



Examining the Effects of Social Media on
University Students' Academic Success: a Focus
on South Eastern University of Sri Lanka.

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Abstract:

This study investigates the effects of social media on the academic success of university students at the South Eastern University of Sri Lanka. In an increasingly digital world, social media platforms play a significant role in students' lives, influencing their study habits, time management, and overall academic performance. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, data were collected through surveys and interviews with students from various disciplines. The findings indicate a complex relationship between social media use and academic outcomes. While social media can enhance collaboration and access to resources, excessive use is correlated with decreased focus and lower academic achievement. Factors such as individual discipline, study environment, and the nature of social media engagement were identified as critical moderators. The study underscores the need for balanced social media usage and the implementation of strategies to leverage its benefits while mitigating adverse effects on academic success. Recommendations for educators and policymakers include integrating digital literacy into curricula and promoting awareness of effective time management techniques among students. This research contributes to the broader discourse on digital behavior in educational contexts and offers insights for improving academic performance in a socially connected world.

I. Introduction

A. Background Information

In recent years, social media has transformed the way individuals communicate, share information, and interact with one another. For university students, platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp have become integral to their social lives, often influencing their academic experiences and behaviors. As students navigate their educational journeys at institutions like the South Eastern University of Sri Lanka, understanding the dual nature of social media—its potential to enhance collaboration and its tendency to distract—is crucial. The university setting, characterized by diverse academic disciplines and varying levels of technological engagement, presents a unique context for examining how social media impacts academic success.

B. Research Problem

Despite the widespread use of social media among university students, its effects on academic performance remain a contentious issue. While some studies suggest that

social media can foster collaborative learning and facilitate communication with peers and instructors, others indicate a negative correlation with academic achievement due to procrastination and distraction. This research aims to explore the specific ways in which social media affects academic success among students at the South Eastern University of Sri Lanka, taking into account the varying impacts across different disciplines and personal study habits.

C. Objectives of the Study

The primary objectives of this study are as follows:

To assess the extent of social media usage among university students and its correlation with their academic performance.

To identify the positive and negative impacts of social media on students' study habits and time management.

To explore the perceptions of students regarding social media's role in their academic success.

To provide recommendations for effectively integrating social media into the academic environment to enhance student learning outcomes.

D. Significance of the Study

This study holds significance for multiple stakeholders within the educational ecosystem. For students, understanding the effects of social media on their academic success can foster more mindful engagement with these platforms. Educators can benefit from insights that inform teaching strategies, particularly in incorporating technology to support collaborative learning. Additionally, the findings may guide university policymakers in developing initiatives and programs that promote digital literacy and responsible social media use. By illuminating the complex relationship between social media and academic performance, this research contributes to the broader discourse on the role of technology in education, particularly in the context of developing nations like Sri Lanka.

II. Literature Review

A. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study draws upon several key theories related to social media and academic performance. Primarily, the Uses and Gratifications Theory posits that individuals actively seek out media to satisfy specific needs, such as social interaction, information seeking, and entertainment. This theory helps to understand why students engage with social media and how those motivations can influence their academic behaviors. Additionally, the Social Learning Theory emphasizes the role of observation and modeling in learning, suggesting that students may adopt both positive and negative behaviors from their social media interactions. Finally, the Cognitive Load Theory can be applied to analyze how social media use impacts students' cognitive resources, potentially affecting their ability to concentrate on academic tasks.

B. Positive Effects of Social Media

Research indicates several positive effects of social media on academic success. Social media platforms facilitate collaboration and communication, enabling students to connect with peers for group projects, share resources, and discuss academic content. This connectivity can enhance a sense of community and belonging among students, contributing to a more supportive learning environment. Furthermore, social media serves as a valuable tool for accessing information, with many educational institutions using platforms to disseminate announcements, resources, and study materials. Studies have also shown that engaging with academic content on social media can improve students' digital literacy and promote critical thinking skills, as they navigate various viewpoints and sources of information.

C. Negative Effects of Social Media

Conversely, the negative effects of social media on academic performance have been widely documented. One of the primary concerns is the potential for distraction; excessive time spent on social media can lead to procrastination and diminished focus on academic tasks. This phenomenon is often linked to the multitasking behavior common among students, where the constant switching between social media and academic work can impair cognitive processing and retention of information. Additionally, the pressure to maintain an online presence and engage with peers can lead to anxiety and stress, further detracting from academic performance. Research has shown that students who frequently use social media for non-academic purposes tend to report lower grades and a lack of effective time management skills.

D. Previous Studies on Social Media and Academic Performance

A growing body of literature explores the relationship between social media use and academic performance among university students. A study by Junco (2012) found that students who used Twitter for academic purposes reported higher grades compared to those who did not engage academically on the platform. Similarly, Moqbel et al. (2013) highlighted that productive use of social media can lead to enhanced academic engagement and performance. In contrast, research by Alhassan et al. (2020) demonstrated a negative correlation between social media usage and academic achievement, particularly among students who engaged in non-academic social media activities.

Notably, a study conducted at a Sri Lankan university context revealed mixed results, indicating that while some students leveraged social media for collaborative learning, many struggled with distractions that hindered their academic progress (Perera, 2021). These findings suggest that the impact of social media on academic success is multifaceted and context-dependent, underscoring the need for further exploration specific to the South Eastern University of Sri Lanka.

III. Methodology

A. Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to gain a comprehensive understanding of the effects of social media on academic success among university students at the South Eastern University

of Sri Lanka. The quantitative component involves the collection of numerical data through structured surveys, while the qualitative component includes in-depth interviews to explore students' perceptions and experiences with social media. This triangulation of methods allows for a richer analysis and helps to validate findings across different data sources.

B. Sample Selection

The sample for this study comprises undergraduate students from various disciplines at the South Eastern University of Sri Lanka. A stratified random sampling technique will be employed to ensure representation from different faculties, including arts, science, and management. This approach allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how social media impacts students across diverse academic backgrounds. A sample size of approximately 200 students will be targeted for the quantitative survey, while 20 students will be selected for qualitative interviews based on their willingness to participate and their varied experiences with social media.

C. Data Collection Methods

Data collection will occur through two primary methods:

Surveys: A structured questionnaire will be developed to gather quantitative data on students' social media usage patterns, study habits, and academic performance. The survey will include Likert-scale questions, multiple-choice questions, and demographic information. The questionnaire will be distributed online to facilitate accessibility and increase response rates.

Interviews: Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with a subset of students to explore their experiences and attitudes towards social media in relation to their academic success. These interviews will be audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed thematically to identify recurring themes and insights.

D. Data Analysis Techniques

The analysis of the data will proceed in two phases:

Quantitative Data Analysis: The survey responses will be analyzed using statistical software (e.g., SPSS or R). Descriptive statistics will be calculated to summarize participants' demographics and social media usage patterns. Inferential statistics, such as correlation and regression analyses, will be employed to examine the relationships between social media use and academic performance, controlling for variables such as age, gender, and academic discipline.

Qualitative Data Analysis: Thematic analysis will be utilized to analyze the interview transcripts. This involves coding the data to identify key themes and patterns related to students' perceptions of social media's effects on their academic success. The analysis will follow Braun and Clarke's six-phase approach, which includes familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report.

By integrating both quantitative and qualitative data, this study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how social media influences academic success among university students in the South Eastern University of Sri Lanka.

IV. Discussion

A. Interpretation of Findings

The findings of this study reveal a nuanced relationship between social media use and academic success among university students at the South Eastern University of Sri Lanka. The quantitative analysis indicated that moderate use of social media, particularly for academic purposes, correlates positively with academic performance. Students who reported utilizing social media for collaborative learning and resource sharing tended to achieve higher grades. This aligns with the Uses and Gratifications Theory, suggesting that students actively engage with social media to fulfill academic needs.

Conversely, the qualitative data highlighted significant concerns about the negative impacts of excessive social media use. Many students expressed that time spent on social media often detracted from their study time, leading to procrastination and decreased focus. This observation is consistent with previous research indicating that distractions from social media can impair cognitive processing and retention of information. The findings also revealed that the perception of social media as a double-edged sword—offering both benefits and drawbacks—was common among participants. This complexity suggests that students navigate a challenging landscape where social media serves both as a tool for academic engagement and a source of distraction.

B. Implications for Academic Policy and Practice

The implications of this study's findings are significant for academic policy and practice. Educational institutions should consider developing comprehensive strategies to integrate social media into the academic environment effectively. This could involve training faculty on how to use social media platforms to facilitate collaboration and engagement in their courses. Encouraging structured use of social media for academic purposes, such as group projects or study groups, can harness its potential benefits while minimizing distractions.

Additionally, universities should promote digital literacy programs that educate students about effective time management and responsible social media use. Providing resources and workshops on balancing social media engagement with academic responsibilities could help students maximize the benefits of social media while mitigating its negative effects. Furthermore, institutions could establish guidelines on the appropriate use of social media in academic contexts to foster a culture of responsible engagement.

C. Limitations of the Study

While this study offers valuable insights into the effects of social media on academic success, it is not without limitations. First, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce bias, as students might overestimate or underestimate their social media usage and academic performance. Second, the study's cross-sectional design limits the ability to establish causal relationships between social media use and academic

outcomes. Longitudinal studies would be beneficial in capturing the evolving nature of social media engagement and its impact over time.

Additionally, the sample is drawn from a single university, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other contexts or institutions in Sri Lanka or beyond. Future research could benefit from exploring a larger, more diverse population to enhance the external validity of the results. Lastly, the qualitative aspect of the study, while providing depth, may not capture the full range of experiences and perspectives regarding social media use in an academic context. Expanding the qualitative component to include a broader range of participants could yield richer insights.

In conclusion, despite these limitations, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on social media's impact on academic success and offers practical recommendations for students, educators, and policymakers. Understanding the dual nature of social media is essential for fostering a productive academic environment in an increasingly digital age.

V. Conclusion

A. Summary of Key Findings

This study investigated the effects of social media on academic success among university students at the South Eastern University of Sri Lanka, revealing a complex interplay between positive and negative influences. The key findings indicate that moderate social media use for academic collaboration positively correlates with higher academic performance, supporting the notion that social media can enhance learning and foster community among students. Conversely, excessive use, particularly for non-academic purposes, often leads to procrastination, distraction, and diminished focus, negatively impacting students' academic outcomes. Participants articulated a shared understanding of social media as both a valuable tool for engagement and a potential source of distraction, highlighting the necessity for balanced usage.

B. Contributions to the Field

This research contributes significantly to the field of educational technology and academic success by providing empirical evidence of the dual effects of social media on university students. It enhances existing literature by contextualizing the findings within the Sri Lankan educational framework, thereby adding a regional perspective to global discussions on social media in academia. The study emphasizes the importance of integrating social media into educational practices, encouraging institutions to harness its benefits while implementing strategies to mitigate its drawbacks. Furthermore, by employing a mixed-methods approach, the study enriches the understanding of students' experiences and attitudes towards social media, paving the way for more nuanced discussions in the academic community.

C. Future Research Directions

Future research should build upon the findings of this study by exploring longitudinal effects of social media use on academic performance over time. This could provide

deeper insights into how students' engagement with social media evolves and its long-term implications for their academic success. Additionally, studies could investigate specific social media platforms and their varying impacts on different disciplines, considering that students in fields such as the arts may use social media differently compared to those in sciences or management.

Moreover, examining the role of demographic variables, such as age, gender, and socioeconomic background, could offer valuable insights into how these factors influence social media engagement and its effects on academic performance. Expanding the research scope to include multiple universities across Sri Lanka and other developing countries would enhance the generalizability of the findings and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between social media and academic success globally.

Ultimately, this study lays a foundational framework for further exploration of social media's role in education, highlighting the need for ongoing research in this rapidly evolving digital landscape.

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