

Impacts of Social Media on Academic Performance of University Students of Nepal

Shreedhar Adhikari¹

¹Assistant Professor, Department of English, Tribhuvan University, Mahendra Multiple Campus, Nepalgunj

¹Corresponding Author: sdhikarishreedhar@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the impact of social media on the academic performance of University students in Nepal. Through a comprehensive analysis of survey data and academic records, the research investigates the correlation between social media usage patterns and students' grades. Factors such as frequency of social media engagement, types of platforms utilized, and time allocation for academic tasks are examined. The findings shed light on the nuanced relationship between social media activity and academic achievement, providing insights for educators, policy makers, and students in navigating the challenges posed by digital distractions in the academic setting.

Keywords: Social media, Academic performance, digital distraction, university students

Introduction

The advent of the internet in the 1990s led to significant progress in communication, giving rise to the creation of social networking sites (SNSs) and revolutionizing various domains such as education and entertainment. Social media, an online platform facilitating rapid generation, distribution, and connection, has transformed communication and bridged gaps that were once reliant on traditional methods like letters and phone calls. As around two-thirds of the global internet population employs SNSs, commonly referred to as social media, the platforms play a pivotal role in shaping public discourse on diverse issues.

The adoption of social media is attributed to factors such as widespread availability, user-friendly features, and adaptability of social technologies. While the ease of adopting social media has positively impacted human existence by facilitating knowledge creation and sharing, it also raises concerns about potential negative consequences. The dichotomy between the positive and negative aspects of social media is evident in its impact on university students' academic achievement.

Studies indicate a positive correlation between social media use and academic success among university students. The benefits encompass strengthening interpersonal connections, enhancing academic motivation, providing tailored educational resources, and fostering collaborative skills. However, concerns are raised about the potential distractions and non-educational activities, such as idle chatting, that social media may introduce.

The prevalence of social media use among students is substantial, with over 90% of college students reported to engage in social networks. The time spent on social networking sites, approximately thirty minutes daily, underscores the significant role these platforms play in students' lives. This pervasive use raises questions about its potential impact, both positive and detrimental, on academic achievement.

The research addresses four problem statements stemming from the increasing prevalence of social media use among students. The primary concern is the shift of students' focus and time from academic studies to social media, impacting their performance in tests. Additionally, the study explores the association between media use and decreased academic achievement, diminished self-perceptions, and reduced motivation for higher education-related careers. The impact of social media on language use, particularly the development of habits like abbreviated handwriting, is also considered.

Given the substantial involvement of students in social networking sites, particularly at the tertiary level, the study aims to assess the extent of students' engagement with social media platforms at the University of Nepal. It seeks to determine social media use patterns and evaluate the impact of such usage on the academic performance of University of Nepal students. The research aims to contribute valuable insights into the dynamic relationship between social media and academic achievement.

Exploration of Existing Literature

The concept of social media is dynamic and continually evolving, making it challenging to provide a definitive definition. Jacka and Scott (2011) argue that there is no universally accepted definition for social media. However, various academics have proposed distinct interpretations over the years. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) describe social media as a collection of internet-based applications built around the principles and technology of Web 2.0, allowing users to create and share user-generated content. The Oxford dictionary (2011) defines social media as "websites and applications used for social networking," emphasizing its role as a widely used and rapidly expanding communication channel trusted by billions of people. Regardless of the definitions, a common theme emerges: social media encompasses diverse forms of internet-based communication between individuals.

Social media's roots can be traced back to the late 1990s, with the establishment of the first acknowledged social media network, "Six Degrees," in 1997. This marked the beginning of a transformative period, witnessing the emergence of various social networking sites catering to local, specific, or global needs. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) classified social media into six categories, including cooperative endeavors, platforms for sharing personal thoughts and opinions (e.g., blogs and microblogs), platforms for sharing and consuming user-generated content (e.g., YouTube), social networking platforms (e.g., Facebook), virtual gaming environments (e.g., World of Warcraft), and virtual Second Worlds (e.g., Second Life). While such categorizations have proven beneficial for researchers, the rapid proliferation of new platforms poses a challenge in accurately classifying them.

The evolution of social media is supported by technological advancements, with mobile devices now facilitating increased engagement through social networking programs. Mobile social networking, involving the use of Android-powered mobile phones, has expanded social

networking activities to public spaces, as highlighted in Humphreys' (2007) study "Mobile Social Networks and Social Practices." The benefits of social media on academic performance are significant, as evidenced by studies conducted by Wheeler, Yeomans, and Wheeler (2008) and Rifkin, Longnecker, Leach, and Ortia (2009). These studies identify four key benefits: expanding interpersonal connections, increasing academic motivation, providing tailored course materials, and fostering collaborative skills. The impact of social media on knowledge acquisition is widespread, with even PhD students utilizing social media platforms to enhance their academic pursuits (Khan, 2010).

However, there are contrasting viewpoints, such as the argument by Kuppuswamy and Shankar (2010), suggesting that social media negatively affects academic performance by diverting attention toward non-educational activities like idle chatting. Subsequent research, including studies by Jain, Verma, Verma, and Tiwari (2012) and Yunus and Salehi (2012), contradicts this assertion, indicating educational benefits through conversations with peers and improved language skills.

Despite the positive aspects, social media's detrimental impact on academic performance cannot be ignored. Concerns include illegal activities, such as identity theft, the proliferation of fake profiles, sexual abuse, harassment, inappropriate advertising, cyberbullying, and privacy issues. These concerns have prompted researchers to delve into factors influencing cyberbullying, with Calvete, Orue, Estevez, Villardon, and Padilla (2010) identifying proactive aggressiveness, justification of violence, exposure to violence, and a lower perception of social support as contributing factors. Privacy concerns also arise due to the dissemination of false information, challenging the authenticity of statements and posts. Some argue that privacy settings on social networking sites may not offer adequate flexibility to address disputes arising from differing privacy preferences (Preibusch, Hoser, Gurses, & Berendt, 2007).

Moreover, scholarly research, including the study by Obi, Bulus, Adamu, and Sala'at (2012), reveals that social media may impact students' use of the English language, leading to abbreviated writing techniques that inadvertently carry over to exams. Numerous studies, such as those by Kuppuswamy and Shankar (2010), Osharive (2015), and Maya (2015), have consistently shown that social media, when used without prudence, can negatively impact students' academic performance.

The growth of social media in Nepal has been steady, with studies by Owusu and Agatha (2015) highlighting a significant number of students in developing nations actively involved in social networking sites. However, this involvement is often associated with adverse effects on academic performance, including deficient grammar and spelling, delayed task submission, reduced study time, and subpar academic achievement (Mingle and Musah, 2015). While some studies emphasize the advantages of social media in students' academic lives, educators must remain aware of its predominant negative consequences, especially in the context of education in Nepal.

Methodology

For this study, a sample size of 200 students was selected randomly from the total population of 38,000 students across T.U. and M.U. component campuses. Utilizing the cluster sampling technique, the entire population was divided into clusters based on their respective

halls of residence. The names of these clusters were transcribed onto individual pieces of paper, mixed randomly in a bowl, and then drawn without bias or predetermined order. The initial twenty-five (25) students encountered in their rooms within each selected cluster were administered the data collection questionnaire, ensuring equal representation across all clusters and achieving the desired total sample size of 200 participants. The questionnaire comprised statements for participants to rate using a Likert scale to express their agreement or disagreement. A total of 197 completed questionnaires were collected, resulting in a response rate of 98.5%. Descriptive statistics were employed to analyze and summarize the participants' responses.

Findings and Discussion

The findings reveal that all 197 respondents, students of the University of Nepal, actively engage with various social media networks. Facebook and WhatsApp emerged as the predominant platforms, with Twitter and Instagram also being popular among the participants. This aligns with earlier research, such as that of Wiley and Sisson (2006), which consistently indicated that over 90% of college students use social networks.

Concerning time allocation to social media, out of the 197 participants, 17 individuals (8.6%) spent 0 to 30 minutes, 31 (15.7%) spent 30 minutes to one hour, 50 (25.4%) spent 1 hour to 2 hours, and 99 (50.3%) spent 2 hours or more. Notably, the majority of students (50.3%) spend more than two hours on social media daily. This finding is significant, considering previous research by Kirschner and Karpinski (2010) highlighting the potential adverse effects of excessive social networking site (SNS) use on academic performance.

Regarding the purpose of social media use, 165 students (82.5%) reported using it mainly for conversations and downloading multimedia content, while 32 participants (16.2%) cited academic reasons. This supports previous research by scholars like Khan (2010) and Englander, Terregrossa, and Wang (2010), indicating that social media can pose a hindrance to students' academic pursuits, as the majority of their usage is for non-academic activities.

Although most students do not primarily use social media for academic objectives, a substantial portion engages in academic-related activities on these platforms. Notably, 68% of participants actively participate in academic discussions, 86% use social media for both receiving and sharing class-related information, and 50.7% utilize tools like wikis for assignment preparations.

The research underscores that while students may not primarily use social media for academic purposes, these platforms are integral to their academic lives when wisely utilized. To assess the impact of social media on the academic performance of University of Ghana students, four statements were formulated, and participants expressed their degree of agreement or disagreement. The responses are detailed in Table 1.

The Positive Influence of Social Media on Students' Academic Performance

Utilization of resources like Wikipedia from social media sites for research has significantly contributed to my academic success. I leverage content obtained from social networking platforms to complement my classroom learning, and engaging in scholarly discussions on these platforms enhances my understanding of subjects covered in class.

Regarding the impact of utilizing resources from social media platforms, such as Wikipedia, for research purposes on student grades, 63 individuals (32.0%) strongly agreed, and 83 individuals (42.1%) agreed. However, 39 individuals (19.8%) disagreed, and 12 individuals (6.1%) strongly disagreed. In total, 146 students (74%) either strongly agreed or agreed that using social media resources positively influences their grades.

Furthermore, 156 individuals (79.2%) expressed agreement with the use of content from social media platforms to supplement their academic endeavors. Additionally, 79.2% of the participants believe that participating in academic debates on social media enhances their comprehension of classroom issues. These findings align with previous research identifying four significant benefits of students in higher education using social media: strengthening relationships, increasing motivation to learn, providing customized course materials, and fostering collaborative skills.

Assessment of Social Media Addiction and its Impact

Out of the total participants, 19 individuals (9.7%) highly agreed, and 56 individuals (28.6%) agreed that they are hooked to social media. Conversely, 73 individuals (37.2%) disagreed, while 48 individuals (24.4%) strongly disagreed. In terms of social networks acting as a distraction, 15 individuals (7.5%) highly agreed, and 87 individuals (44.2%) agreed, while 69 individuals (35.1%) disagreed, and 26 individuals (13.2%) strongly disagreed. Concerning the amount of time dedicated to social media compared to academic pursuits, 33 individuals (16.8%) highly agreed, and 96 individuals (46.8%) agreed. On the contrary, 50 individuals (25.4%) disagreed, and 18 individuals (9.1%) strongly disagreed. Regarding the impact on grades, 7 individuals (3.6%) highly agreed, and 55 individuals (27.9%) agreed that their grades have not improved since using social networking sites. Conversely, 91 individuals (46.2%) disagreed, and 44 individuals (22.3%) strongly disagreed.

The findings suggest that although most respondents do not acknowledge social media as having a detrimental influence on their academic performance, a certain degree of addictive behavior and distraction is associated with its usage. Notably, 38.3% of the participants reported experiencing addiction to social media, negatively affecting their academic performance. Additionally, 51.7% of the respondents mentioned that online networks diverted their focus from academic pursuits. This aligns with prior research indicating that students may unknowingly develop a dependency on social media networks, impacting their focus levels during lectures and learning sessions.

Furthermore, 31.5% of students reported no improvement in their Grade Point Average (GPA), specifically attributing this lack of progress to their addiction to social networks, which led to distractions from their studies. This is consistent with findings in Ghana, where social media platforms like WhatsApp were identified as distractions to students' academic lives, contributing to a decline in their focus levels during lectures and learning sessions.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, social media has become an indispensable tool in human communication, playing a pivotal role not only in interpersonal interactions but also significantly influencing

scholarly activities. Its impact extends to various forms of education, including the widespread adoption of distance education, facilitated by social media networks. The ease of acquiring information locally and internationally, be it from friends, lectures, or experts, is a testament to the transformative power of the internet.

While acknowledging the immense benefits of social media as a valuable tool, it is crucial to recognize its dual nature, characterized as a "useful servant but a dangerous master" and a "two-edged sword." The study's findings reveal that, despite the advantages students gain from social media, such as information sharing, relationship building, and participation in group discussions, there exists a certain level of addiction and attention distraction. These issues can have serious consequences on students' academic lives.

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