



Original Article

Balancing Books and Browsing: A Sociological Insight into Social Media Use and Academic Discipline among Students in Muradnagar, Ghaziabad, U.P.

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Abstract

In the rapidly evolving digital era, social media platforms have become deeply embedded in the everyday lives of university students, influencing not only their social interactions but also their academic behaviors. The present study aims to explore the impact of social media usage on the academic performance of university students from a sociological perspective. Conducted in Muradnagar town of Uttar Pradesh, this research is based on primary data collected from 120 students through a structured questionnaire. The purposive sampling technique was used to ensure a diverse representation in terms of gender, educational background, and social category. The study investigated patterns of social media consumption, preferred platforms, duration of use, and the academic relevance of online activities. It was observed that while platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube are widely used for both academic and non-academic purposes, the intensity and unregulated nature of use often led to distractions, disturbed sleep schedules, and a perceived decline in academic performance. Despite this, many respondents acknowledged the positive role of social media in facilitating access to academic resources, peer interaction, and online learning. The study concludes that social media, when used purposefully and within controlled limits, can serve as a valuable academic aid. However, excessive and unplanned use may hamper concentration and academic discipline. Thus, the research emphasizes the need for digital awareness, time management, and institutional support to help students strike a balance between social engagement and educational responsibilities.

Keywords: Social Media, Academic Performance, University Students, Digital Distraction, Online Learning, Sociological Perspective, Muradnagar, Youth and Technology, Educational Impact, Time Management

Introduction

In today's technology-driven world, the role of social media in shaping students' educational experiences has become increasingly significant. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), WhatsApp, Snapchat, and YouTube—once intended mainly for social interaction—have now become vital for sharing information, collaborating on assignments, and engaging in academic discussions. For many university students, these platforms offer opportunities to stay connected with peers, participate in virtual study groups, and access learning content outside the traditional classroom.

However, this digital shift is not without challenges. The frequent and sometimes uncontrolled use of social media can result in decreased concentration, irregular study patterns, and poor time management. Students often find themselves scrolling through non-academic content or engaging in prolonged chatting sessions that interfere with their learning schedules. Research indicates that excessive multitasking on social media may negatively impact academic performance, leading to lower grades and unfinished academic tasks (Chayko, M. T., 2018).

This study explores how students use social media both for academic and non-academic purposes and seeks to examine whether such usage supports or hinders academic outcomes. It also considers how social media habits may affect students' mental health, including stress and distraction levels, and investigates whether intentional and limited use of these platforms might promote better academic success.

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Statement of the Problem

Social media is now deeply woven into the daily routines of students. While it provides benefits such as instant access to academic resources and easier communication with classmates and teachers, it also brings growing concerns. Many students spend a significant part of their day on these platforms—often at the expense of their academic tasks. The easy availability of entertainment and distractions on social media can disrupt focus, delay important assignments, and lead to poor academic planning.

The addictive nature of these platforms can also affect students' sleep cycles, stress levels, and motivation. Notifications, viral trends, and peer pressure to remain constantly active online contribute to a fragmented attention span and lower academic output. On the other hand, some studies suggest that moderate use of social media for academic purposes can improve collaboration and learning outcomes.

Given the mixed perspectives, there remains a gap in understanding the exact nature of this relationship. Does social media help students learn better, or does it pull them away from their goals? This research aims to find out by closely studying how students use social media, the purpose behind their usage, and the effect it has on their grades, concentration, and study behavior. The findings can help educators and institutions guide students toward healthier digital habits and more productive academic lives.

Review of literature

Over the years, several researchers have explored the relationship between social media usage and academic performance among students. With the rapid growth of digital platforms, scholars have increasingly focused on understanding how these tools influence learning behaviours, time management, concentration, and mental well-being. Various national and international studies have examined both the positive and negative outcomes of social media use in academic settings. While some emphasize its role in enhancing collaboration and access to information, others highlight concerns such as distraction, procrastination, and reduced academic output. The following review brings together key findings from existing literature to provide a comprehensive background for the present study.

Kalaskar (2015) studied 300 university students in Pune to assess social media's impact on academic performance. The research found that 68% of students used social media for over 3 hours daily, often during study time. Excessive usage led to procrastination, late assignments, and reduced focus. However, students who used platforms for academic purposes performed better. Gender differences in usage patterns were also observed.

Bansal and Kaur (2018) surveyed 320 students from Punjab universities and found 70% used social media at night, causing sleep issues and daytime fatigue. Most used platforms for entertainment, affecting study sessions. A smaller group used them academically and showed better performance. Stream-wise and gender-based usage variations were also noted. Students in science and commerce used platforms more productively.

Sharma and Sahu (2019) conducted a study on 280 students in Chhattisgarh, highlighting that 72% habitually checked social media, disrupting their academic focus. Students averaged 3.5–6 hours of use per day, especially during study hours. Excessive use led to procrastination, poor sleep, and reduced concentration. Some used it productively for academic content and webinars. Smartphone usage was highest due to portability.

Kumar and Verma (2017) studied 350 students across four UP universities and found a negative correlation ($r = -0.48$) between social media usage and CGPA. Students who used platforms over 4 hours daily had lower grades. Non-academic scrolling and distractions during study were common. A small group used social media for academic purposes and showed better results. Science students showed more academic use.

Thomas and Abraham (2020) examined 300 Kerala university students and found 72% used social media daily for academic purposes. YouTube and WhatsApp were most used for learning videos and group discussions. Students reported better academic engagement when using platforms for study. Features like reminders and digital organization helped time management. Science and commerce students showed more academic use than humanities.

Roy and Singh (2018) explored social media addiction in 280 students from West Bengal and found 45% displayed signs of addiction. Addicted students experienced anxiety, poor concentration, and lower grades. Many underestimated their usage time, which affected sleep and academic motivation. Urban students and first-year students were more prone. Students with low use performed better academically.

Patel and Desai (2019) studied 350 students in Gujarat and found that 65% used social media 3–4 hours daily. Excessive non-academic usage led to poor grades and fragmented study focus. Around 30% used it for academic content and showed better engagement. Urban students had higher overall use, while semi-urban students used it more academically. Gender differences were minimal.

Mehta and Rao (2020) investigated 320 Maharashtra students and found 75% used social media over 3 hours daily, mostly during study time. This resulted in multitasking, distractions, and extended study hours. Sleep disruption and poor concentration were common. Some students used social media strategically for education and had better study discipline. Commerce and engineering students used it more academically.

Singh and Kaur (2017) examined 300 students in Punjab and found that 68% used social media 2–5 hours daily. Most used it for entertainment, leading to frequent distractions and reduced academic output. A negative correlation ($r = -0.42$) was found between social media use and GPA. Academic users performed slightly better. Platforms like Facebook and YouTube were most used.

While numerous national and international studies have explored the impact of social media on students' academic performance, most of these investigations are concentrated in metropolitan cities, elite institutions, or well-resourced university settings. There exists a noticeable gap in literature when it comes to understanding how students in semi-urban or peri-urban regions, such as Muradnagar (Uttar Pradesh), are affected by their patterns of social media use. Muradnagar, being an emerging educational hub with a mix of coaching centers, private colleges, and university-affiliated institutions, presents a unique demographic with diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

However, limited scholarly attention has been given to how students in such transitional urban settings navigate the dual pressures of academic performance and digital engagement. Most studies either generalize social media effects across all student groups or fail to account for regional and infrastructural disparities that influence digital access, online behavior, and academic motivation. This leaves a crucial gap in understanding the contextual realities faced by students in towns like Muradnagar, where traditional study environments coexist with rapidly increasing digital exposure.

The present study seeks to address this overlooked area by offering empirical insights into the social media usage habits of students in Muradnagar, their academic patterns, and the sociological factors influencing this relationship. By doing so, it contributes to region-specific understanding and policy formulation that may better cater to the needs of students outside India's metro and capital regions.

Sociological Perspective on Social Media and Academic Performance

From a sociological standpoint, social media is not merely a technological tool but a dynamic space where social interactions, identities, and cultural patterns are constantly being formed and redefined. For university students, these platforms act as virtual social arenas where peer influence, group norms, and symbolic communication play a significant role in shaping behavior—including academic habits. The concept of *social capital*, as discussed by Bourdieu and Coleman, becomes highly relevant here, as students often use social media to build networks that provide academic support, shared resources, and emotional reinforcement. However, the same networks can also encourage time-wasting practices, digital dependency, and performative behaviors driven by validation and likes.

From the lens of symbolic interactionism, students engage with social media by constructing digital identities that may or may not align with their academic self. Their online presence, interactions, and the meanings they assign to digital engagement often impact how they prioritize studies in relation to their virtual life. Conflict theorists, on the other hand, might argue that excessive use of social media reflects broader issues of distraction, alienation, and the commodification of student attention by tech corporations—thus diverting focus from productive educational pursuits.

Overall, sociology helps us to move beyond seeing social media as a simple cause of distraction and instead understand it as a complex social environment influenced by norms, values, group dynamics, and systemic factors. This approach is essential in analyzing not just *how* social media affects academic performance, but *why* students interact with it in the ways they do.

Objectives of the Study

1. To know the socio-economic profile of the respondents.

This includes analyzing variables such as age, gender, caste, current academic status, place of residence, and access to digital infrastructure, to understand how these factors influence patterns of social media use and academic engagement.

2. To assess the impact of social media usage on academic performance.

This involves evaluating the relationship between time spent on social platforms, the purpose of usage (educational vs. non-educational), and academic outcomes like grades, focus, and time management.

Research Methodology

The present study is conducted in Muradnagar, a semi-urban area located in the Ghaziabad district of Uttar Pradesh. Muradnagar is home to several educational institutions and a diverse student population, making it a relevant site to explore the intersection of digital media use and academic life. With the growing penetration of smartphones and internet connectivity even in tier-2 and tier-3 towns, students here reflect both traditional academic aspirations and modern digital habits, offering a meaningful context for sociological inquiry.

To examine the relationship between social media usage and academic performance among university students, the study adopts an exploratory-descriptive research design. This approach allows for a detailed understanding of patterns, perceptions, and correlations without manipulating any variables. A purposive sampling technique has been used to select a sample of 120 students enrolled in various undergraduate and postgraduate programs across disciplines. Care has been taken to include diversity in terms of gender, academic stream, and residential background (urban-rural mix), thereby enhancing the relevance and representativeness of the findings.

Data collection has been carried out using a structured, MCQ-based interview schedule that includes both close-ended questions and Likert-scale items. The data was collected during the months of May and June in the year 2025.

The questions focus on various aspects such as the frequency of social media use, platform preference, daily time spent online, and the purpose of usage—whether academic, recreational, or multitasking in nature. Likert-scale statements help capture students' perceptions of how social media affects their focus, motivation, time management, and academic outcomes.

Each participant responded to the schedule in a one-on-one setting lasting approximately 20–30 minutes, allowing for uninterrupted and focused responses. The data gathered were analyzed using descriptive statistical tools including frequencies, percentages, and mean scores, providing a clear picture of prevailing trends.

Ethical considerations have been strictly observed throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, with informed consent obtained from all respondents. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured, and students were assured that their academic standing would not be affected in any way by their responses.

By combining structured data collection with a context-sensitive research site like Muradnagar, this study aims to offer both localized insights and broader implications for understanding how digital behavior is shaping academic outcomes among today's students.

Findings and Analysis

Table: Socio-Economic Profile of the Respondents (N = 120)

Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Age	18–21	24	20.0%
	22–25	38	31.7%
	26–30	28	23.3%
	>30	30	25.0%
Gender	Male	68	56.7%
	Female	52	43.3%
Category	General	28	23.3%
	OBC	54	45.0%
	SC/ST	38	31.7%
Marital Status	Married	10	8.3%
	Unmarried	110	91.7%
Education Level	UG	35	29.2%
	PG	32	26.7%
	Ph.D	14	11.7%
	Other	39	32.5%
Residence	Rural	50	41.7%
	Urban	70	58.3%
Monthly Pocket Money	Upto ₹2000	34	28.3%
	₹2000–₹3000	26	21.7%
	₹3000–₹4000	30	25.0%
	>₹4000	30	25.0%

This socio-economic profile of 120 respondents from Muradnagar (Ghaziabad) reflects a predominantly unmarried (91.7%), urban-residing (58.3%), and male (56.7%) student population. The inclusion of students from various age brackets and education levels ensures a diverse sample for examining how social media usage affects academic performance.

In terms of caste-based category, OBCs dominate (45%), followed by SC/ST (31.7%) and General category (23.3%) students, which mirrors the broader demographic structure of semi-urban areas like Muradnagar.

Education-wise, the sample is spread across UG (29.2%), PG (26.7%), PhD (11.7%), and others (32.5%), representing both regular and non-traditional learners. The pocket money distribution shows that a large segment falls between ₹2000–₹4000, influencing their access to devices, data, and digital platforms.

This table sets a strong foundation for analyzing patterns in academic engagement, time management, and digital behavior in the following sections.

Table 2: Social Media Use and Academic Performance of Respondents (N = 120)

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Use of social media	Yes	112	93.33%
	No	08	6.67%
Daily Time Spent on social media	<1 hour	18	15.00%
	1–2 hours	36	30.00%
	3–4 hours	40	33.33%
	>4 hours	26	21.67%
Most Frequently Used Platform	Facebook	10	8.33%
	Instagram	36	30.00%
	WhatsApp	42	35.00%
	YouTube	26	21.67%
	Others	06	5.00%
Use of social media for Academic Purposes	Yes	72	60.00%
	No	48	40.00%
Helps in Understanding Academic Topics	Yes	68	56.67%
	No	52	43.33%
Feel Distracted Due to Excessive Social Media Use	Yes	88	73.33%
	No	32	26.67%
Academic Performance Declined Due to Social Media Use	Strongly Agree	22	18.33%
	Agree	40	33.33%
	Disagree	38	31.67%
	Strongly Disagree	20	16.67%
Check social media While Studying/Homework	Frequently	44	36.67%
	Occasionally	40	33.33%
	Rarely	22	18.33%
	Never	14	11.67%
Sleep Schedule Affected Due to Social Media Use	Yes	74	61.67%
	No	46	38.33%
Perception of Own Academic	Excellent	10	8.33%

Performance			
	Good	44	36.67%
	Average	46	38.33%
	Poor	20	16.67%
Belief that limiting social media Can Improve Academic Performance	Yes	90	75.00%
	No	30	25.00%

The data presented in the above table is based on the responses of 120 university students and offers a comprehensive insight into how social media usage correlates with academic behavior and performance. A large majority of respondents (93.33%) reported using social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook, which reflects the widespread digital engagement among today's student population. Only a small percentage (6.67%) indicated they do not use these platforms, confirming the near-universal penetration of social media in student life.

When asked about their daily screen time, 33.33% of students reported spending 3–4 hours on social media, followed by 30% who spent 1–2 hours. Interestingly, a substantial 21.67% admitted to spending more than 4 hours a day on these platforms. This prolonged usage could potentially influence both their academic focus and health routines.

WhatsApp (35%) and Instagram (30%) emerged as the most frequently used platforms, while YouTube (21.67%) and Facebook (8.33%) were also notable. A small group (5%) used other platforms, possibly including Telegram, Snapchat, or newer apps. In terms of academic utility, 60% of students said they used social media for academic purposes like study groups or tutorials, suggesting a blend of entertainment and educational use. However, the remaining 40% indicated that their usage was non-academic.

Despite the academic potential of social media, 56.67% believed it helped them understand academic topics better, while 43.33% did not find it particularly beneficial. The more alarming trend was that 73.33% of students admitted to feeling distracted from studies due to excessive social media use. This was further reflected in their academic performance evaluations—51.66% (Strongly Agree + Agree) acknowledged that their performance had declined due to social media, although 48.34% disagreed with this notion.

A deeper behavioral insight showed that 36.67% frequently checked social media while studying or doing homework, while only 11.67% said they never did. This multitasking or split attention could be a contributing factor to the 61.67% of respondents who stated their sleep schedule had been affected by social media. Lack of sleep or irregular routines are well-known to impact cognitive performance and memory retention in students.

When asked to self-assess their academic performance, only 8.33% rated it as "Excellent," while the majority saw their performance as "Good" (36.67%) or "Average" (38.33%). About 16.67% considered their performance "Poor," possibly correlating with their social media habits. Notably, 75% of respondents believed that limiting social media usage could improve their academic performance, indicating awareness and willingness for behavioral change among students.

Conclusion and Suggestions

The present study, conducted in Muradnagar (Uttar Pradesh), sought to examine the intricate relationship between social media usage and academic performance among university students. Based on the analysis of 120 respondents, the study reveals that while social media has become an integral part of students' daily routines, its impact on academic performance is dual in nature—offering both constructive and disruptive outcomes.

A significant proportion of the respondents reported being active users of platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook, with a daily engagement of 1–4 hours on average. These platforms serve as powerful tools for communication, entertainment, and even academic collaboration. A majority of students admitted to using social media for educational purposes, including participation in study groups, sharing academic content, and watching tutorials, which highlights the potential of these platforms as supplementary learning tools.

However, the data also points to certain adverse effects. A considerable number of students acknowledged that excessive usage of social media often leads to distraction from studies and affects their sleep schedules, thereby negatively influencing academic outcomes. A worrying trend of multitasking—checking social media during study hours—was observed among many respondents, which has been linked to reduced concentration, cognitive overload, and academic underperformance.

From a sociological perspective, this study emphasizes the changing nature of student life in the digital era. Social media has not only transformed peer interaction and leisure but has also redefined academic behaviors and learning environments. It reflects how digital culture intersects with educational aspirations, creating both opportunities and challenges for today's youth. In light of the findings, the following suggestions are proposed to strike a healthy balance between social media use and academic performance:

1. **Digital Discipline and Time Management:** Students should be encouraged to develop self-regulation practices, including setting specific time slots for social media use to avoid unnecessary distractions during study hours.
2. **Awareness Campaigns:** Universities and educational institutions should conduct awareness programs on the responsible use of social media and the consequences of digital addiction.
3. **Academic Integration of Social Media:** Educators can strategically incorporate social media tools into academic activities to harness their benefits, such as using WhatsApp groups for discussions or YouTube for tutorial recommendations.

4. **Digital Detox Intervals:** Periodic social media breaks or “digital detox” sessions can help students reset their focus, improve mental well-being, and enhance academic productivity.
5. **Counseling and Support Services:** Institutions should provide access to counseling services to support students struggling with excessive social media use and its psychological effects.
6. **Parental and Peer Guidance:** Family members and peer groups should foster open conversations about digital habits and encourage a balanced lifestyle.
7. **Policy Recommendations:** Educational policy-makers may consider integrating digital literacy and media awareness into the curriculum to ensure students are equipped with critical thinking skills and ethical use of technology.

In conclusion, while social media is an inescapable reality of modern student life, its impact on academic performance largely depends on how it is used. The key lies not in rejecting social media but in cultivating mindful and purposeful engagement. A balanced approach that promotes academic growth while embracing technological advancements can lead to more holistic development among students.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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