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THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TOOLS BY DOCTORAL STUDENTS AT THE THESIS STAGE

Abstract:

Social Media (SM) has been widely used in education for many years and with the rapid development of Artificial Intelligence (AI), digital technologies place critical roles in every aspects of teaching and learning.

Much research into the use of such technologies in higher education has been at undergraduate level leaving the involvement of students with digital technologies at post-graduate and doctoral levels relatively unexplored.

Based on a case study of international students engaged in a fully online Professional Doctorate in Higher Education jointly run by two agencies, one in UK and the other in the Netherlands, our proposed paper aims to explore how the students made use of digital tools in the thesis stage of their doctoral studies and what impact those tools had on their studies.

Data were collected at two phases following a sequential design: an online survey of the students in the thesis stage of the programme (n=28) was followed by a series of semi-structured interviews with a convenient sample of 9 students. The analysis of the survey data informed the qualitative phase of data collection.

The combination of quantitative and qualitative data served triangulation and explanatory purposes. The use of additional qualitative data augmented the structured responses, which provided the opportunity to gain key insights into unexpected relationships and a better understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

Both survey and interview data show similar pattern of digital technologies uses in which SM far outpaces the usages of AI for our participants. The unique characteristics of the online doctoral students might have determined the popularity of some digital tools. The study findings help us to better understand students digital experience as both individuals and learners and based on this understanding, appropriate actions can be proposed to enhance online learning outcomes.

Keywords:

Digital technologies; Social Media; Artificial Intelligence; Doctoral studies