriate boundaries in social media interactions is a recurrent theme in recent literature. Kayas et al. (2023) discuss the potential for boundary violations, such as students intruding on professors' time or accessing private information. They argue that educators must carefully manage their online presence to avoid these issues.

Mățã (2022) emphasizes delineating professional and personal social media use. They suggest that professors use separate accounts for professional and personal interactions to prevent students from accessing private content. Their research indicates that clear guidelines and institutional policies are necessary to support educators in maintaining these boundaries.

Indeed, many universities now use social media platforms as important avenues of communication. However, the poorly marked intersection of universities and social networking has seen its fair share of accidents, as universities have yet to be immune to many social changes. Typography of problematic issues as we think about specific cases that have arisen recently in news reports and the courts involving professors and social networking. The most known problems are broken down into four major areas or categories. First, educators make statements through social media that are taken to reflect poorly on their professional judgment as professors. These include statements of contempt for students and families, particularly statements that show hostility toward racial or ethnic groups (Warnick et al., 2016).

This category of the problem might also include statements admitting unprofessional behaviors (for example, posting on Facebook that "I just graded papers that I did not even read" or "I cheated my way through my teacher education program"). These statements reveal attitudes relevant to how we judge these professors as professors. There are multiple examples of this problem (Warnick et al., 2016).

The second category of issues arises when professors engage in unlawful or extremely careless activities, which are then exposed on social networking platforms. These activities may involve the display of photographs depicting drug consumption, underage drinking, theft, reckless driving, and similar behaviors (Warnick et al., 2016). The third category encompasses problems that emerge when professors exhibit uncomfortable or unwelcome attention toward students through social networking, which can include

incidents of stalking. The fourth category of complications arises from professors engaging in conduct that, although not illegal or reckless, is considered 'mature' and contradicts prevailing societal norms or is deemed an undesirable influence on children and adolescents (Jauregui, 2012).

Such legally permissible yet controversial behaviors encompass drinking, intoxication, partying, the use of profane language, and participation in sexual or erotic activities. A study conducted in Ohio by investigators from the Columbus Dispatch revealed that local professors had shared stories about sex, drugs, and alcohol on their Myspace pages. However, by implementing clear and comprehensive rules, we can hope to mitigate these issues and ensure a safer and more professional environment for both students and professors. These rules promise a brighter future where our educational institutions are respected, and our students are protected (Warnick et al., 2016).

The theoretical framework of liberal egalitarianism examined these moral problems. This tradition comes from the ethical writings of Immanuel Kant (1993), who built his philosophy on a solid respect for the individual and their ability to make choices for themselves as rational agents. For egalitarian liberalism, the state respects rational agents by protecting liberty and encouraging individual autonomy while promoting equality of resources and opportunities. One of the prominent supporters of modern liberal egalitarianism, political philosopher John Rawls (1971), planned under which the state's efforts to promote good utilitarian outcomes were limited by the state's duty to protect fundamental individual liberties, such as freedoms of conscience, speech, religion, and association. These freedoms have "lexical priority" over other social goals.

Educational institutions aim to promote and create equal social opportunities through education, especially for the least advantaged students. Suppose universities cannot achieve these goals because of disruptive social behavior. In that case, universities have the right to stop or limit this disruptive behavior, including disruptive behavior on social media. Furthermore, liberal egalitarianism supports a specific vision of civic education that may be helped or hurt by different uses of social media. Different policies about social media send different civic messages. Moreover, privacy principles related to social media come from the liberal-egalitarian focus on liberty and autonomy.

With equal opportunities and moral problems in mind, student-professor social media interactions raise ethical considerations. Social media enhances contact between professors and students but also impacts the language style of communication. Violations of etiquette norms, such as slang or impolite expressions, can occur between lecturers and students in text messages. In online communication, students perceive ethical problems related to inappropriate language, misunderstanding of information, and failure to respect the teacher's private time. Academic social media conversations can also devolve into disrespectful exchanges, with attacks and blocking opposing viewpoints. These issues highlight the need for respectful and professional communication in student-professor interactions on social media platforms.

The ethical and pedagogical implications of the professor-student relationship on social media highlight the ethical and pedagogical issues and challenges when professors and students use social media for educational purposes, such as enhancing learning, teaching, and assessment. A conceptual paper by Malesic discussed the ethical dilemmas and risks that professors might encounter when they use social media to interact with students, such as potential conflicts of interest, power imbalances, dual relationships, and confidentiality breaches. He argued that professors should adhere to respect, beneficence, and justice when using social media for educational purposes (Li & Wong, 2021).

A literature review by Schweber and Segal (2023) analyzed the legal and constitutional issues and challenges that arise when public schools regulate or restrict social media use by professors. They proposed a forum-based approach to investigate and resolve these issues based on the distinction between open, limited, and closed forums for speech. They argued that professors have more freedom of speech in open forums, such as personal social media accounts than in limited or closed forums, such as school-sponsored social media accounts. They also discussed the factors determining whether a teacher's speech is protected, such as its content, context, and impact (Iredale et al., 2020).

Practical suggestions and examples of how professors and students can effectively and ethically use social media for educational purposes were presented in a case study by Barrot (2021), where he proposed a social media governance model of the University of the Philippines Open University, which is based on the principles

of openness, transparency, accountability, and responsibility. The model includes a social media policy (SMP), a social media team, a social media plan, and a monitoring and evaluation system (Li & Wong, 2021).

Social media governance and management were critical issues for higher education institutions in many of the scholarly works here, as they involve the policies, strategies, and practices that regulate and guide the use of social media for educational purposes. A literature review on this topic reveals the potential and limitations of social media for enhancing learning, teaching, and research outcomes, as well as the opportunities and risks for institutional reputation, engagement, and innovation.

The frameworks and models for social media governance and management highlighted that higher education institutions adopt or develop to govern and manage social media use. A conceptual paper by Rowley et al. proposed a framework for social media governance in higher education, which consists of four dimensions: strategic alignment, risk management, performance management, and stakeholder engagement. They argued that this framework can help institutions align social media with their strategic goals, mitigate potential risks, measure and improve performance, and engage with various stakeholders.

The need, reasons, motivation, and rationale for social media policies for students were explored for developing and implementing social media policies for higher education institutions. Literature argues that social media policies are necessary to regulate and guide the use of social media for educational purposes and to protect the rights and responsibilities of students, faculty members, and the institution. Studies suggest that social media policies should be based on openness, transparency, accountability, and commitment, as they can help mitigate social media's potential risks and challenges.

A qualitative study by Perez et al. (2023) analyzed the social media policies of 20 higher education institutions in the U.K. and found that most of them covered topics such as the purpose and scope of the policy, the definition and types of social media, the standards and expectations for social media use, the protection of privacy and reputation, the prevention of harassment and bullying, and the consequences of breaching the policy. They also found that most policies were written in a formal and prescriptive tone, and some needed more clarity and consistency (Masrom et al., 2021)

## METHODOLOGY

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### Study Design and Procedures

The research employed a qualitative approach; semi-structured interviews were conducted with Cairo University professors, allowing for predetermined questions and open-ended discussions. This approach facilitated in-depth conversations that captured the nuances of the participants' views on ethical concerns in online communication. Follow-up and clarification were integral to the interview process to ensure the accuracy and depth of the data collected. Rather than conducting separate follow-up interviews, the interviewer used clarification techniques within the same session. During the interviews, the interviewer would ask participants to elaborate on unclear or essential points, using techniques such as probing questions and restating responses for confirmation. This method ensured that any ambiguities were addressed immediately, enhancing the reliability of the data while maintaining the flow of conversation.

The data analysis followed a thematic approach, which was used to categorize and interpret the data. After the interviews were transcribed, the data was systematically coded using a combination of deductive coding (based on predetermined ethical themes such as privacy, boundary management, and cyberbullying) and inductive coding (allowing for the emergence of new themes directly from the data). Thematic analysis was chosen to identify patterns across the data, providing a comprehensive understanding of the common ethical problems professors face in their social media interactions with students.

### Study Sample

The research's data was gathered using an available sample of 20 professors at Cairo University in Egypt. A series of in-depth interviews were conducted over a structured period, starting on 2 April 2024, and concluding on 30 May 2024. This two-month time frame allowed for comprehensive engagement with participants, facilitating detailed exploration of their insights and experiences.



## FINDINGS

### Impact on Educator-Student Dynamics

Integrating social media into the daily lives of faculty members at Cairo University has brought about a significant and positive shift in educator-student dynamics. According to the study, approximately 95% of the respondents use social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, WhatsApp, Messenger, and Telegram daily. This extensive use is significantly influenced by the need for indirect communication mechanisms, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Maintaining communication despite physical restrictions has led to a heightened reliance on these platforms, fostering a more connected and interactive educational environment.

Like their counterparts worldwide, Cairo University faculty members use social media for various purposes, including staying updated with the official pages of academic institutions, maintaining personal connections, exploring new friendships, leveraging others' experiences, and fulfilling work-related tasks. Notably, Facebook and WhatsApp are the most frequently used platforms, engaging up to 90% of the faculty members interviewed. This trend is consistent with global patterns, as observed in several studies, where social media is leveraged for communication and knowledge exchange.

The use of social media has significantly altered the dynamics between the professors and the students, presenting both opportunities and challenges. Social media platforms provide a convenient means for students and professors to interact outside the traditional classroom setting. However, this increased accessibility can sometimes blur the boundaries between professional and personal interactions, raising concerns about maintaining appropriate professional relationships. One respondent noted,

"Social media has become an indispensable tool for maintaining connections with students, but it also requires careful navigation to avoid crossing professional boundaries" (Prof. Nermeen Alazrak, Faculty of Mass Communication).

Professors reported that the ease of communication provided by social media can lead to more informal interactions between students and educators. This informality can be beneficial in creating a more approachable and engaging learning environment. However, it also has the potential to undermine educators' authority and diminish the educational process's seriousness. Students treating professors as equals on social media platforms were reported, which can lead to a lack of respect and discipline in academic interactions.

In addition, some professors, particularly those from older generations or high-level experts, preferred direct communication methods. They argue that face-to-face interactions or official communication channels, such as university emails or dedicated educational platforms, are more appropriate for maintaining professional boundaries. This preference highlights the generational differences in the acceptance and use of social media for educational purposes. As one professor mentioned,

"Implementing an open-door policy between the student and the professor is essential. I open my door to all students and do not need to communicate with them through various websites and multiple pages. However, they are essential in communication, especially in the corona period. However, I have never and will never close my door to students; thus, face-to-face communication solves issues first and foremost. It does not leave an opportunity for issues to worsen, or for the student to develop into an assault on his professors or administrators, without whom the academic and educational process is not complete at the university" (Prof. Gamal Shehata, Faculty of Commerce).

The impact of social media on educator-student dynamics also extends to the level of engagement and interaction. Social media platforms provide opportunities for real-time communication, immediate feedback, and continuous engagement. This can enhance the learning experience by making it more interactive and responsive to students' needs. However, it also requires educators to be constantly available, which can blur the lines between personal and professional time. One professor commented,



"Social media allows me to be more accessible to my students, but it also means that I must set clear boundaries to maintain a work-life balance" (Dr. Eman Taher, Faculty of Mass Communication).

### Impact on the Educational Process

The integration of social media into the educational process at Cairo University has proven to be both beneficial and challenging. The study found that about 70% of university head members prefer communicating with students through social media, especially during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. Social media has facilitated the continuation of education through virtual discussions, group interactions, and the dissemination of academic content. These platforms have proven effective in engaging students and providing flexible communication channels (Schoeman & Eybers, 2023; Mudenda et al., 2023).

However, the reliance on social media also presents challenges. The ease of interaction can lead to informal communication styles that undermine the seriousness of the educational process. Professors reported instances of students making inappropriate comments or treating academic discussions on social media with a lack of seriousness. This behavior can detract from the educational experience and hinder effective learning. One faculty member observed,

"Social media has made it easier to communicate with students, but it has also led to some students treating academic discussions too casually" (Dr. Hayat Badr, Faculty of Mass Communication).

Moreover, professors sometimes share personal frustrations or informal content on social media, negatively influencing students' perceptions of the educational process. The overlap between personal and professional content on social media platforms can create confusion and diminish the perceived professionalism of educators. This issue underscores the need for clear guidelines and boundaries for social media use in educational settings. As one respondent stated,

"It is important to separate personal and professional content on social media to maintain the integrity of the educational process" (Prof. Laila Abdel-Meguid, Faculty of Mass Communication).

The study's findings underscore the dual nature of social media in the educational process. Despite the challenges it presents, social media has proven to be an invaluable tool for enhancing communication and interaction within the educational process, particularly during crises. However, it should be considered a supplementary tool rather than a replacement for face-to-face interactions under normal circumstances. Integrating social media into the educational process requires a balanced approach that leverages its benefits while mitigating potential drawbacks. One educator highlighted,

"Social media is a powerful tool for education, but it should complement, not replace, traditional teaching methods" (Prof. Laila Abdel-Meguid, Faculty of Mass Communication).

The study also found that social media platforms are particularly effective in facilitating collaborative learning. Professors can quickly form study groups, share resources, and engage in discussions outside the classroom. This collaborative aspect of social media enhances the learning experience by promoting peer-to-peer interaction and knowledge sharing. However, professors must also monitor these interactions to ensure they remain productive and respectful. As one respondent noted,

"Social media fosters student collaboration but requires oversight to maintain a positive learning environment. Social media sites are significant in creating a good image of our educational institutions in our contemporary time as the most important communication and interaction tools currently. They can be employed by formulating appropriate messages for each category of the institution's affiliates, choosing the proper means of communication with them, creating attractive sites for interaction, providing the institution's audience with the information they need, identifying the most critical issues, offering solutions, opening channels for exchanging opinions, and fostering permanent joint interaction, which these means achieve if properly used and directed" (Dr. Nancy Habashi, Faculty of Mass Communication).

### Boundary Navigation: Perceptions of the Blurring Borders

The use of social media by faculty and students at Cairo University introduces several ethical considerations and risks. Social media platforms provide a unique opportunity for open communication and engagement but also present challenges in maintaining professionalism and ethical conduct. The study highlights the need for faculty members to navigate these challenges carefully to ensure that social media use aligns with the university's values and standards.

"On a practical basis, you could notice that I do not use Facebook to communicate with students, and I do not favor the idea of professors using it to communicate with students as long as there is a university board. As for the issue of official university websites, there must be a filter, and comments are not published until they pass through an administrator who authorizes or prevents them" (Prof. Eman Hosny, Faculty of Mass Communication).

One of the primary ethical concerns is the potential for students to exploit their relationships with professors on social media to gain academic advantages. Instances of students making inappropriate comments or using informal communication styles to seek favors were reported. This behavior can create a perception of favoritism and undermine the integrity of the academic process. Faculty members stressed the importance of maintaining professional boundaries and avoiding interactions that could be perceived as biased or unfair. One respondent emphasized,

"Maintaining professional boundaries on social media to avoid any perception of favoritism or bias is crucial. I am shocked by those who access students on their Facebook or other pages, which should be private for the professor and his acquaintances and not for the students. This eliminates boundaries and separations and sometimes leads to compromises. I have never seen this in advanced foreign universities" (Prof. Sherif Shaheen, Faculty of Arts).

"Students are becoming more and more arrogant, and their style of speech, even if there is no insult, addresses their professors and assistants in an unacceptably rude and rude manner, and this is the result of excessive kindness in dealing with them and fulfilling their desires, and their way of objecting is rude and excessive. I am one of the people who does not add students on Facebook at all in case of any transgression by them on my page. Being friendly with them makes them think that heads are equal, so they write, joke, and reduce their manners at their convenience" (Dr. Hayat Badr, Faculty of Mass Communication).

### Privacy Preservation & Ethical Decision-Making

The study found that some professors advocate for maintaining separate personal and professional accounts to avoid conflicts and ensure that interactions remain appropriate and professional. Perceptions of Cairo University's professors underscore the importance of deliberate and ethical practices in managing social media use within academic contexts. By separating personal and professional spheres, utilizing appropriate communication channels, and exercising discretion, they can effectively navigate the challenges of online interactions while preserving their privacy and professional integrity.

Professors must be vigilant about their online presence, ensuring their posts and interactions reflect their professional role. This approach helps maintain a clear distinction between personal opinions and professional responsibilities, which is crucial for preserving the integrity of the professor-student relationship.

"Ethical decisions in online interactions start with discretion. I filter what I post on my profiles and ensure that any communication with students happens through formal channels. This approach helps me protect my identity and maintain professional decorum" (Prof. Nashwa Akl, Faculty of Mass Communication).

Furthermore, keeping professional interactions on designated platforms reinforces the professors' authority and professional demeanor. When professors confine their academic discussions to professional channels, such as LinkedIn or official university platforms, they enhance their credibility and maintain the

formal nature of these interactions. This practice helps avoid the potential dilution of professional authority when personal and academic interactions converge.

“Establishing boundaries between my personal life and professional role online is essential. I am cautious about having a personal account on social media to ensure that it aligns with my position as an educator. Ethical decision-making starts with responsible sharing” (Prof. Hwayda Mostafa, Faculty of Mass Communication).

“I avoid connecting with students on personal platforms like Facebook. I prefer using institutional tools like the university’s learning management system or dedicated educational accounts for communication. This ensures that our interactions remain appropriate and ethical” (Prof. Fatma Abo-Elmagd, Faculty of Physical Therapy).

### **Cyberbullying and Harassment**

The study also identified several risks associated with social media use, including the potential for cyberbullying, harassment, and misinformation. These risks can have severe implications for the well-being of the faculty members and can undermine the educational process.

The pervasive use of social media among academicians has opened new avenues for intellectual discourse, collaboration, and visibility. However, these platforms also expose faculty members to significant risks, including cyberbullying, harassment, and the spread of misinformation. Cyberbullying and harassment can take various forms, from personal attacks on one’s character and expertise to targeted campaigns meant to discredit and undermine academic work. These digital assaults have the potential to not only affect the reputation of faculty members but also impact their mental health and sense of security (Eslen-Ziya et al., 2023). Furthermore, misinformation—often propagated deliberately or through misunderstanding—can harm the integrity of scholarly communication and create obstacles in the academic community’s effort to promote truthful and well-founded knowledge.

“I have experienced firsthand how online harassment can wear you down. As someone active on social media to share research, I have seen many colleagues targeted by anonymous users who question my credibility and make personal attacks. It is emotionally draining and sometimes makes me question whether it is worth maintaining an online presence” (Prof. Ahmed Elsherif, Faculty of Science).

“Navigating the risks of cyberbullying in digital space has become a part of academic life. As a researcher, I have balanced public engagement with protecting my well-being. The absence of strong institutional policies often means professors like me are left to manage these challenges independently, which can be emotionally draining and professionally limiting” (Prof. Hala Ezzeldein, Faculty of Physical Therapy).

### **Crafting Ethical Pathways for Academic Social Media Engagement**

Professors generally perceive developing and implementing an ethical social media framework on campus as crucial for fostering responsible online behavior and protecting faculty and students. Research suggests that professors view such a framework not only as a tool to prevent harmful behaviors, such as cyberbullying and harassment but also as an opportunity to promote professional conduct and intellectual integrity in digital interactions. Suggested steps forward were highlighted, as follows:

#### ***Increased awareness and training***

Faculty members believe an ethical social media framework should include comprehensive training and guidelines to raise awareness about the risks and responsibilities of online behavior. They suggest that such a framework clarifies the boundaries of acceptable behavior in both academic and personal social media use.

"We need clear policies and training that educate faculty and students about the ethical implications of online interactions. It is about fostering a respectful environment where everyone understands their responsibilities in a digital space" (Prof. Nermeen Alazrak, Faculty of Mass Communication).

"Digital literacy training is essential for ensuring faculty and students use social media ethically and effectively. I see the need for the university to develop faculty development programs to focus on programs of functional importance, such as courses for preparing curriculum in digital form, courses and programs dealing with different learning platforms, information analysis, and digital content management, as well as providing all digital requirements for professors with great discounts and relative advantages that encourage them to acquire the latest devices, technologies, and modern programs" (Prof. Mahrez Ghaly, Faculty of Mass Communication).

### ***Protection against cyberbullying and misinformation***

Professors emphasize the need for a robust framework to protect against cyberbullying, harassment, and spreading misinformation. Such policies would safeguard the well-being of both students and faculty while ensuring that academic discourse remains grounded in factual and respectful communication.

"An ethical, social media framework is not just about preventing harassment; it is about maintaining the integrity of our academic community in a digital age where misinformation can spread so easily" (Prof. Hwayda Mostafa, Faculty of Mass Communication).

### ***Professional development and digital identity***

Professors see an ethical framework as a tool for guiding professional development, helping them and their students navigate the complexities of maintaining a digital identity that reflects their academic and professional values. It can offer clear guidance on engaging with others responsibly and avoid conflicts or misinterpretations that may damage one's reputation.

"As academics, we are not just representing ourselves but also our institutions. An ethical social media framework would help ensure that our online presence aligns with our professional responsibilities and values" (Prof. Walid Fathallah, Faculty of Mass Communication).

"There should be a specialized department to follow up on social media communication at the university. It should be responsible for monitoring everyone: This is very important, and there are mechanisms, rules, and degrees of punishment, and they are circulated to colleges and institutes; for example, there is a ban on placing files, paper, or documents bearing the name of the university on communication pages" (Dr. Heidi Bayoumi, Faculty of Arts).

### ***Collaborative governance and inclusivity***

Faculty stress the importance of including diverse perspectives in the development of the framework. They advocate for policies created through collaborative governance, which would address the varied needs of the academic community and ensure inclusivity in how online behavior is regulated.

"Any framework we develop needs to be inclusive and reflective of the diverse voices on campus. It should be created with input from faculty, students, and administrators alike" (Prof. Hala Ezzeldeen, Professor of Physical Therapy).

### ***Long-term academic culture change***

Professors view the ethical social media framework as part of a broader effort to create a culture of professionalism and accountability in academic spaces. They believe it would contribute to fostering a more respectful and constructive academic environment, both online and offline.

"Problems may worsen and turn into a crisis if there is no careful follow-up from the university administration, and the steps to prevent students from transgressions that may occur on social

networking sites on campus must include specific steps, starting from warning to warning and then applying the customary university regulations, which must be announced to everyone from the supporting staff, faculty, students and administrators, and it is also necessary to separate the issue of the relationship between the student and the professor by distinguishing between official communication through educational platforms and unofficial, and not to confuse them" (Prof. Manal Shehata, Faculty of Medicine).

### **Structured communication channels**

Implement official communication platforms like Blackboard and Zoom to maintain professional boundaries and ensure accountability. These platforms can provide a more controlled environment for academic interactions and help separate personal and professional content. One faculty member noted,

"Using official communication platforms can help maintain professionalism and accountability in academic interactions. Those who believe in punishment misbehave, and now they know that if they curse and say whatever they say, no one will hold them accountable. If the faculty holds them accountable, the world will rise and fall. From now on, if the faculty finds X, Y, or N of the students and holds them accountable or punishes him/her, whatever the punishment, there will be a system. Indeed, if the faculty canceled the punishment for him/her for whatever reason and appeased his/her feelings to silence the students, there will never be any accountability or respect" (Prof. Walid Fathallah, Faculty of Mass Communication).

### **Regulatory mechanisms**

Establish content control departments to monitor and manage online interactions effectively, ensuring compliance with university policies. These departments can provide oversight and address any violations of social media guidelines, promoting a safe and respectful digital environment. One respondent emphasized,

"Regulatory mechanisms are necessary to ensure compliance with social media guidelines and promote a safe online environment. We must establish a code of conduct for publishing, like any existing website or page. The page administrator should delete any comment that deviates from the declared principles. There must also be interaction with the questions posed on the page and a response to some respectful comments that do not deviate from moral and university values" (Prof. Dalia Abdullah, Faculty of Mass Communication).

## **PROPOSED SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY: ENHANCING COMMUNICATION AND UPHOLDING INSTITUTIONAL VALUES**

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The literature consistently underscores the need for professional conduct in social media interactions. Mullen et al. (2014) argue that the ethical standards applied in face-to-face interactions should extend to online communications. This includes maintaining a respectful tone, avoiding inappropriate language, and ensuring that communications align with educational objectives. Kwestel and Milano (2020) advocate for developing specific ethical guidelines tailored to social media use in academic settings. Their study suggests that these guidelines should cover consent, confidentiality, and the appropriate use of digital platforms for educational purposes. They recommend integrating these guidelines into the broader framework of academic policies to ensure consistency and enforceability.

Effective implementation of ethical guidelines requires comprehensive institutional policies. Pomerantz et al. (2015) argue that universities should develop and disseminate clear policies on social media use, outlining acceptable practices and consequences for breaches. They highlight the need for regular reviews and updates to keep pace with evolving technologies and social norms. Dutta (2015) provides practical recommendations for policy development. They emphasize involving educators and students in policymaking to ensure the guidelines are realistic and applicable. Additionally, they highlight the need for ongoing training and support for educators to navigate the ethical challenges of social media use effectively.

The proposed policy framework emphasizes transparency, ethical responsibility, and consistent communication. This addresses the immediate need for social media management and positions Arab University in worldwide efforts to promote responsible and ethical use of digital platforms. By investing in professional social media managers, ensuring the accessibility of university leaders, and maintaining a unified tone across all platforms, the university can build credibility and effectively manage crises.

Regular monitoring of social media activity and thorough post-crisis evaluations will enable the university to respond proactively to emerging issues and continuously improve its communication strategies. By adopting these comprehensive policy recommendations, Universities can foster a positive and productive social media environment that supports its academic mission and promotes a culture of open dialogue and ethical responsibility.

### **Enhancing Social Media Governance in Universities**

Universities must establish clear social media usage guidelines that reflect academic and professional standards. Universities can guide faculty and students toward responsible social media use by developing educational materials and resources, ensuring alignment with institutional values and ethical standards. This is essential in shaping positive educator-student dynamics in a digitally integrated academic environment.

A key element in this governance is building credibility through honest and transparent communication. Universities should prioritize trust-building with their audiences by ensuring that public relations officers provide accurate and timely information. This transparency is essential during public scrutiny or crisis, where consistency and clarity are vital to maintaining the institution's reputation.

Investing in professionally trained social media managers is essential to maintaining a unified and strategic communication approach. These individuals would ensure coherent messaging across platforms, helping to reinforce the institution's mission and integrity. Furthermore, access to official university social media accounts should be restricted to designated personnel, ensuring that all communications represent a cohesive and professional voice. This structured management prevents miscommunication and upholds the institution's credibility.

Universities should implement a structured and consistent communication framework to maintain public confidence, particularly in times of crisis. Establishing a clear posting schedule ensures the public is informed and reassured of the university's preparedness and effective management. University leaders should also maintain an active social media presence, including the president and deans. By closely monitoring their accounts and ensuring consistent messaging, leaders foster a sense of connection, transparency, and trust with the university community and the public.

The suggested policy highlights how integrating social media into academic settings at Cairo University has transformed educator-student dynamics. It emphasizes the need for professional management and clear guidelines to navigate the complexities of digital engagement in academia.

### **Addressing Social Media Speech and Conduct**

When social media posts cause problems on campus, the university should issue a standard statement asserting the individual's right to free expression while addressing the specific concerns raised by the post. This nuanced approach helps balance the right to free speech with the need for respectful and constructive discourse.

After a crisis, the policy should mandate a thorough evaluation of the university's communication performance, including the effectiveness of social media tools. This evaluation should analyze user engagement, content impact, and overall coordination and consistency of messages. Insights gained from post-crisis evaluations should inform future crisis communication strategies, ensuring continuous improvement and preparedness.

The policy should ensure that codes of conduct use clear and precise language, avoiding vague and broad terms that could lead to legal challenges. Terms such as "behavior that harms the university's reputation" or "disrupts the educational process" should be clearly defined. The policy should extend to monitoring off-campus behavior that affects the educational environment or the university's mission. The dean of students should be able to adjudicate violations of student codes of conduct, regardless of where they occur. The



university can ensure a proactive and robust approach to managing social media conduct by drafting policies with worst-case scenarios in mind and reviewing them periodically.

### Legal and Ethical Responsibilities

Universities should foster a culture of open dialogue by engaging the campus community in discussions about institutional values concerning freedom of expression. This engagement can be facilitated through workshops, seminars, and forums emphasizing the importance of open dialogue and dissenting views in an academic setting.

Faculty members should be encouraged to incorporate discussions about freedom of expression into their curricula, thereby modeling intellectual discourse and critical thinking. Consistency in tone and voice across different social media platforms is crucial for maintaining a coherent brand image. The policy should provide guidelines on the appropriate language and style for each platform, ensuring that all communications are aligned with the university's values and goals.

## CONCLUSION

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News stories, predominantly negative, have highlighted the improper usage of college and university students, staff, and employees and the issues surrounding implementing social media policies at higher education institutions. Consequently, studying SNS and SMP must be refined to leverage data to inform clear and well-supported decision-makers. Despite the diversity of problems facing universities and higher education institutions, in general, concerning public/private discourse on social media, one type of problem is usually raised more than others in this context, as universities now deal with a complicated legal landscape that needs to change, adapt, and grow as these platforms develop and are used. As a result, questions arise regarding the type of protection required in universities to ensure their effective use of SNS on the one hand and to provide the university with a legal right to hold someone accountable regarding their university-related behaviors. Moreover, what criteria should govern such legal regulation if the same applies to faculty members, staff, and students?

Relevant research shows that universities should now do more than respond to the threats posed by SNS and the laws that govern how different platforms work. Instead, universities should take the lead in promoting open dialogue and deciding what steps should be taken to regulate how these platforms work. The university is the only place with a wide range of experts who can come up with internal rules that explain the general expectations of university campus members and keep to the standards of free speech and the limits of the institution and its vision, not only as a place for education and research but also as an institution with a general role in society that can support and develop intellectual and technical rules and tools for a better world.

The need for the different institutions of society to strike a balance between their commitment to the principles of freedom of opinion and expression and their other institutional obligations, such as anti-harassment policies, discrimination, professional ethics, etc., seems to be one of the most challenging things these institutions must deal with these days because they have so many different areas of work or interest.

The presence of well-defined policies and procedures, followed by the steps and codified consequences of controls that distinguish between permissible limits and those that violate the applicable limits—at least legally—is essential in any institution, and it is imperative in educational institutions today, despite the diversity of their employee categories. Furthermore, their differences imprison many determinants, and if these policies stop at forms of expression and speech that can harm one or more groups of society and respond to the most significant possible number of issues and problems that may face the university campus in general, this is fully aware that every accident or incident is an event and is unique in some way.

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## APPENDIX A

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### Names of the Interviewees (Alphabetical Order)

1. Ahmed Elsherif, Professor, Faculty of Science
2. Dalia Abdullah, Professor, Faculty of Mass Communication
3. Eman Hosny, Professor, Faculty of Mass Communication
4. Eman Taher, Lecturer, Faculty of Mass Communication
5. Fatma Aboelmagd, Professor, Faculty of Physical Therapy
6. Gamal Shehata, Professor, Faculty of Commerce
7. Hala Ezz Eldeen, Professor, Faculty of Physical Therapy
8. Hanan Junaid, Professor, Faculty of Mass Communication
9. Hayat Badr, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Mass Communication
10. Heidi Bayoumi, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Arts
11. Huwaida Mustafa, Professor, Faculty of Mass Communication
12. Laila Abdel-Meguid, Professor, Faculty of Mass Communication
13. Mahrez Ghaly, Professor, Faculty of Mass Communication
14. Manal Shehata, Professor, Faculty of Medicine
15. Nancy Habashi, Lecturer, Faculty of Mass Communication
16. Nashwa Akl, Professor, Faculty of Mass Communication
17. Nermeen Alazrak, Professor, Faculty of Mass Communication
18. Salwa Al-Awadly, Professor, Faculty of Mass Communication
19. Sherif Kamel Shahin, Professor, Faculty of Arts
20. Walid Fathalla, Professor, Faculty of Mass Communication

