The Awareness–Usage Gap: Academic and Professional Engagement on X (Twitter) Among Mass Communication Undergraduates in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Since its launch in 2006, the social media platform X (formerly Twitter) has become an essential tool for digital networking, real-time news gathering, and professional branding in the media industry. Grounded in the Uses and Gratifications Theory, this research study examines the awareness, usage, and perceived academic and professional value of X among Mass Communication undergraduates at Rajarata University of Sri Lanka. Here, engagement is defined as active information-seeking, networking, and career-oriented platform use beyond basic social browsing. Primary quantitative data were collected through a structured questionnaire distributed to 122 second-, third-, and fourth-year students, resulting in 102 usable responses analyzed using descriptive statistics. Findings reveal a clear awareness–usage gap: about 90% of students are aware of the platform and its basic functions, but only 43% are active users. Furthermore, engagement among these users is infrequent, with most logging in occasionally (once a week) rather than daily. Several barriers to engagement were identified, including low technical self-efficacy and uncertainty about how X supports academic research or career pathways. Most participants lacked an understanding of how X is strategically utilized in professional media workflows to source news quickly or build industry networks. Thus, high brand awareness does not translate into practical application. The study concludes that embedding targeted digital literacy and practical exposure to X into mass communication curricula is essential to help students leverage the platform as a strategic tool for academic development and professional growth.

Keywords: *Twitter, Social Media, Mass Communication, Undergraduate Students, Sri Lanka*