

Social Media Usage among University and College Students: A Case Study

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Abstract: This study examines social media usage patterns among 293 college and university students in Meerut district, Uttar Pradesh. Using a descriptive survey method, it analyses students' preferred platforms, frequency of use, time spent online, purposes of use, and educational applications. The findings show that WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube are the most popular platforms, primarily used for communication, entertainment, and accessing educational information. Although social media offers valuable opportunities for academic learning and information sharing, excessive use may lead to academic distraction, privacy concerns, and other negative effects. The study concludes that students should use social media responsibly and recognise its potential as a useful academic and educational resource rather than merely a source of entertainment.

Keywords: Social media, university students, college students, higher education, digital communication, educational resources.

1. INTRODUCTION

Social media has become a vital component of the digital landscape in higher education. It has transformed the ways in which students, teachers, researchers, and institutions interact, collaborate, and share information. Platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp, X (formerly Twitter), LinkedIn, and other digital tools offer learning opportunities that extend beyond the traditional classroom. In higher education, social media can facilitate information sharing, academic conversations, collaborative learning, student participation, community building, and interaction between teachers and students. A systematic review by Pérez et al. (2023) indicates that social media is increasingly being explored as a teaching and learning tool, particularly due to its potential to foster interaction, collaboration, information sharing, and student-centred learning.

The inclusion of social media in higher education has also brought about changes in teaching methods. Academics can utilize social media to disseminate educational resources, facilitate discussions, provide feedback, encourage peer learning, and connect students with professional and academic communities. Research suggests that social media can create a more interactive and collaborative learning environment, complementing traditional learning management systems (Manca & Ranieri, 2016). Furthermore, systematic evidence suggests that student participation through social media can be measured through posting, commenting, viewing, and other forms of online participation, demonstrating that these platforms have the potential to provide measurable indicators of student participation.

However, the educational use of social media also presents challenges. Issues such as privacy, information credibility, distractions, digital literacy, misuse, academic integrity, and the need for appropriate teaching strategies require careful consideration. Consequently, the effectiveness of social media in higher education depends not merely on the availability or popularity of digital platforms, but on how judiciously they are integrated into the teaching and learning process. Recent research emphasizes the need for approaches that are grounded in theory and sound teaching practices to ensure that social media contributes meaningfully to educational outcomes rather than simply becoming another means of communication (Tarifa-Rodriguez et al., 2023).

Consequently, social media presents both an opportunity and a challenge for higher education institutions. Its effective use can enhance communication, collaboration, engagement, information sharing, and student-centred learning, while addressing its limitations requires appropriate institutional policies, digital competencies, and instructional planning. Therefore, for institutions that want to adapt teaching and learning methods to today's digital environment, it is important to understand the role, benefits, challenges, and impact of social media on education. The educational role of social media has become particularly significant because higher education increasingly incorporates

digital communication and online learning. The University Grants Commission (UGC) has emphasised digital learning, academic integrity and the use of information and communication technologies within higher education. Its current resources include guidance relating to online programmes, academic integrity, cyber hygiene and student development (UGC, 2023).

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Kazmi and Sharma (2026) examined social media usage patterns among university students and linked its increasing use to changes in communication, entertainment, and information seeking. Deshmukh (2024) examined the need for social media policies in Indian educational institutions. The study highlighted issues such as privacy, cyberbullying, surveillance, digital rights, and the lack of a proper institutional policy framework. Following this, appropriate institutional guidelines for responsible social media use were recommended. Mihret and Joshi (2024) conducted a systematic review of the literature on social media and academic achievement in higher education, finding evidence of both positive and negative effects; several studies found that social media can have positive contributions when used for educational purposes. Bhushan (2023), in a review of the literature on media use and satisfaction among higher education students in India, stated that college students use social media for communication, connecting with people, finding information, and other types of satisfaction. The review also observed that students may spend more time online on communication and social networking than on academic activities. Parveen, Singh, and Sagar (2020) investigated social media addiction among higher education students in Uttar Pradesh; Their study of 200 students at Mahatma Jyotiba Phule Rohilkhand University revealed concerns associated with excessive social media use, including health, social, and learning problems. Their findings suggest that it's important to distinguish between appropriate use and excessive or problematic use. According to Bharucha J. (2018), a structured questionnaire and in-depth interviews revealed four main themes: the general use of social media, its specific use in business education, its benefits, and the drawbacks of using social media for learning. There is no doubt that social media will continue to hold importance in the Indian education system. Many Indian schools and universities are incorporating social media into their teaching methods, but successfully integrating it with the curriculum remains a challenge.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The major objectives of the study are:

- To identify the social media platforms most frequently used by students.
- To determine the frequency and duration of social media use.
- To examine the major purposes for which students use social media.
- To assess the educational use of social media among students.
- To identify students' perceptions regarding the benefits of social media.
- To examine perceived negative effects of social media use.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a descriptive survey research design to examine current social media usage patterns and habits among higher education students. The descriptive research approach is considered appropriate because the purpose of this study is to identify and describe students' current social media usage patterns without making any experimental changes to their behaviour. The study used a combination of purposive and convenience sampling methods to select respondents. A total of 300 structured questionnaires were prepared for university and college students and distributed electronically through Google Forms via WhatsApp. Of the questionnaires distributed, 293 responses (97.67%) were found suitable for analysis and were included in the study. The final sample size was determined keeping in mind the time and resources available to conduct the study. The population of this study includes university and college students studying in higher education institutions (state universities, private universities, and government-aided colleges) located in Meerut district of Uttar Pradesh. The data collected from the respondents were systematically tabulated and analysed using descriptive statistical methods (especially frequency and percentage analysis) to present the results clearly and meaningfully.

5. DATA COLLECTION

Data for the present study were collected from university and college students through a systematic questionnaire. Respondents were informed about the educational purpose of the study, and their participation was voluntary. The questionnaire consisted mainly of closed-ended questions, along with some opinion-based questions aimed at eliciting respondents' opinions about social media use. The questionnaire focused on various aspects of students' social media

habits and usage patterns. Respondents were not asked for any identifying information, to ensure their privacy and confidentiality. Necessary ethical procedures have been followed to conduct a proper study on the ground.

6. DATA ANALYSIS, TABULATION AND INTERPRETATION

Table 1: Gender-wise Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	197	67.23
Female	96	32.76
Total	293	100.00

Table 1 shows that 32.76% of the survey respondents were female and 67.23% were male. As a result, most of the survey participants were men, which suggests that the proportion of male participants in this study is relatively high.

Table 2: Age-wise Distribution of Respondents

Age group	Frequency	Percentage
17–19 years	31	10.58
20–22 years	131	44.71
23–25 years	84	28.67
Above 25 years	47	16.04
Total	293	100.00

Table 2 shows that most of the respondents (44.71%) are in the age group of 20–22 years, followed by those in the age group of 23–25 years (28.67%). Respondents aged over 25 years accounted for 16.04%, while the youngest age group (17–19 years) accounted for 10.58%. Overall, the results show that the majority of respondents are young, especially those aged 20–22 years.

Table 3: Level of Study

Level	Frequency	Percentage
Undergraduate	186	63.48
Postgraduate	87	29.69
Research/other higher studies	20	06.83
Total	293	100.00

Table 3 shows that most of the respondents (63.48%) are undergraduate students, followed by 29.69% pursuing postgraduate studies. Only 6.83% of respondents fall into the research or other higher education category. Thus, the results indicate that this study primarily involved undergraduate students.

Table 4: Most Frequently Used Social Media Platform

Platform	Frequency	Percentage
WhatsApp	263	89.92
Instagram	171	58.36
YouTube	269	91.80
Facebook	112	38.22
Telegram	21	07.17
LinkedIn	8	02.73
Other	7	02.39

(Multiple responses allowed)

Table 4 shows that YouTube (91.80%) is the most used social media platform among the survey respondents, closely followed by WhatsApp (89.92%). Instagram (91.80%) is in third place, while Facebook (38.22%) has a comparatively lower number of users. Telegram (7.17%), LinkedIn (2.73%) and other platforms (2.39%) are used much less frequently.

Table 5: Frequency of Social-Media Use

Frequency	Frequency	Percentage
Several times a day	194	66.21
Once a day	47	16.04
Several times a week	32	10.92
Occasionally	20	06.83
Total	293	100.00

Table 5 shows that social media usage is very high among the survey participants. The majority (66.21%) use social media several times a day, while 16.04% use it once a day. About 10.92% of people use social media several times a week, and only 6.83% of people use it occasionally.

Table 6: Average Daily Time Spent on Social Media

Daily duration	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 1 hour	51	17.41
1–2 hours	129	44.03
3–4 hours	91	31.06
More than 4 hours	22	07.50
Total	293	100.00

Table 6 shows that most people (44.03%) spend 1-2 hours daily on social media, followed by 31.06% who spend 3-4 hours. About 17.41% of people spend less than an hour, while only 7.50% spend more than four hours daily.

Table 7: Purpose of Social-Media Use

Purpose	Frequency	Percentage
Communication with friends/classmates	264	96.92
Entertainment	271	92.49
Educational information	146	49.82
News/current affairs	121	41.29
Academic group discussion	155	52.90
Career/professional information	63	21.50
Other	21	7.16

(Multiple responses allowed)

Table 7 indicates that interacting with friends/classmates (96.92%) is the most common purpose for using social media, followed by entertainment (92.49%). Group discussions related to studies (52.90%) and getting information related to education (49.82%) are also important motives. However, the number of people using social media for news/current affairs (41.29%) and career/professional information (21.50%) is comparatively lower. Only 7.16% of respondents cited other purposes.

Table 8: Use of Social Media for Academic Activities

Academic activity	Frequency	Percentage
Sharing notes/material	76	25.94
Watching educational videos	68	23.21
Discussing assignments	51	17.41
Following educational pages/channels	42	14.33

Obtaining examination information	34	11.60
Not used academically	22	07.51
Total	293	100.00

Table 8 shows that the most common academic use of social media is sharing notes or materials, as reported by 25.94%; this is followed by watching educational videos (23.21%). Discussing assignments accounts for 17.41%, while following educational pages or channels accounts for 14.33%. Very few people use social media to get exam related information (11.60%). Only 7.51% of people said that they do not use social media for academic work.

Table 9: Perceived Benefits of Social Media

Benefit	Frequency	Percentage
Quick access to information	83	28.33
Easy communication	72	24.57
Educational resources	58	19.80
Collaboration with classmates	39	13.31
Career/networking opportunities	24	08.19
Other	17	05.80
Total	293	100.00

Table 9 shows that the primary benefit of social media is rapid access to information, cited by 28.33% of respondents; this is followed by ease of communication, considered important by 24.57%. While 19.80% found it useful as a learning tool, 13.31% found it essential for working together with classmates. Career and networking opportunities were mentioned by 8.19% of respondents, and only 5.80% mentioned other benefits.

Table 10: Perceived Negative Effects of Social Media

Negative effect	Frequency	Percentage
Distraction from studies	91	31.06
Excessive time consumption	68	23.21
Reduced concentration	47	16.04
Sleep-related disturbance	31	10.58
Privacy/security concerns	29	09.90
Exposure to misinformation	19	06.48
Other	8	02.73
Total	293	100.00

Table 10 shows that the most common negative effect of social media is distraction from studies, followed by excessive time wasting (23.21%) and lack of concentration (16.04%). A significant number of people (10.58%) also reported sleep-related problems, and 9.90% reported privacy and security concerns. The number of people who mentioned misinformation (6.48%) and other impacts (2.73%) was comparatively low.

Table 11: Students' Overall Opinion about Social Media

Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
Highly beneficial	49	16.72
Beneficial	118	40.27
Neutral	67	22.87
Harmful	45	15.36
Highly harmful	14	04.78
Total	293	100.00

Table 11 shows that most students have positive opinions about social media. About 40.27% of students consider it beneficial, while 16.72% consider it very beneficial. Thus, overall 56.99% of students view social media positively. On

the other hand, 22.87% of students remain neutral on the matter. Only 15.36% of students consider social media harmful and 4.78% very harmful.

7. MAJOR FINDINGS

Based on the study, the main findings are as follows:

- WhatsApp has emerged as the most used social media platform among students, followed by Instagram and YouTube.
- Most students reported using social media multiple times a day.
- A large portion of students spend around 2-4 hours per day on social media platforms.
- The most common purpose for students to use social media is to communicate with friends and classmates.
- Entertainment is another major factor motivating students to use social media.
- Social media also serves an important educational purpose, especially for sharing notes, accessing educational videos, and participating in assignment-related discussions.
- Students consider quick and convenient access to information as one of the major benefits of social media.
- Distraction from studies is considered to be the most common negative effect of social media use.
- Excessive time consumption and poor concentration are also considered significant concerns associated with social media use.

Overall, the results indicate that social media has become an important part of students' academic and personal lives. Its educational benefits can be maximised by responsible, balanced, and thoughtful use, while avoiding distraction and excessive use.

8. SUGGESTIONS

Based on the study, the following suggestions are made:

- Universities and colleges should organise digital-literacy programs so that students can better understand and use the online world.
- Teachers can encourage students to use appropriate social-media platforms, such as sharing information, communicating about the course, sharing and receiving class announcements, and more.
- Higher-education institutions should develop balanced social-media guidelines to address privacy, online bullying, communication, academic integrity, and other related issues. Indian education researchers have also stressed the need to create an institutional social-media policy.
- Students should be taught how to control the amount of time they spend on different online platforms, as well as how to properly allocate time between studies, entertainment, and interactive activities.
- Students should be educated about the importance of strong passwords, privacy, phishing, fraudulent links, impersonation, and other security concerns.
- Instead of using social networks solely for entertainment, teachers can utilise them productively to foster discussions on course-related topics.
- Educational institutions should inform and guide students about popular educational resources, institute web pages, libraries, databases, professional resources and networks.
- The use of social media should complement, not replace, classroom discussions, textbooks, journals, libraries, lab experiments, and conversations.

9. CONCLUSION

Social media plays an important role in the education and social life of students in Meerut district. It helps in sharing information, getting study materials, discussing assignments, communicating and learning. However, excessive use can lead to distraction, loss of study time, loss of concentration, privacy issues, and misinformation. The right approach is to promote responsible and purposeful use of social media, rather than mindlessly banning or promoting it excessively. Students should enhance their digital literacy, learn to differentiate between studies and entertainment, and maintain a balance between online and offline learning. Teachers and institutions can help by incorporating appropriate social media platforms into their learning and teaching students about privacy, academic integrity, and responsible online behaviour. Overall, the benefits of social media for learning depend on its purpose, time of use, digital awareness, and the student's ability to maintain the right balance.

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