

The Impact of Social Media Use on University Student Academic Performance

Executive Summary

This report examines the impact of social media use on university student academic performance. The report focuses on time management, concentration, academic communication and study habits. It draws on survey responses from 150 undergraduate students and a review of recent academic sources on digital behaviour in higher education. The findings show that social media can support learning when students use it for course communication, peer support and access to information. However, high levels of non-academic use often reduce concentration, increase procrastination and weaken time management. The report concludes that academic performance depends less on social media itself and more on the way students use it. It recommends stronger study routines, better digital literacy support and clearer university communication systems.

Introduction

Social media now plays a central role in student life. Most university students use digital platforms every day for communication, entertainment and access to information. As a result, social media has become part of the wider learning environment, even when institutions do not formally integrate it into teaching.

This development has created an important academic question. Some researchers argue that social media harms academic performance because it distracts students from study and encourages short attention spans. Other researchers emphasise its benefits. These benefits include fast communication, access to peer networks and support for collaborative learning. Therefore, the relationship between social media use and academic achievement remains complex.

This report aims to assess how social media use affects university student academic performance. It focuses on three main areas. First, it considers the effect of social media on concentration during study. Second, it examines the impact on time management and assignment completion. Third, it explores the role of social media in academic communication and peer support.

The scope of this report remains limited to undergraduate students in one university setting. The report does not attempt to measure all aspects of digital life. Instead, it focuses on patterns of use that relate directly to academic work. The report begins with the research method, then presents the findings, analyses their meaning and ends with conclusions and recommendations.

Methodology

This report used a mixed-method approach. The study combined primary survey data with secondary academic literature. This method allowed both local evidence and wider academic context.

The primary research involved an online survey of 150 undergraduate students from three subject areas: business, education and media studies. The survey included first-year, second-year and final-year students. It asked about daily time spent on social media, the main purpose of use, the effect on concentration, assignment habits and perceptions of academic performance.

The survey divided social media use into three categories. The first group used social media for less than one hour per day. The second group used it for one to three hours per day. The third group used it for more than three hours per day. This division helped identify broad behavioural patterns.

The study also reviewed recent academic articles and books on digital media, student behaviour and learning outcomes in higher education. These sources helped compare the survey results with existing research.

The analysis used descriptive statistics from the survey and thematic comparison across the literature. The method did not attempt advanced statistical modelling. Instead, it aimed to identify clear patterns that could support discussion and recommendations.

This research has several limitations. The sample came from one institution, so the results may not represent all university students. In addition, the survey relied on self-reported behaviour. Some responses may therefore reflect perception rather than precise measurement. Even so, the data offers a useful basis for this report because it highlights common trends and student experiences.

Findings

The findings of this report show that the effect of social media on academic performance varies according to frequency and purpose of use.

Students in the low-use category reported the fewest academic problems. Most of these students used social media mainly for messaging, course updates and brief social interaction. Few in this group linked social media to poor concentration or missed deadlines.

Students in the moderate-use category reported mixed experiences. Many students in this group described practical academic benefits. They used class group chats, exchanged notes, shared deadlines and discussed coursework. However, some also admitted that short interruptions during study often became longer periods of distraction.

Students in the high-use category reported the strongest negative effects. In this group, 62 per cent stated that social media reduced concentration during revision or assignment work. In addition, 48 per cent reported late submission of at least one piece of work because of poor

time management linked to social media use. A further 57 per cent stated that they checked social media repeatedly during study sessions even when no academic reason existed.

Across the full sample, 71 per cent of students stated that notifications interrupted study. This finding suggests that even moderate users face some difficulty in maintaining focus. At the same time, 64 per cent of all respondents agreed that social media helped them stay informed about deadlines, seminar changes and group work tasks.

The survey also revealed differences in student attitudes. Many students described social media as both useful and distracting. For example, some students said that a course group chat helped them solve practical problems quickly. However, the same platform often led them into unrelated conversations or entertainment content.

The literature reviewed in this report broadly supports these findings. Recent studies suggest that frequent task-switching reduces concentration and increases cognitive overload. Other studies show that online peer networks can support collaboration, reduce isolation and improve access to information. The evidence therefore points to a balanced conclusion rather than a simple positive or negative judgement.

Discussion

The discussion in this report shows that social media does not produce a single academic outcome. Its effect depends on the pattern of use, the purpose of use and the level of self-regulation shown by the student.

First, moderate and purposeful use can support academic work. Students often benefit from fast communication with classmates, easy access to reminders and quick sharing of study materials. These functions can improve organisation and strengthen peer support. In particular, students who commute, work part-time or manage heavy course loads may find these tools especially helpful.

Second, heavy use often undermines academic performance. The survey results show that many students struggle to control the frequency of checking social media. This habit interrupts concentration and breaks study time into smaller, less effective periods. As a result, students may spend longer on tasks and feel less prepared for assessments.

The results also suggest that the main problem lies in unstructured use rather than simple access. Social media itself can function as an academic tool. However, constant movement between study tasks and entertainment content weakens attention and increases delay. In this sense, the issue concerns habit and boundary-setting more than technology alone.

Another important point concerns institutional practice. Many students rely on informal digital channels because official systems often feel slow or less convenient. This pattern creates both advantages and risks. On one hand, students receive quick support from peers. On the other hand, academic communication becomes mixed with distraction. Universities that improve official communication platforms may reduce this problem.

The discussion also highlights the importance of digital literacy. Students need more than subject knowledge in order to succeed. They also need practical strategies for concentration,

screen-time management and intentional technology use. When students understand how digital habits affect attention, they can make stronger decisions about study routines.

Overall, this report shows that social media acts as a tool with mixed academic effects. Productive use can support learning, but uncontrolled use can damage focus, efficiency and performance.

Conclusion

This report concludes that social media has both positive and negative effects on university student academic performance. The evidence does not support a simple claim that social media always helps or always harms learning. Instead, the results show that outcomes depend on the way students use these platforms.

Moderate and purposeful use can improve communication, support collaboration and provide access to useful academic information. In contrast, excessive and unstructured use can reduce concentration, weaken time management and increase procrastination. Students who use social media with clear boundaries appear more likely to maintain strong academic habits.

The central conclusion of this report is that academic performance depends less on the existence of social media and more on patterns of behaviour around it. Effective routines, institutional support and stronger digital literacy can reduce negative effects and strengthen positive ones.

Recommendations

This report recommends that students create fixed study periods without notifications and avoid switching repeatedly between academic tasks and social media platforms. Clear time limits for non-academic use may also help improve concentration and task completion.

Universities should provide practical guidance on digital wellbeing, concentration and time management as part of student support services. These forms of support should address everyday academic habits rather than treat social media as only a personal issue.

Course teams should also use clear and efficient official communication systems. Faster institutional communication may reduce overdependence on informal social media channels for important academic information.

Finally, future research should compare students across multiple universities and subject areas. A broader sample would allow a stronger assessment of how widely these findings apply.

References

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