

USAGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: A STUDY OF PATTERNS, IMPACT AND PERCEPTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Social media has emerged as one of the most influential communication technologies of the twenty-first century. University students constitute one of the largest groups of social media users, utilizing these platforms for communication, entertainment, education, information sharing, and professional networking. The present study investigated the usage patterns of social media among university students and examined its impact on their academic, social, and personal lives. A quantitative descriptive survey method was adopted for the study. Data were collected from 502 students of Guru Kashi University using the standardized Social Media Usage Scale developed by Saha and Guha (2019). Descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentage were employed for data analysis. The findings revealed that Facebook was the most widely used social media platform among students, followed by YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter. The majority of students spent one to three hours daily on social networking sites, primarily for chatting, downloading media content, and maintaining social relationships. While students acknowledged several benefits of social media, including communication, news updates, and educational support, excessive use was found to contribute to academic delays, sleep disturbances, eye strain, and reduced productivity. The study highlights the need for balanced and responsible social media use among university students and recommends digital literacy and wellbeing initiatives in higher education institutions.

Keywords: *Social Media, University Students, Social Networking Sites, Digital Communication, Student Behaviour, Social Media Usage*

Introduction

The rapid advancement of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has transformed the way individuals communicate, access information, and interact with one another. Among these technological developments, social media has emerged as one of the most influential digital innovations of the twenty-first century. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, WhatsApp, and LinkedIn enable users to create, share, and exchange information within virtual communities and networks (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). University students represent one of the most active groups of social media users due to their extensive engagement with digital technologies and online communication tools. Social media has

become an integral part of students' daily lives, serving multiple purposes including communication, entertainment, information seeking, academic collaboration, and professional networking (Junco, 2015). Research indicates that social networking platforms provide opportunities for knowledge sharing, peer interaction, collaborative learning, and the development of social capital among students (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). The increasing popularity of social media has generated significant interest among researchers because of its potential influence on students' academic performance, social relationships, and psychological well-being. Studies have shown that social media can facilitate learning by providing access to educational resources, enabling communication between teachers and students, and

promoting collaborative learning environments (Tess, 2013). At the same time, excessive use of social media has been associated with reduced academic achievement, procrastination, distraction, sleep disturbances, and mental health concerns such as anxiety and depression (Kirschner & Karpinski, 2010; Pantic, 2014). Furthermore, social media has reshaped interpersonal communication patterns among young adults. While these platforms help students maintain social connections and build online communities, concerns have been raised regarding privacy issues, cyberbullying, social comparison, and digital addiction (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Verduyn et al., 2017). The dual nature of social media as both a beneficial and potentially harmful tool highlights the importance of examining how university students utilize these platforms and how such usage affects various aspects of their lives. In the Indian context, the widespread availability of smartphones and affordable internet services has accelerated the adoption of social media among university students. Despite the growing body of literature on social media usage, there remains a need to explore its patterns, purposes, and effects within specific institutional contexts. Therefore, the present study aims to investigate the usage of social media among university students and examine its impact on their academic, social, and personal lives. The development of communication technologies has transformed the way people interact and exchange information. Social media platforms have become an integral part of modern life, enabling individuals to communicate instantly across geographical boundaries. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, Twitter, Snapchat, LinkedIn, and TikTok have significantly changed communication patterns, social relationships, and information-sharing practices. Social media refers to internet-based platforms that allow users to create, share, and interact with content within virtual

communities. These platforms provide opportunities for networking, self-expression, entertainment, collaboration, and learning. University students are among the most active users of social media because of their familiarity with digital technologies and their need for communication and information exchange. The rapid growth of social media has generated both positive and negative consequences. On the positive side, social media facilitates communication, knowledge sharing, academic collaboration, professional networking, and access to information. Conversely, excessive use may lead to addiction, distraction, cyberbullying, privacy concerns, academic decline, anxiety, depression, and reduced face-to-face interaction. Given the widespread use of social media among young adults, it is important to understand how university students utilize these platforms and how such usage influences their academic and personal lives. Therefore, the present study examines the patterns, purposes, and effects of social media usage among university students.

Review of Literature

Several researchers have investigated the influence of social media on students' lives. Valenzuela et al. (2009) and Ellison et al. (2011) reported that social networking platforms contribute significantly to social capital formation and interpersonal relationships. Their studies suggested that online networks enhance communication and community participation among users.

Pantic et al. (2012) found a relationship between excessive social networking and mental health issues such as depression and anxiety. Similarly, Yardi and Boyd (2010) highlighted concerns regarding online polarization and digital citizenship.

Junco (2015) and Kirschner and Karpinski (2010) examined the relationship between Facebook usage and academic performance. Their findings indicated that excessive social media use may negatively affect academic achievement, although moderate use can

support collaboration and information sharing.

Verduyn et al. (2015) reported that passive Facebook use was associated with lower emotional well-being, whereas active engagement enhanced social connectedness. Dhir et al. (2018) identified social media fatigue, fear of missing out (FOMO), and compulsive usage patterns among young adults.

Sharma and Gupta (2019) observed that educational use of social media positively influenced academic engagement and student motivation. Garcia and Martinez (2020) found that social media platforms facilitate the development of online communities and support networks among university students.

Johnson and Smith (2020) investigated the relationship between social media use and mental health and concluded that social comparison and cyberbullying significantly affect students' psychological wellbeing. More recently, Santos et al. (2023) emphasized the role of social media in promoting intercultural communication and global connectivity among university students.

The literature indicates that social media plays a multifaceted role in students' academic, social, and psychological development. However, findings remain mixed regarding its overall impact.

Research Gap

A review of available literature revealed that numerous studies have examined social media usage among students across different countries and educational settings. However, limited research has been conducted specifically among students of Guru Kashi University. Therefore, the present study was undertaken to investigate the usage patterns and effects of social media among university students in this specific context.

Objectives of the Study

The study was conducted with the following objectives:

1. To examine social media usage among university

students.

2. To identify differences in social media usage with respect to gender.

3. To examine differences in social media usage with respect to age.

4. To determine the amount of time spent on social media by university students.

5. To identify the most frequently used social media platforms among students.

6. To examine the impact of social media on students' academic, social, and personal lives.

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted a quantitative approach using a descriptive survey research design. The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to gather information regarding students' social media usage patterns and perceptions.

Population and Sample

The population consisted of all students enrolled at Guru Kashi University. A sample of 502 students was selected to represent the population. The sample included undergraduate and postgraduate students from different academic streams and demographic backgrounds.

Research Tool

Data were collected using the standardized Social Media Usage Scale developed by Saha and Guha (2019). The questionnaire consisted of 29 items and included demographic information as well as questions related to social media usage patterns, purposes, and perceptions.

Statistical Techniques

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques such as frequency distributions and percentage analysis. SPSS software was used for data processing and interpretation.

Results and Discussion

The findings revealed that social media use was highly prevalent among university students. Most respondents belonged to the age group of 18–21 years, indicating that social media usage is particularly common among young adults.

Popular Social Media Platforms

Facebook emerged as the most popular social media platform, used by 63.7% of respondents. YouTube ranked second with 19.5%, followed by Instagram (9.3%) and Twitter (7.3%). These findings suggest that students prefer platforms that facilitate communication, content sharing, and entertainment.

Reasons for Using Social Media

The primary reason for social media usage was chatting and communication (45.2%). Other major purposes included downloading music and videos (32.9%), communication with teachers and classmates (16.1%), posting photos (14.7%), blogging (13.7%), and uploading media content (12.4%). These findings indicate that social media serves both recreational and educational purposes. Students increasingly utilize these platforms for academic communication and information exchange.

Time Spent on Social Media

A considerable proportion of students spent between one and three hours per day on social networking sites. Approximately 21.5% spent between 1.5 and 2 hours daily, while 16.7% spent between 2 and 2.5 hours. The results indicate a moderate to high level of engagement with social media among university students.

Preference for Online Interaction

The study found that 45.8% of respondents considered online interaction through social media equivalent to face-to-face communication. However, 45% preferred direct interpersonal communication, indicating that traditional social interaction remains important despite technological advancements.

Impact on Student Life

Students reported both positive and negative impacts of social media. Positive effects included easier communication, access to information, educational support, news updates, and social connectivity. Social media enabled students to maintain relationships, collaborate academically, and stay informed about current events.

However, negative consequences were also identified. Approximately 30.4% of students reported that social media distracted them from their studies and reduced academic productivity. Excessive usage was associated with procrastination, reduced concentration, and delayed completion of academic tasks.

Health Effects

The study revealed several health-related concerns associated with excessive social media use. Eye strain (25.9%), sleep deprivation (8.0%), headaches (5.0%), stress (2.4%), and depression (2.4%) were reported by respondents. These findings support previous research linking excessive screen time to physical and psychological health problems.

Mobile Phone Usage

Most students accessed social media through smartphones. Mobile devices provided continuous connectivity and convenience, making social networking an integral part of daily life. The widespread use of smartphones explains the increasing frequency of social media engagement among university students.

Major Findings

The major findings of the study are summarized below:

1. Social media usage is highly prevalent among university students.
2. Facebook is the most commonly used social networking platform.
3. Communication and chatting are the primary reasons for social media use.
4. Most students spend between one and three hours

daily on social networking sites.

5. Social media supports communication, academic collaboration, and information sharing.
6. Excessive use contributes to academic delays and reduced productivity.
7. Health issues such as eye strain, sleep disturbances, stress, and headaches are associated with excessive usage.
8. Smartphones are the dominant devices used for accessing social media.
9. Social media has both positive and negative impacts on students' lives.

Suggestions

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Universities should organize digital literacy and awareness programs.
2. Students should be encouraged to maintain a balance between online and offline activities.
3. Workshops on responsible social media usage should be conducted regularly.
4. Social media should be integrated into teaching and learning activities for educational purposes.
5. Institutions should promote digital wellbeing and mental health initiatives.
6. Students should be educated about privacy protection and cybersecurity practices.
7. Social media detox programs may be organized to reduce excessive dependence on online platforms.
8. Counseling services should be made available for students experiencing digital stress or addiction.

Conclusion

Social media has become an indispensable component of contemporary student life. It provides opportunities for communication, learning, collaboration, and entertainment. The findings of the present study demonstrate that university students actively use social media for a variety of purposes, particularly communication and information sharing. While social media offers numerous educational and

social benefits, excessive use may negatively affect academic performance, health, and overall wellbeing. Therefore, educational institutions should encourage responsible and balanced social media usage while promoting digital literacy and wellbeing among students. By adopting appropriate strategies, students can maximize the benefits of social media while minimizing its potential risks.

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