



WHEN DISTRACTION MASQUERADES AS LEARNING: SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE MODERN STUDENT

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, social media has become deeply embedded in students' daily lives, influencing not only communication but also learning practices. It serves as a readily accessible platform for acquiring information, sharing ideas, and engaging in academic discussions. At the same time, concerns have been raised about its potential to distract students, spread unreliable information, and negatively impact academic performance. This paper examines both the constructive and adverse roles of social media in education. It further suggests practical measures to promote responsible usage among students. The study concludes that social media can be an effective learning tool when used consciously and within appropriate limits.

Keywords: Social Media, Student Learning, Digital Literacy, Academic Engagement, Online Information.

INTRODUCTION

The integration of digital technology into education has significantly altered the way students learn and interact with information. Social media platforms, once used primarily for entertainment, have evolved into spaces where academic content is widely shared and discussed. Students today increasingly depend on these platforms for notes, tutorials, and collaborative learning.¹

Unlike traditional classroom methods, social media allows continuous and flexible learning beyond institutional boundaries. Students are no longer restricted to textbooks or lectures;

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¹ Samantha Samarasinghe and Thamali Chandrasiri, 'Impact of Social Media on Academic Performance' (2019).

instead, they can access diverse perspectives and resources instantly. This shift has contributed to the growth of informal learning environments that complement formal education.²

In the contemporary digital era, social media is no longer limited to entertainment but serves as an informal learning environment where knowledge is exchanged instantly across geographical boundaries. This transformation has blurred the lines between formal and informal education, enabling students to learn beyond classrooms.

However, this transformation also raises important concerns. While social media offers valuable learning opportunities, its misuse can result in distraction, misinformation, and reduced academic discipline. Therefore, it is essential to critically assess whether social media genuinely supports meaningful learning.³

Children who are under the age of 10 years know how to use a smartphone and are able to use social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook and YouTube. This is because of parents who are busy at work or just giving them phones to make them calm. Due to this, children are prone to getting autism, ADHD etc kind of brain development diseases, where they will be just watching the screen without any understanding. The cases of this kind of brain diseases to the children have increased during the pandemic time because of lockdown.

ACCESSIBILITY AND AVAILABILITY OF INFORMATION

One of the strongest advantages of social media is the ease with which students can access information. Educational videos, explanatory posts, and discussion forums are available at any time, allowing students to learn at their own pace.⁴

The advantage is that instead of reading hundreds of pages and by hearing topics, they can see a short video of a visual representation of the concept and can understand properly, also easy to remember. This accessibility has made education more inclusive, particularly for students who may not have access to traditional academic resources. Social media helps bridge gaps by providing free and diverse learning materials.⁵

² Vibhuti Tyagi and others, 'Student Learning Behaviors' (2025).

³ Galih Narendra Muhamad, 'Learning Focus and Social Media' (2025).

⁴ Sourabh Sharma and Ramesh Behl, 'Academic Performance Study' (2022).

⁵ Eva Perez and others, 'Social Media as Teaching Tool' (2023).

The students who can't go to offline classes and learn, social media platforms are a great support for them to gain the knowledge like other students. Mostly, the students are using social media platforms for the purpose of learning new tools of technology, like artificial intelligence courses, Python courses, coding, etc. They are also getting certificates for studying such courses.

At the same time, the overwhelming amount of available content can create confusion. Students may find it difficult to identify accurate and trustworthy information, which can negatively affect their understanding of subjects.⁶

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING AND PEER INTERACTION

Social media encourages collaboration by enabling students to connect with peers, share knowledge, and discuss academic topics. Group chats and online communities often function as informal study groups.⁷ Students who are graduates seeking employment opportunities are using social media platforms. They are making it an employment through these platforms by teaching the courses, explaining subjects with pictures and making more conceptual learning.

Such interactions can improve understanding, as students explain concepts to one another and engage in meaningful discussions. This peer-based learning often enhances confidence and communication skills.⁸ These kinds of social interactions help the people who are introverted and can't talk in public build such confidence by talking to the people in online meetings and expressing their thoughts, ideologies and creativity. However, the reliability of peer-shared information is not always guaranteed. Without proper verification, students may unknowingly rely on incorrect explanations.⁹

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND MOTIVATION

The interactive nature of social media makes learning more engaging. Visual content, short videos, and live sessions can simplify complex topics and maintain students' interest.¹⁰ Before 2014, online coaching was not used intensively as now, at that time smartphones also weren't

⁶ Manjur Kolhar and others, 'Social Media and Learning' (2021).

⁷ Sarita Singh and Anjulata Yadav, 'Academic Achievement' (2026).

⁸ Khritish Swargiary, 'Primary Education and Social Media' (2023).

⁹ OECD, 'Students, Digital Media and Learning' (2021).

¹⁰ UNESCO, 'Digital Learning Report' (2022).

used, and most of the people were not able to afford to buy phones, a laptop and also the internet.

After 2020, during the time of the pandemic due to lockdown, online classes were started for the students. Because of the even government supported the students by providing smartphones, laptops and other electronic devices under different schemes in different parts of India. Many students find this form of learning more appealing compared to traditional methods, which can sometimes feel rigid or monotonous. As a result, social media can increase motivation and participation.¹¹ Nevertheless, the same platforms also host entertainment content that can easily distract students, reducing their focus on academic tasks.¹²

NEGATIVE IMPACT ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Despite its benefits, excessive use of social media can interfere with academic performance. Students often spend considerable time browsing unrelated content, which reduces the time available for studying.¹³

In the year 2016, there was an app called “TikTok” which overruled all other social media platforms. People started getting addicted to the endless scrolling of the videos, which are just for entertainment purposes, like cringe content and some inappropriate content, like misleading people by giving false reviews on the products. So, students stopped studying, lost interest in their studies and started doing content.

Research has shown that heavy social media usage is linked to lower academic outcomes, mainly due to poor time management and lack of concentration.¹⁴ Additionally, habitual checking of social media can interrupt study sessions, making it difficult for students to maintain consistent focus.¹⁵

ROLE OF DIGITAL LITERACY

Digital literacy is essential for ensuring that students use social media effectively. It involves the ability to critically evaluate online information and distinguish between reliable and

¹¹ Pew Research Center, ‘Teens and Social Media’ (2023).

¹² Statista, ‘Social Media Usage Statistics’ (2024).

¹³ Junco R, ‘The Relationship Between Frequency of Facebook Use and GPA’ (2012).

¹⁴ Kirschner PA and Karpinski AC, ‘Facebook and Academic Performance’ (2010).

¹⁵ Rosen LD, ‘Media and Technology Usage’ (2013).

unreliable sources.¹⁶ Digital literacy is useful for studying courses from foreign countries for people who can't go to foreign countries. People can participate in foreign internships and gain experience from those internships.

Students who possess strong digital literacy skills are better equipped to use social media as a learning tool rather than a source of confusion.¹⁷ Students who use digital literacy in a correct way they are getting success and getting employment by learning new skills. Moreover, digital literacy encourages independent thinking and helps students develop research-oriented approaches to learning.¹⁸

INFLUENCE ON CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

Social media can contribute positively to the development of critical thinking. Exposure to different viewpoints encourages students to analyse information and form their own opinions.¹⁹ Online discussions and debates provide opportunities to question ideas, evaluate arguments, and engage in intellectual exchange.²⁰ However, if students are exposed to biased or misleading content without proper guidance, it may hinder their ability to think critically.²¹

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND BEHAVIOURAL EFFECTS

The psychological impact of social media cannot be ignored. Excessive usage has been associated with stress, anxiety, and reduced attention span, all of which can affect learning.²² People are getting disturbed mentally and psychologically by continuous scrolling on the apps without knowing the time. People are using till late midnight and are not able to sleep; they are drained physically and waking up with no energy and becoming fatigued.

Sleep disturbances caused by prolonged screen time can further reduce academic efficiency and concentration levels.²³ Because of sleeping fewer hours, the creativity of the person decreases eventually if they don't sleep for at least 8 hours per day. On the other hand, social

¹⁶ Eshet Y, 'Digital Literacy Theory' (2004).

¹⁷ Buckingham D, 'Media Education' (2003).

¹⁸ Ng W, 'Digital Literacy Framework' (2012).

¹⁹ Greenhow C and Lewin C, 'Social Media and Education' (2016).

²⁰ Selwyn N, 'Social Media in Higher Education' (2012).

²¹ Allcott H and Gentzkow M, 'Fake News Study' (2017).

²² Kross E and others, 'Facebook and Wellbeing' (2013).

²³ Levenson JC and others, 'Social Media and Sleep' (2016).

media can also provide emotional support by connecting students with peers facing similar challenges, thereby creating a sense of belonging.²⁴

MEASURES TO ENHANCE POSITIVE OUTCOMES

To ensure that social media contributes positively to education, students must learn to manage their time effectively and avoid unnecessary usage.²⁵ Parents have to put a timer on the phones of children for the screen time; the phone automatically shuts off.

Educational institutions can incorporate social media into teaching strategies, using it as a tool for interactive and collaborative learning.²⁶ Teachers and parents should guide students in developing responsible online habits and encourage them to use these platforms for academic purposes.²⁷ Creating reliable and structured educational content on social media can further improve its usefulness as a learning resource.²⁸ In addition, digital tools that monitor screen time can help students maintain a healthy balance between academic and non-academic activities.²⁹

CONCLUSION

The role of social media in student learning cannot be understood in absolute terms, as it presents a complex blend of opportunities and challenges. On one hand, it has revolutionised access to information, enabling students to engage with diverse educational resources, collaborate with peers, and participate in continuous learning beyond traditional classrooms. This transformation reflects the evolving nature of education in a digitally connected world, where knowledge is no longer confined to institutional boundaries. At the same time, the unregulated and excessive use of social media raises serious concerns. Issues such as distraction, misinformation, reduced attention span, and declining academic discipline highlight the limitations of relying on these platforms without critical awareness. The tendency of students to prioritise entertainment over education further complicates its effectiveness as a learning tool.

²⁴ Best P, Manktelow R and Taylor B, 'Online Communication' (2014).

²⁵ Cain J, 'Time Management and Social Media' (2018).

²⁶ Tess PA, 'Social Media in Higher Education Classes' (2013).

²⁷ Livingstone S, 'Children and Internet Safety' (2008).

²⁸ Redecker C, 'Digital Competence Framework' (2017).

²⁹ Anderson M and Jiang J, 'Teens, Social Media & Technology' (2018).

Importantly, the impact of social media is not inherently positive or negative; rather, it depends largely on how it is used. When students possess strong digital literacy skills and are guided in evaluating information critically, social media can serve as a valuable supplement to formal education. Conversely, a lack of regulation and awareness may transform it into a source of academic inefficiency.

Therefore, a balanced and structured approach is essential. Educational institutions, teachers, and parents must work collectively to promote responsible usage, integrate social media into pedagogical practices, and encourage purposeful engagement. Equally, students must develop self-discipline and time management skills to ensure that their online activities align with their academic goals.

Ultimately, social media should not be viewed as a replacement for traditional learning, but rather as a complementary tool that, when used judiciously, can enhance educational outcomes. Its true potential lies not in the platform itself, but in the way it is utilised by learners. A conscious and informed approach can transform social media from a source of distraction into a meaningful instrument of knowledge and academic growth.