



THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA USE ON STUDENT LEARNING, ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN HIGHER EDUCATION OF ODISHA

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Abstract

The increasing integration of social media into everyday life has substantially altered the way university students communicate, access information, collaborate, and participate in learning activities. Social networking platforms are no longer used exclusively for personal interaction; they have increasingly become informal spaces for academic communication, resource sharing, peer support, and knowledge exchange. However, their educational value is accompanied by concerns regarding distraction, excessive usage, information reliability, and changes in students' communication practices. This study examines the influence of social media use on student learning, academic performance, and communication skills in higher education. Particular attention is given to the frequency and purpose of social media use, the distinction between academic and recreational engagement, collaborative learning, access to educational resources, and students' formal and informal communication practices. A quantitative research approach using a descriptive survey design is proposed. Data are to be collected from undergraduate and postgraduate students through a structured questionnaire incorporating demographic, usage-related, learning-related, and communication-related measures. Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and appropriate inferential tests may be employed to examine relationships among the study variables. The study is expected to provide a balanced understanding of social media by considering both its educational opportunities and potential disadvantages. The findings may assist educators and higher education institutions in developing responsible social media practices, strengthening students' digital literacy, and integrating appropriate social media activities into teaching and learning.

Keywords: social media, higher education, student learning, academic performance, communication skills, collaborative learning, digital literacy.

Introduction

Digital technologies have become an important component of contemporary higher education. Among these technologies, social media has emerged as a particularly influential

communication environment because of its accessibility, interactive nature, and widespread adoption among young adults. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and other networking services allow users to communicate rapidly, exchange information, produce content, and participate in online communities. Within higher education, these capabilities have created opportunities for students to extend academic interaction beyond the physical classroom.

The educational use of social media can take several forms. Students may use online groups to discuss academic topics, exchange notes, share educational videos, seek clarification from peers, and coordinate group assignments. Educators may also use social platforms to distribute supplementary resources, communicate announcements, encourage discussion, and create opportunities for students to engage with subject-related material outside scheduled classes. Consequently, social media can contribute to more flexible and participatory learning environments.

Research has increasingly recognized the potential of social media to support student engagement and collaborative learning. When students use these platforms with a clear academic purpose, they may benefit from increased access to information, peer interaction, and opportunities to exchange ideas. Social media can also connect learners with educational content and communities that extend beyond their immediate institution.

Nevertheless, the educational contribution of social media should not be viewed as universally positive. The same platforms that provide educational resources also contain entertainment, advertising, personal communication, and other forms of non-academic content. Frequent notifications and continuous online engagement may interrupt students' attention and contribute to procrastination or ineffective time management. Excessive recreational use may therefore reduce the time and concentration available for academic activities.

Social media may also influence how students communicate. Online interaction is often characterized by brevity, immediacy, informality, and the frequent use of abbreviated language. Although these characteristics can facilitate rapid peer communication, extensive dependence on informal digital communication may create challenges when students are required to produce formal academic writing, presentations, or professional correspondence.

Another concern is the quality and reliability of information available through social media. Students encounter content produced by individuals and organizations with varying levels of expertise and credibility. Without adequate digital and information literacy, students may accept inaccurate or misleading information as reliable. Therefore, effective educational use of social media requires not only access to digital platforms but also the ability to evaluate, interpret, and use online information critically.

Against this background, the present study focuses on the relationship between social media use and three important dimensions of higher education: student learning, academic performance, and communication skills. Rather than considering social media simply as either beneficial or harmful, the study adopts a balanced perspective by examining how the purpose, intensity, and nature of usage may influence students' educational experiences.

Significance of the Study

The importance of this study arises from the growing role of social media in students' academic and personal lives. Since students frequently move between academic and recreational digital activities, understanding the consequences of this behavior is increasingly relevant to higher education institutions.

The study is significant because it examines whether social media can contribute positively to learning when it is used for educational purposes. Academic discussion groups, educational videos, peer support networks, and resource-sharing activities may provide students with additional opportunities to understand course content and interact with others. Identifying these benefits can help educators make more purposeful use of social media in teaching.

At the same time, the study considers potential disadvantages associated with excessive or inappropriate use. Distraction, procrastination, poor time management, and dependence on entertainment-oriented content may interfere with academic responsibilities. Examining these factors can help institutions develop strategies for promoting more responsible digital behaviour.

Communication represents another important dimension of the study. Social media has changed the speed, frequency, and style of student interaction. Understanding these changes can help educators determine how digital communication complements or conflicts with formal academic communication. The results may therefore contribute to the development of communication and digital-literacy initiatives within higher education.

The study may also be useful to policymakers and institutional administrators. Evidence concerning students' patterns of social media use can support the development of guidelines for appropriate academic use of social networking platforms. Rather than restricting technology indiscriminately, institutions can encourage students to develop the skills required to use digital platforms productively and critically.

Statement of the Problem

The widespread use of social media among higher education students has created a complex educational situation. Social networking platforms can provide students with rapid access to information, opportunities for collaboration, and channels for academic communication. At the same time, frequent engagement with non-academic content may interfere with concentration, time management, and academic responsibilities.

The central issue is therefore not simply whether students use social media, but **how, why, and to what extent they use it**. Students who primarily use social media for educational interaction may experience different learning outcomes from students whose use is predominantly recreational. Similarly, frequent digital communication may strengthen peer interaction while simultaneously changing students' approaches to formal writing and professional communication.

A further concern involves the reliability of information shared through social media. The large volume of user-generated content makes it increasingly important for students to evaluate the credibility and relevance of information before incorporating it into academic work.

Despite the growing use of social media in higher education, its relationship with academic performance and communication remains complex. The educational value of social media may

depend on factors such as frequency of use, purpose of use, students' ability to manage their time, and their digital-literacy skills. Consequently, systematic investigation is required to understand the conditions under which social media supports or undermines student learning.

Review of Related Literature

Existing research presents social media as a multidimensional phenomenon within higher education. Studies have examined its influence on student engagement, collaboration, satisfaction, academic achievement, and communication.

Research by Al-Rahmi and colleagues has examined the relationship between social media use, student interaction, satisfaction, and academic performance. Their work indicates that social media can contribute to educational interaction and student outcomes when incorporated into appropriate learning activities. Such findings suggest that the educational value of social media is closely related to the manner in which students and educators use these platforms.

A systematic review by Pérez et al. examined research on social media as a teaching and learning tool in higher education. The literature reviewed in that study indicates that social media can support interaction, participation, and access to educational materials. However, the effectiveness of these tools varies according to the educational context, platform, learning activity, and manner of implementation.

Recent literature has also emphasized that social media has affective, behavioral, and cognitive dimensions. Its influence therefore extends beyond academic achievement to include students' attitudes, participation, motivation, and patterns of interaction. This broader perspective is important because learning is influenced by both academic and social processes.

Communication is another significant area of investigation. Social media enables students to maintain frequent contact with peers and instructors and can facilitate the development of online learning communities. However, the informal characteristics of online communication raise questions concerning the development and maintenance of formal academic communication practices.

The literature also identifies several risks. Excessive social media engagement may contribute to distraction, reduced academic focus, and ineffective time management. Furthermore, misinformation, privacy concerns, and digital dependence can complicate the educational use of social networking platforms.

Overall, previous studies suggest that social media does not have a uniform effect on students. Its influence appears to depend substantially on the purpose and pattern of use. This observation supports the need for studies that distinguish between academic and non-academic social media engagement while examining both learning and communication outcomes.

Research Gap

Although previous research has extensively examined social media in higher education, several areas require further investigation. Much of the existing literature focuses independently on academic performance, engagement, or technology acceptance. Fewer studies examine academic learning and communication skills together within the same analytical framework. Furthermore, the distinction between educational and recreational social media use is important because overall usage time alone may not adequately explain its effect on students. Two

students may spend the same amount of time online but experience substantially different educational consequences depending on how that time is used.

The present study therefore seeks to address this gap by examining social media use in relation to student learning, academic performance, collaborative learning, and communication skills. It adopts a balanced approach that recognizes both the educational opportunities and potential disadvantages associated with social networking platforms.

Objectives of the Study

The study aims to:

- determine the extent and patterns of social media use among higher education students;
- examine the relationship between social media use and students' academic performance;
- investigate the contribution of social media to collaborative learning and knowledge sharing;
- assess the influence of social media on students' formal and informal communication skills;
- compare the educational implications of academic and non-academic social media use; and
- identify the potential benefits and challenges associated with incorporating social media into higher education.

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are proposed:

- **H1:** Social media usage is significantly associated with students' academic performance in higher education.
- **H2:** Social media usage significantly influences students' communication skills.
- **H3:** Students who primarily use social media for educational purposes demonstrate significantly different learning outcomes from students who primarily use it for non-academic purposes.
- **H4:** Educational use of social media is significantly associated with students' participation in collaborative learning and knowledge-sharing activities.

Operational Definitions

Social media use: The frequency, duration, and purpose with which students engage with social networking platforms for academic and non-academic activities.

Student learning: The acquisition and development of knowledge and skills, reflected in students' understanding of course content, participation, engagement, and perceived learning outcomes.

Academic performance: Students' level of academic achievement, measured through reported grades, marks, GPA, or other appropriate academic indicators.

Communication skills: Students' ability to convey, interpret, and exchange information effectively through written, verbal, and digital communication.

Collaborative learning: A learning process in which students work with peers to exchange information, solve problems, discuss academic issues, and construct knowledge collectively.

Learning outcomes: The knowledge, skills, competencies, attitudes, and academic achievements that students develop through educational activities.

Higher education: Formal post-secondary education provided by universities, colleges, and other recognized institutions at undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

Research Methodology

Research Approach and Design

The study adopts a quantitative research approach using a descriptive and correlational survey design. This approach is appropriate because the study seeks to measure patterns of social media use and examine relationships between social media engagement, academic performance, learning outcomes, and communication skills.

Population and Sample

The target population consists of undergraduate and postgraduate students enrolled in recognized higher education institutions. Participants may be selected using convenience sampling or, where institutional access permits, stratified random sampling to obtain representation across academic levels and disciplines.

The final sample size should be determined using an appropriate statistical method based on the size of the target population, expected effect size, confidence level, and available resources.

Research Instrument

Data may be collected through a structured questionnaire divided into several sections:

- demographic characteristics;
- frequency and duration of social media use;
- academic and non-academic purposes of use;
- collaborative learning and knowledge sharing;
- perceived learning outcomes;
- academic performance; and
- formal and informal communication practices.

Likert-scale items can be used to measure students' perceptions and experiences. Before full-scale data collection, the questionnaire should be reviewed by subject experts and pilot-tested with a small group of students to assess clarity, validity, and reliability.

Variables of the Study

The primary independent variable is **social media usage**, measured through frequency, duration, and purpose of engagement.

The dependent variables are:

- academic performance;
- student learning outcomes;
- collaborative learning; and
- communication skills.

Demographic characteristics such as age, academic level, discipline, and other relevant characteristics may be examined as background variables.

Data Collection Procedure

Data may be collected through printed questionnaires or a secure online survey platform. Participation should be voluntary. Participants should receive information about the purpose of the study before providing informed consent. No personally identifying information should be collected unless it is essential and appropriately protected.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, may be used to describe social media usage patterns and students' responses. Pearson's correlation or another appropriate correlation coefficient may be employed to examine associations among the principal variables. Independent-samples t-tests or other suitable tests may be used to compare groups based on the primary purpose of social media use. Where appropriate, regression analysis may be used to determine whether social media usage predicts academic or communication outcomes. Statistical significance should be evaluated using a predetermined significance level, commonly $p < .05$.

Expected Contribution of the Study

The study is expected to contribute to the understanding of social media as an educational and communication environment rather than treating it solely as a source of distraction. Its principal contribution lies in examining both the academic and communicative dimensions of social media use. From an educational perspective, the findings may help instructors identify ways of incorporating social media into collaborative activities, resource sharing, and student engagement. From an institutional perspective, the findings may support digital-literacy programs that teach students how to manage online distractions, evaluate information credibility, and communicate appropriately in academic environments. The study may also provide evidence for distinguishing productive digital engagement from excessive recreational use. Such a distinction can support more balanced institutional policies that encourage responsible technology use rather than relying exclusively on restrictions.

Conclusion

Social media has become an important component of the contemporary higher education environment. Its influence extends beyond social interaction to include learning, collaboration, information exchange, and communication. When used purposefully, social media can provide students with additional opportunities to access educational materials, interact with peers, participate in discussions, and construct knowledge collaboratively.

At the same time, its educational potential can be weakened by excessive or poorly managed use. Distraction, procrastination, unreliable information, and overdependence on informal communication may create challenges for students and educators. Consequently, the impact of social media should be understood in relation to the purpose, intensity, and context of use rather than through usage time alone. The effective integration of social media into higher education therefore requires a balanced approach. Students need digital and information-literacy skills that enable them to evaluate online content, manage their digital behavior, and communicate appropriately across academic and social contexts. Educators and

institutions can support this process by designing purposeful online learning activities and establishing clear expectations for responsible digital engagement. Ultimately, social media should not be regarded simply as either an educational solution or an academic threat. Its value depends largely on how it is incorporated into learning environments and how effectively students manage its opportunities and risks. A thoughtful and evidence-based approach can enable higher education institutions to harness the collaborative and communicative potential of social media while reducing its negative influence on student learning and academic performance.

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