

# Beyond the Screen: Exploring Students' Views on Social Media's Impact in Education

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**Abstract.** This study delved into the intricate relationship between social media usage and academic outcomes among university students from diverse fields: engineering and art studies, health and social care studies, and business studies. The study employed a two-pronged methodological approach, encompassing a survey questionnaire and focus group discussions. The survey data, reported in a separate publication, provided quantitative insights into students' social media usage patterns, preferences, and perceived impacts on academic performance. The focus group discussions, conducted across three university campuses, facilitated a more in-depth exploration of students' experiences, motivations, and the nuances of their social media usage behaviors.

The study's findings highlighted the complex interplay between social media and academic outcomes. While excessive social media engagement could negatively impact academic performance, social media could also be harnessed for collaboration, knowledge sharing, and peer-to-peer learning. Students' preferences for specific social media platforms were influenced by the purpose of use and the desire to maintain a sense of autonomy. The study concluded that educators should adopt strategies to help students manage their social media usage effectively, maximizing its potential benefits while minimizing distractions and negative impacts on academic performance.

Keywords: Social media, academic outcome, University students.

## 1 Introduction

In the dynamic landscape of contemporary higher education, understanding the impact of social media usage on student attention, motivation, and self-regulation is of paramount importance. As social media platforms become increasingly intertwined with students' daily lives, their influence on academic engagement and performance cannot be overlooked. This research offers valuable insights into the complex interplay between social media usage and academic outcomes, providing a foundation for educators and policymakers to develop effective interventions to support students' success in the digital age.

University students use social media to interact with families and friends. This research is exploring on the use of social media of university students to prepare for their

assessment and on how it also affects students negatively. The literature indicates the advantages of using social media by students for collaborative learning (Al-Adwan et al., 2020; Al-rahmi, 2013). Through the collaboration of social media, the work by (W. M. Al-Rahmi et al., (2014) suggested that social media use improves academic performance. However, there is a research gap on finding on students' perception on the effect of the use of social media on their preparation for assessment for how social media affects students' engagement and preparation for their assessment.

The following research questions are the drivers for this research. The rationale for the development of research question 1 (see Table 1 below) is that social media has become an integral part of many students' lives, and its use can have both positive and negative impacts on their academic performance. Understanding how social media use affects engagement, motivation, and self-regulation can help educators design interventions to maximise the benefits and minimise the potential drawbacks of social media use for academic purposes.

The second research question is developed to understand collaboration and group work. Social media can provide a platform for students to coordinate group projects, share ideas, and provide mutual support. However, the effectiveness of social media for collaboration may depend on factors such as the size and dynamics of the group, the clarity of communication channels, and the establishment of clear expectations and goals.

The final research question is about knowing what students' preference of social media. Understanding students' preferences for social media platforms for academic purposes can help educators and technology designers develop more effective and targeted social media-based learning interventions. By considering the factors influencing these preferences, such as academic discipline, learning style, and individual needs, educators can tailor their approaches to maximize engagement and learning outcomes.

**Table 1 Research Questions**

RQs	Description
RQ 1	How does the frequency and purpose of social media use influence students' academic attention, motivation influenced by self-regulation?
RQ 2	How does social media facilitate collaboration among students, including group project coordination, knowledge sharing, and peer-to-peer learning, and how does this collaboration impact students' academic outcomes?
RQ 3	What factors influence students' preferences for specific social media platforms for academic purposes?

The rest of the manuscript starts with a literature review that critically evaluates existing research on the topic, identifying key themes, gaps in the literature, and emerging trends. The methods section outlines the research design, data collection procedures, and analytical techniques employed in the study. The findings section presents the results of the study, highlighting significant patterns and relationships between social

media use and academic outcomes. The discussion section interprets the findings in the context of existing literature and theoretical frameworks, offering explanations for the observed relationships and exploring potential implications for educators and policy-makers. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the key findings of the study, restates the significance of the research, and suggests directions for future research.

## **2 Literature review**

A vast majority of students are active on social media, as observed in the study by Kolhar et al., (2021), which found that 97% of students use these platforms. However, only a minor proportion, about 1%, utilize social media primarily for academic purposes. The study further revealed diverse usage patterns among students: 35% predominantly use it for chatting, 43% use it as a pastime, and a significant 57% exhibit high levels of engagement with social media, which may suggest a tendency towards habitual or excessive use. While the high usage of social media for non-academic purposes is evident, there are studies that reveal a different aspect of this trend.

Contrasting these findings, a study from South Africa by Chukwuere, (2021) suggested that social media use can positively influence students' academic learning performance. This improvement was noted in areas such as communication, interaction, engagement, and self-directed learning. A key reason for this positive impact is the access social media provides to academic resources. Platforms like YouTube offer an extensive range of educational content, including tutorials, lectures, and coursework from various institutions and educators globally. Such resources can significantly enhance understanding and supplement classroom learning. This positive influence is further exemplified in collaborative educational settings.

Social media has emerged as a powerful tool for fostering collaborative learning among students, facilitating interactivity with peers, and promoting knowledge sharing. These platforms provide a virtual space where students can connect, communicate, and engage in shared learning experiences that extend beyond the confines of the traditional classroom (Ansari & Khan, 2020).

Collaborative learning involves students working together to achieve common learning goals. Social media enables this by providing a platform for students to share ideas, brainstorm solutions, and co-create knowledge. Online discussion forums, group chats, and collaborative workspaces allow students to engage in asynchronous and synchronous discussions, fostering a sense of community and shared purpose. Interactivity with peers is another key aspect of social media's impact on student learning. Social media platforms provide opportunities for students to interact with their peers in a variety of ways, including asking questions, providing feedback, and offering support. This peer-to-peer interaction can enhance understanding, clarify concepts, and promote diverse perspectives, enriching the learning experience (W. Al-Rahmi et al., 2014).

Knowledge sharing, the exchange of information and expertise, is also facilitated by social media. Students can share study materials, post links to relevant resources, and engage in discussions that contribute to the collective knowledge base. This collaborative knowledge construction process deepens students' understanding and promotes the development of critical thinking skills. However, alongside these positive aspects, there are studies highlighting the challenges associated with social media use.

A parallel study by Bhandarkar et al., (2021) also highlighted the extensive use of social media among students. According to their findings, 71.5% of students utilized social media to complete assignments, and over 50% used it for preparing for seminars. The study noted a negative impact of social media on students' academic performance. Additionally, it was observed that academically lower-performing students tended to use social media more frequently compared to their higher-performing counterparts.

Social media usage has emerged as a prominent factor influencing student attention, motivation, and self-regulation, consequently impacting academic performance. The pervasiveness of social media platforms has created a constant stream of distractions, readily accessible at the touch of a button. This continuous influx of notifications, updates, and engaging content can significantly divert students' attention away from academic tasks, hindering their ability to focus and negatively affect their academic performance (Giunchiglia et al., 2018; Hassell & Sukalich, 2016).

Moreover, social media's ability to foster instant gratification and social connection can undermine intrinsic motivation, the inherent drive to engage in activities for personal satisfaction or interest. Instead, students may become more inclined to seek extrinsic rewards, such as the validation and approval of their peers, through social media engagement. This shift in motivation can diminish their genuine interest in academic pursuits, further affecting their attention and engagement (Barton et al., 2018; Thompson, 2017).

Self-regulation, the ability to manage one's thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, plays a pivotal role in mediating the effects of social media on attention and motivation. Students with strong self-regulation strategies are better equipped to resist distractions, manage their time effectively, and prioritize academic tasks. Conversely, students with weaker self-regulation skills may struggle to control their social media usage, leading to decreased attention, reduced motivation, and ultimately, impaired academic performance (Khan et al., 2021). Amidst these varied impacts, understanding student preferences in social media platforms remains a complex issue.

Despite the widespread use of social media among students, the existing literature does not provide a definitive understanding of the factors that influence their choices of platforms for specific purposes. While some studies have identified general trends, such as the use of platforms like Instagram and TikTok for entertainment and Facebook and WhatsApp for social interaction, there is a lack of clear consensus on the underlying factors driving these preferences.

This lack of clarity can be attributed to the complex and multifaceted nature of social media usage. Students may consider various factors when selecting platforms, including the platform's features, the type of content it offers, the perceived benefits of using the platform, and the individuals they wish to connect with. Additionally, individual preferences and motivations play a significant role in shaping social media usage patterns. Further research is needed to delve deeper into the factors that influence students' social media platform preferences. This research should explore the interplay between individual characteristics, social context, and technological affordances to shed light on the complex decision-making processes behind social media usage. By understanding these factors, educators and policymakers can develop more effective strategies to guide students towards mindful and purposeful social media engagement.

### **3 Methodology**

To investigate the intricacies of students' social media usage and its influence on their academic preparation and outcomes, this study employed a two-pronged methodological approach. The first phase involved a survey questionnaire, the results of which have been reported in a separate publication. This survey provided valuable insights into students' social media usage patterns, preferences, and perceived impacts on their academic performance. Building upon the foundational data gathered from the survey, the study expanded its scope to include qualitative insights. Building upon the foundational data gathered from the survey, the study expanded its scope to include qualitative insights.

#### **3.1 Rationale for Methodology Selection**

The combination of a previously conducted survey and the focus group discussions provided a robust methodological framework for addressing the research questions. The survey offered a quantitative assessment of students' social media usage patterns and their perceived impacts on academic performance, laying the groundwork for the focus group discussions. To deepen our understanding of these initial findings, the study utilized a more interactive and detailed approach.

To further explore these findings and gain a deeper understanding of students' experiences, motivations, and the nuances of their social media usage, focus group discussions were conducted across three distinct university campuses. These discussions, encompassing students from engineering and art studies, health and social care studies, and business studies, facilitated a more in-depth examination of their perspectives and the contextual factors influencing their social media usage behaviors. To ensure the effectiveness and integrity of these discussions, a comprehensive data collection procedure was meticulously followed.

### 3.2 Data Collection Procedure

To ensure the quality and effectiveness of the focus group discussions, a thorough data collection procedure was implemented. This procedure encompassed the following steps:

1. **Ethics Procedures:** Ethical procedures were followed throughout the research to protect participants' rights and well-being.
2. **Pilot Testing of Questions:** The pre-prepared questions for the focus group sessions were pilot tested for clarity, relevance, and effectiveness in eliciting meaningful responses, involving a mock group to refine and ensure their suitability for the discussions.
3. **Participant Information Leaflet:** Prior to the focus group discussions, participants received a comprehensive information leaflet detailing the study's purpose, participation expectations, confidentiality measures, and withdrawal procedures.
4. **Consent Form:** Before participating in the focus group discussions, participants were required to review and sign an informed consent form, which outlined the study procedures, risks and benefits of participation, and their rights, including the option to withdraw at any time.
5. **Focus Group Discussions:** Focus group discussions were held across three university campuses, each targeting a specific discipline, where a moderator used a structured format and probing questions to guide the conversation and delve deeper into specific topics.
6. **Data Transcription:** Audio recordings of the focus group sessions were transcribed using Team software, ensuring efficient, accurate, and complete transcription of the discussions.
7. **Data Cleaning and Verification:** A data cleaning process was conducted to enhance the data's reliability, involving a thorough review and correction of the transcribed data against the original audio recordings to ensure accuracy and trustworthiness. In the conducted study, the researcher adhered to a five-step process for qualitative data analysis as outlined by Clarke & Braun, (2021):
  - a. **Familiarization with the Dataset:** The researcher engaged in extensive reading and re-reading of the transcripts to become thoroughly familiar with the content. This process involved making detailed notes to form initial analytical observations. In line with Silverman, (2013)'s recommendations, audio recordings were also utilized. These recordings were crucial in understanding the tone and emotion of the speakers, group dynamics, and non-verbal cues such as pauses, sighs, changes in speech pace, and laughter. They were essential in ensuring the accuracy of the transcriptions and in revealing subtle aspects of speech, such as hesitations, emphasis on specific words, or changes in tone, which were key to grasping the nuances of the participants' responses.

- b. Coding: During this phase, the researcher generated succinct labels to capture significant ideas, concepts, explanations, examples, and metaphors relevant to the research questions. The use of audio recordings aided in refining codes that were not apparent in the transcript alone.
  - c. Generating Initial Themes: The researcher examined the codes and collated data to develop broader patterns of meaning, which led to the formation of potential themes.
  - d. Developing and Reviewing Themes: The researcher reviewed the established codes and themes to ensure that they presented a coherent narrative in line with the research questions.
  - e. Refining, Defining, and Naming Themes: Lastly, the researcher evaluated the scope and focus of each theme. This step was crucial to ensure that the names of the themes were both informative and reflective of their content.
8. Thematic Analysis: Thematic analysis was used to systematically code the transcribed data, extract meaningful patterns and themes, and develop a comprehensive understanding of the concepts and issues emerging from the focus group discussions (Braun et al., 2019).

Each step of this procedure was designed to optimize the quality of the collected data and the insights derived from it. By adhering to a rigorous data collection procedure, this study ensured the quality, reliability, and validity of the data gathered through the focus group discussions. The combination of pilot testing, a participant information leaflet, a consent form, careful transcription, data cleaning, and thematic analysis provided a robust foundation for analyzing the complex relationship between social media usage and academic outcomes.

### **3.3 Participant Recruitment and data collection.**

At each campus, research assistants proactively invited students to participate in the focus group discussions. This direct approach ensured that the participants were well-informed about the purpose of the study and voluntarily consented to share their insights. To gather in-depth insights into students' perceptions and experiences regarding social media usage and its impact on academic outcomes, three focus group discussions were conducted. Each focus group consisted of 5 to 6 participants and lasted for approximately 45 to 54 minutes. The total number of participants across the three focus groups was 16, providing a rich and diverse range of perspectives for analysis. The focus group discussions were carefully guided by a moderator to ensure that all participants had the opportunity to share their thoughts and experiences. The discussions were audio-recorded and transcribed to facilitate further analysis and interpretation of the data.

Selecting participants for focus groups comes with inherent limitations. One significant limitation is the potential lack of representativeness owing to the small group size,

making it challenging to generalize the findings. Additionally, the dynamics within the group and the potential for peer pressure can significantly influence individual responses, potentially skewing the data. The format of focus groups inherently limits the depth of each participant's engagement, offering fewer opportunities for a thorough exploration of individual perspectives or experiences. Another critical challenge is striking a balance between creating a diverse group to capture a broad range of perspectives and maintaining a homogeneous group to ensure focused and relevant discussions.

## **4 Findings**

The findings presented the theme developed from the data. The main four identified themes are social media effect of attention and motivation, collaboration work and social media, distraction on academic work and reasons for the choices of social media.

### **4.1 Attention and collaboration**

Across the focus group discussions, a consistent theme emerged regarding the perceived impact of social media use on students' attention and motivation. Participants generally expressed the belief that their social media usage was not excessive or disruptive to their academic performance. They acknowledged the potential for distractions posed by social media, but they also emphasized their ability to manage their time effectively and balance social media engagement with their academic responsibilities. One research participant expressed the themes as follows: 'I use social media all the time, but it does not affect my academic performance.' Another research participant expressed the same line of argument 'I have been informed that my use of social media is excessive, and will impact on my attention on my academic work but my academic performance and result is not affected by it'

Several participants noted that they utilized social media platforms for academic purposes, such as accessing study materials, connecting with classmates, and seeking clarification from instructors. They perceived these uses of social media as beneficial and complementary to their traditional learning methods.

While some participants acknowledged occasional instances where social media had temporarily diverted their attention from academic tasks, they did not attribute these distractions to any inherent negative effects of social media. Rather, they viewed them as lapses in self-regulation that could be addressed through improved time management strategies and mindful social media usage habits.

### **4.2 Social media and collaboration for academic work**

Social media has emerged as a transformative tool for fostering collaboration and enhancing student engagement in group projects. By leveraging the interactive and connective nature of social media platforms, educators can cultivate a dynamic learning



environment that empowers students to collaborate effectively, achieve shared goals, and ultimately improve their academic performance.

Social media platforms provide a virtual space for students to connect with peers, exchange ideas, and work together on projects seamlessly. This collaborative approach encourages students to actively participate in their learning, share their unique perspectives, and learn from their peers' diverse experiences. The ability to engage in real-time discussions, share files, and provide feedback seamlessly fosters a sense of shared responsibility and ownership of the project, motivating students to contribute their best efforts.

Social media platforms also facilitate asynchronous communication, allowing students to work on projects at their own pace and revisit discussions at their convenience. This flexibility is particularly beneficial for students with diverse schedules or time zone differences. Additionally, social media platforms enable students to ask questions and seek clarification from their peers or instructors outside of class time, promoting a continuous learning process.

Furthermore, social media platforms offer a range of features that streamline project management and enhance collaboration. The ability to share documents, schedule meetings, and engage in live video or audio discussions makes it easier for students to coordinate their efforts and clarify difficult concepts. This digital workspace fosters a sense of community and shared purpose, enabling students to work together effectively towards achieving their project goals.

### **4.3 Choice of social media platforms**

Students exhibit distinct preferences for social media platforms based on the purpose of use and the social circles they wish to engage with. Facebook, for instance, is often used to maintain connections with family and close friends. Some students may even restrict their Facebook usage to exclusively interact with family members, maintaining a separation between personal and academic circles. One research participant expressed this sentiment as follows: 'We are told to use different platforms for different modules. Imagine switching from one platform to another, receiving messages and alerts and reminder. In my group work we decided to use WhatsApp for all modules, simple and convenient.'

Platforms like TikTok and Instagram, on the other hand, are primarily used for entertainment purposes. Students gravitate towards these platforms for their engaging content, such as short videos, memes, and music. This preference reflects the desire for relaxation and escape from academic pressures.

Interestingly, students often maintain separate social media identities for different social groups. Those who connect with colleagues and potential employers on LinkedIn may not include these connections on Facebook, WhatsApp, or Twitter. This distinction

suggests a conscious effort to manage privacy and maintain different personas across social media platforms. Another student expressed the sentiment as follows: 'I have WhatsApp group with my colleagues, which is extensively used to ask questions, share ideas and documents. I don't want to use another platform, each lecture wants us to use what they prefer, I found it not efficient for my study.'

Further research could be conducted to delve deeper into the categorization of social media groups and explore the underlying motivations behind students' platform preferences. This research could shed light on the complexities of social media usage and provide valuable insights for educators and policymakers in tailoring interventions and strategies that align with students' social media behaviors.

## **5 Discussions**

The discussion presented in this paper is organised around the key research questions that guided the study. It delves into the research findings, carefully examining them in the context of the existing literature. This approach ensures that the research findings are not merely presented in isolation but are instead situated within the broader landscape of knowledge on the topic.

### **5.1 How does the frequency and purpose of social media use influence students' academic attention, motivation influenced by self-regulation?**

While research has established a link between excessive social media engagement and negative academic outcomes (Giunchiglia et al., 2018), determining the precise amount of social media usage that constitutes "too much" remains a challenge. Individual factors such as self-regulation skills, time management strategies, and social media usage habits play a significant role in mediating the impact of social media on academic performance.

Students with strong self-regulation skills and effective time management strategies may be able to manage their social media usage without experiencing significant distractions or declines in motivation. Conversely, students who struggle with self-regulation or have difficulty managing their time may find that even moderate levels of social media usage can negatively impact their academic performance.

Furthermore, the definition of "excessive" social media usage may vary depending on the individual student's academic workload, extracurricular activities, and personal commitments. For some students, even a few hours of social media usage per day may be too much, while others may be able to manage their time effectively and use social media responsibly without compromising their academic performance.

In light of these limitations, it is crucial for educators and policymakers to adopt a nuanced approach to addressing the impact of social media on student learning. Rather

than focusing on arbitrary time limits or blanket restrictions, they should emphasize the development of self-regulation skills and mindful social media usage habits. By empowering students to make informed choices about their social media engagement, they can foster a learning environment that promotes academic success in the digital age.

While some students perceive their social media usage as neutral or even beneficial, a growing body of research indicates that excessive social media engagement can negatively impact academic performance, reduce attention, and diminish motivation to focus on academic work. The constant interruptions, the urge to stay connected, and the fear of missing out can all contribute to decreased focus, diminished motivation, and impaired productivity (Giunchiglia et al., 2018).

However, it is important to note that the impact of social media on academic outcomes is complex and varies depending on individual factors such as self-regulation skills, time management strategies, and social media usage habits. Students who can effectively manage their social media usage and prioritize academic tasks may experience less negative impact on their academic performance.

Therefore, educators and policymakers should focus on developing strategies to help students manage their social media usage, foster self-regulation skills, and promote mindful social media engagement. By empowering students to make informed choices about their social media usage, we can help them optimize their academic success in the digital age.

## **5.2 How does social media facilitate collaboration among students, including group project coordination, knowledge sharing, and peer-to-peer learning, and how does this collaboration impact students' academic outcomes?**

Social media has emerged as a transformative tool for fostering collaboration and enhancing student engagement in group projects, offering a versatile platform that promotes knowledge sharing, facilitates communication, and streamlines project management. By leveraging the interactive and connective nature of social media platforms, educators can cultivate a dynamic learning environment that empowers students to collaborate effectively, achieve shared goals, and ultimately improve their academic performance.

Social media platforms provide a virtual space for students to connect with peers, exchange ideas, and work together on projects seamlessly. This collaborative approach encourages students to actively participate in their learning, share their unique perspectives, and learn from their peers' diverse experiences. The ability to engage in real-time discussions, share files, and provide feedback seamlessly fosters a sense of shared responsibility and ownership of the project, motivating students to contribute their best efforts.

While social media platforms offer a convenient and accessible space for collaboration among students, some students may prefer to exclude instructors from their group project discussions. This preference stems from a desire to maintain a sense of autonomy and privacy during the collaborative process. Students may fear that involving the instructor could lead to excessive scrutiny, judgment, or interference with their chosen approaches and decision-making.

Instructors' presence in the group's social media discussions can create an atmosphere of surveillance, diminishing students' sense of ownership and responsibility for the project. Students may feel hesitant to express their ideas freely or engage in open discussions if they perceive that their every word and action are being monitored and evaluated by the instructor. Moreover, students may worry that involving the instructor in their social media discussions could disrupt the group's dynamics and hinder their ability to work effectively together.

### **5.3 What factors influence students' preferences for specific social media platforms for academic purposes?**

Social media platforms cater to diverse purposes, reflecting students' multifaceted digital lives. While platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp serve as primary channels for social connection and communication, platforms like TikTok and Instagram are primarily used for entertainment and relaxation. This distinction highlights the role of social media in fulfilling various needs, ranging from maintaining social ties to seeking escapism from academic pressures.

The preference for entertainment-focused platforms like TikTok and Instagram underscores the desire for leisure and distraction amidst academic demands. These platforms offer a respite from academic rigor, allowing students to unwind, engage with lighthearted content, and connect with others on a more informal level. The short-form videos, memes, and music on these platforms provide a quick dose of entertainment and humor, catering to students' need for relaxation and stress relief.

Furthermore, the conscious maintenance of separate social media personas for different social groups indicates an understanding of the varying expectations and norms across different online communities. Students recognize the importance of managing their digital presence and tailoring their online interactions to align with the specific context of each platform. This demonstrates a growing awareness of the implications of social media usage and the need to navigate the digital landscape responsibly.

The diverse usage patterns of social media among students reflect the multifaceted nature of these platforms and the varied needs they fulfill. Whether used for social connection, entertainment, or professional networking, social media has become an integral part of students' digital lives, offering a range of opportunities for communication, engagement, and self-expression.

## 6 Conclusion

While some students perceive their social media usage as neutral or even beneficial, a growing body of research indicates that excessive social media engagement can negatively impact academic performance, reduce attention, and diminish motivation to focus on academic work. The constant interruptions, the urge to stay connected, and the fear of missing out can all contribute to decreased focus, diminished motivation, and impaired productivity.

To effectively manage social media distractions and optimize academic outcomes, educators should adopt strategies that promote self-regulation skills, mindful social media usage habits, and effective time management strategies. Instead of imposing arbitrary time limits or blanket restrictions, educators should foster a collaborative learning environment that empowers students to make informed choices about their social media engagement.

Furthermore, when incorporating social media into collaborative work, educators should consider students' preferences for specific platforms and the varying expectations and norms across different online communities. Allowing students to choose the platforms that align with their preferences and the specific context of the collaborative task can enhance their comfort, engagement, and overall effectiveness in collaborative learning.

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