




## HARNESSING SOCIAL MEDIA FOR LEARNING: BENEFITS AND RISKS

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### RESEARCH ARTICLE



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#### Abstract

Social media has become a central element of modern communication, influencing reading habits, mental health, and educational outcomes. A survey of individuals aged 19 to 25 revealed that most participants spend 1 to 5 hours per day on social media, primarily for leisure rather than educational purposes. Although 55% of respondents acknowledged that social media can provide educational tools, 70% reported that excessive use negatively affects their academic performance. Research on mental health indicated that only 30% of respondents found social media calming, whereas 65% experienced anxiety, mood fluctuations, or low self-esteem due to its use. Furthermore, while only 15 respondents reported benefits from digital platforms, 60 respondents cited adverse effects on their reading habits. The study also highlighted notable mental health concerns associated with prolonged social media exposure. The results underscore the dual nature of social media as both a beneficial educational resource and a potential barrier to academic success and mental well-being. It highlights the importance of moderate usage. Future research should explore age-specific strategies and develop methods to balance the advantages and disadvantages of social media in educational contexts.

**Keywords:** *Social media, Anxiety, Moderate usage, Mental health, Educational tools, Academic performance*

### Introduction

Social media refers to websites and applications that allow users to engage in social networking, create, and share content. Beyond sharing personal updates or holiday photos, social media has increasingly become a credible platform for audience engagement and information dissemination (Mohaur, 2023). It has profoundly influenced all areas of life—social, political, economic, and educational. In the educational sphere, digital media enables students to connect with teachers anytime and enhances learning opportunities. The Indian government's efforts to develop an educational social network further highlight the significance of social media in education (Kirkpatrick, 2011).

The internet has become an indispensable part of daily life, supporting activities ranging from shopping and email to education. While some individuals use the internet primarily for learning, most young people and teenagers engage with it mainly for social networking (Tariq, Mehboob, Khan, & Ullah, 2012). Social media's role in education is growing in importance, particularly in today's interconnected learning environments. Platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Telegram, Twitter, and Snapchat host workshops, conferences, online courses, webinars, meetings, and training sessions (Solidjonov, 2021). Students use these platforms for research, entertainment, and social interaction, accessing information quickly and easily. However, social media impacts individuals differently, bringing both benefits and drawbacks. Frequent use of platforms like Facebook and Twitter has been linked to reduced academic performance (Raut, & Patil, 2016). and the regular engagement of the new generation with social media is reshaping their communication, learning, and cognitive processes (Pang, & Ji, 2023).

One major concern regarding the negative impact of social media in education is the type of distraction students experience in the classroom. Privacy issues, including the sharing of personal information online, contribute significantly to the challenges of integrating social media into educational settings. In several instances, inappropriate content has been shared, potentially misleading or confusing students (Siddiqui, & Singh, 2016). Platforms such as Instagram, LinkedIn, and Baidu serve as important spaces for communication and engagement among individuals, groups, and organizations. While these platforms promote creativity and knowledge sharing, they also present challenges, particularly for students. Advantages include exposure to user-generated content and the opportunity to develop technical skills, but drawbacks include increased rates of depression, altered social interactions, and changes in students' developmental trajectories. This dual effect underscores the complex role of social media in shaping cultural and societal norms (Abbas, Aman, Nurunnabi & Bano, 2019). The present study seeks to

examine the impact of social media on education, with particular focus on differences across age groups, patterns of social media use, and associated effects on mental health and reading habits.

In today's world, social media has become a pervasive force influencing multiple aspects of life, including reading habits, mental health, and education. This study provides a comprehensive analysis of these effects by systematically examining their complex interactions and integrating insights from contemporary research.

### **Impact on Education**

Social media can act as both a facilitator and a distraction in educational settings. While its vast resources can enhance learning opportunities, excessive use often undermines academic performance. Addiction to social media negatively affects students' reading habits, reducing their ability to concentrate for extended periods and engage in deep study (Liu Z, Hu R, & Bi X, 2023). Research has demonstrated a correlation between university students' decreased academic engagement and social media overuse, highlighting the importance of balanced usage to maximize educational benefits (Ullah, 2024). Despite its drawbacks, social media has proven effective in promoting informal learning. Platforms such as YouTube and LinkedIn provide access to valuable resources, enabling students to acquire new skills and knowledge beyond traditional educational institutions (Gikas, 2013). The challenge lies in leveraging the educational potential of social media while minimizing its distracting aspects.

### **Impact on Mental Health**

The psychological effects of social media are complex, with both positive and negative implications. While some individuals use social media as a means of relaxation and stress relief, others report increased anxiety and mood swings. Similar findings are documented, noting that excessive use can lead to psychological distress despite its potential therapeutic benefits (Primack, 2017, Keles, 2020). Recent research indicates that engagement and content patterns have a major impact on these results, emphasizing the value of building social media comparison resilience because too much exposure to idealized information frequently breeds unease (Moniruzzaman, 2023). These negative consequences can be lessened by employing techniques to increase mental resilience, such as emphasizing personal development over approval from others (<https://qa.time.com>).

### **Impact on Reading Habits**

Digital media has significantly transformed reading habits, producing mixed outcomes. Some individuals report a decline in deep reading—shifting from in-depth engagement with texts to more superficial, surface-level interaction—while others note improved accessibility and a greater variety of content (Liu, 2005). This trend is exacerbated by the rapid pace of digital consumption. On platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, dynamic and constantly changing content encourages fleeting attention rather than sustained focus (Boyd D M, & Ellison N B, 2007). Concerns about digital addiction and its impact on cognitive capacities have also sparked debates regarding smartphone use in educational settings (<https://nypost.com>). Measures aimed at reducing distractions, such as restricting mobile phone use in schools, may help preserve deep reading and learning habits. Overall, social media exerts a complex influence on reading habits, mental health, and education, presenting both opportunities and challenges. While technology provides benefits such as access to learning platforms and educational resources, excessive use can lead to decreased cognitive engagement, distraction, and heightened anxiety. To fully leverage its advantages while mitigating adverse effects, balanced and mindful use of social media is essential.

### **Methodology**

The study employed an online questionnaire consisting of 25 carefully designed statements (Figure 1) to examine students' perceptions of the use of social media in science education. An online survey method was selected due to its efficiency in reaching a geographically dispersed student population and its suitability for collecting self-reported perceptions within a limited timeframe. Convenience sampling was adopted as an appropriate strategy given the exploratory nature of the study, constraints related to time and accessibility, and the absence of a comprehensive sampling frame across institutions. This approach enabled the inclusion of respondents from diverse educational settings in Kerala and Karnataka, thereby providing a broad overview of prevailing attitudes toward social media use in education.

A total of 116 students aged 15 years and above participated in the study. Respondents were categorised into three age groups to facilitate comparative analysis of perceptions regarding social media as an informal educational tool, focusing on both its current use and perceived educational value (Alabdul, 2015). While convenience sampling allowed for rapid data collection and enhanced participation rates, it also introduces limitations related to sample representativeness. The findings may therefore reflect the perspectives of students who are more digitally engaged or more inclined to participate in online surveys, potentially resulting in self-selection bias (Radwan, 2020).

To further mitigate response bias, participants were assured of anonymity and informed that there were no right or wrong answers, encouraging honest and unbiased responses. Nevertheless, the reliance on self-reported data may be subject to social desirability bias, as respondents might overestimate the educational benefits of social media or underreport its negative effects. These limitations were acknowledged during data interpretation, and the results were analysed cautiously to avoid overgeneralisation beyond the study population.

Data collection was conducted over a one-week period, after which all responses were compiled and analysed using descriptive statistical techniques. Pie charts were employed to visually represent response distributions and to identify trends and variations across age groups. Although descriptive analysis limits causal inference, it was deemed appropriate for achieving the study's objective of exploring patterns in students' perceptions of social media in science education (Orlanda-Ventayen, 2017).

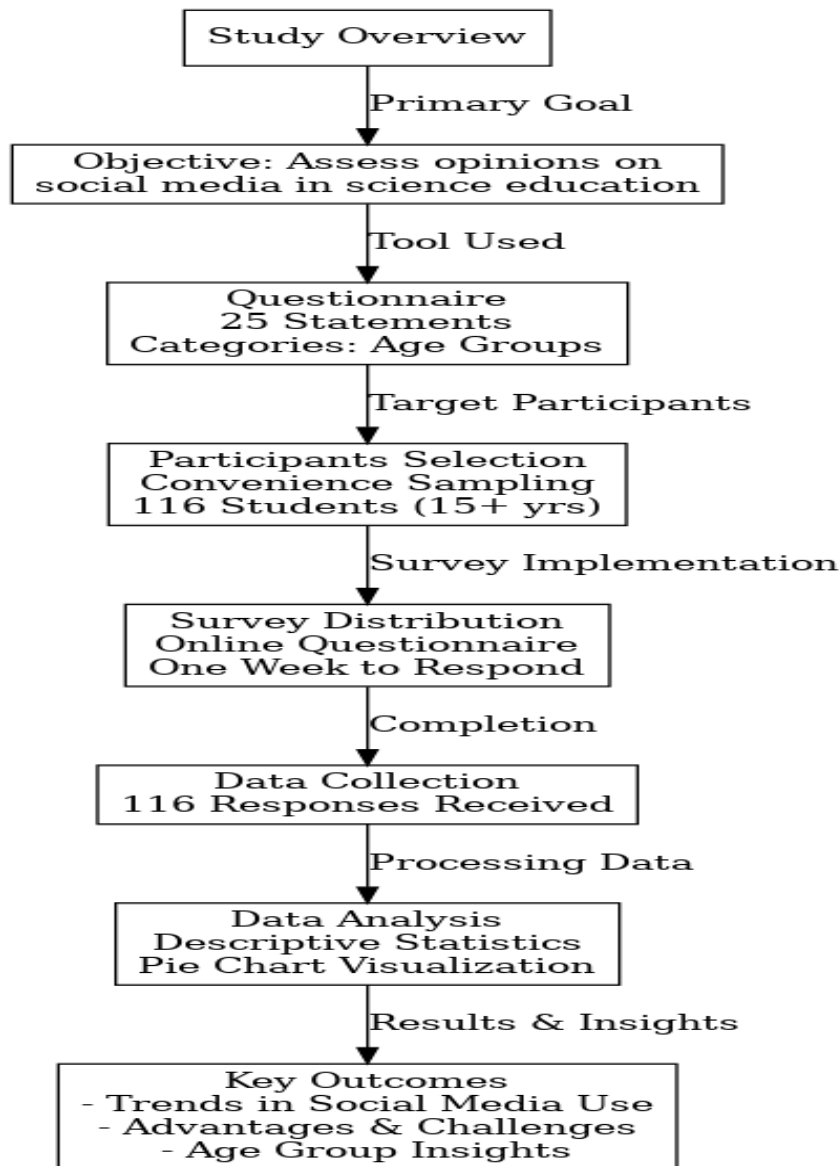


Figure 1: Methodology

### Results

The 116 survey participants, who are between the ages of 15 and 18, 19 and 25, and older, are made up of 70.7% females and 28.4% males.

#### Relationship between age group and social media usage

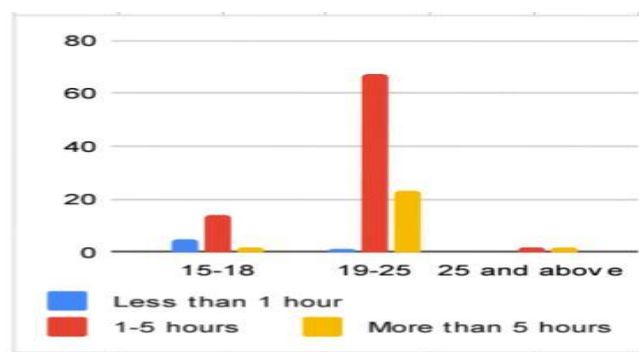
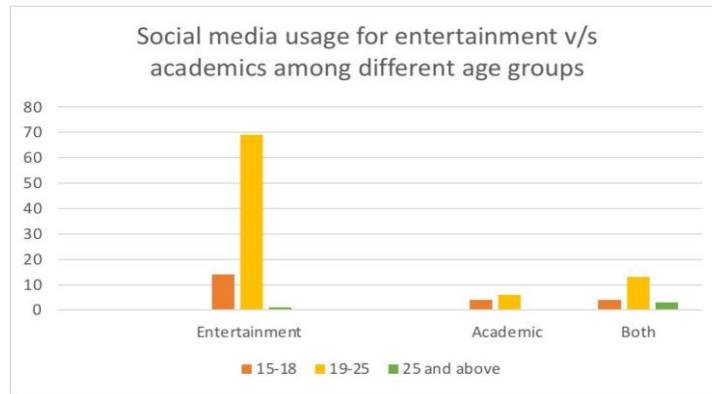


Figure 2: Time utilized for social media by different age groups

The majority of social media users are between the ages of 19 and 25. The majority of this group uses it for 1–5 hours per day, with those who use it for more than 5 hours coming in second as shown in Figure 2.

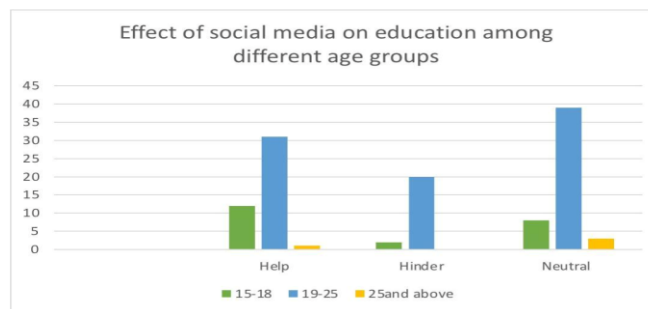
**Usage of social media for entertainment v/s academics**



**Figure 3: Usage of social media for entertainment Vs academics**

A lesser percentage of users use social media for academic objectives or to join educational forums, while the majority of users (across all age categories) use it for amusement. According to the 19–25 age group, 6 respondents use it for academic objectives, and 69 respondents use it for amusement. 13 responders fall into both the academic and entertainment categories as shown in Figure 3. The primary purpose of social media for 14 respondents in the 15–18 age range is enjoyment. 4 respondents primarily utilize social media to get educational content and participate in learning forums for academic objectives. 4 respondents said they used social media for a combination of academic and recreational purposes. 1 respondent who is 25 years of age or older said that their main reason for using media for entertainment. No respondents primarily utilize social media to get educational content and participate in learning communities for academic objectives. 3 respondents said they used social media for a combination of academic and recreational purposes.

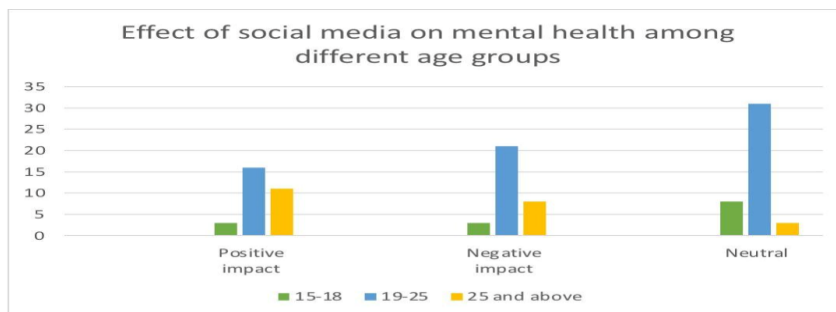
**Effect of social media on education**



**Figure 4: Relationship of education and social media effect**

According to Figure 4, 31 respondents in the 19–25 age group think social media helps by offering resources and learning networks, 20 respondents think it harms their education, and 39 respondents say it both helps and hinders their education. In the 15-18 age group, 2 respondents feel that social media negatively affects their studies. 8 respondents stated that social media has no significant impact on their academic performance. 12 respondents believe that social media enhances their academic performance. In the 25 and above age group no respondents feel that social media negatively affects their academic performance. 3 respondents reported no significant impact on their academic performance. According to 1 respondent, social media gives them access to educational resources, which improves their academic achievement.

**Impact of social media on mental health**



**Figure 5: Mental health and social media**

In 19-25 age group 16 respondents said that using social media caused them to experience anxiety, mood swings, or a decline in self-esteem as shown in Figure 5. According to 21 respondents, social media helps people relax or take mental breaks, which

has a favorable effect on their mental health. According to 31 respondents, social media has no discernible impact on their mental health. 3 respondents in the 15-18 age range said that using social media had caused them to experience worry, mood swings, or a decline in their sense of self. According to 3 respondents, social media has a good effect on their mental health. According to 8 respondents, social media has no discernible impact on their mental health. 11 respondents in the 25+ age range said that using social media had caused them to experience worry, mood swings, or a decline in their sense of self. According to 8 respondents, social media has a good effect on their mental health. According to 3 respondents, social media has no discernible impact on their mental health.

### Social media impact on reading habits

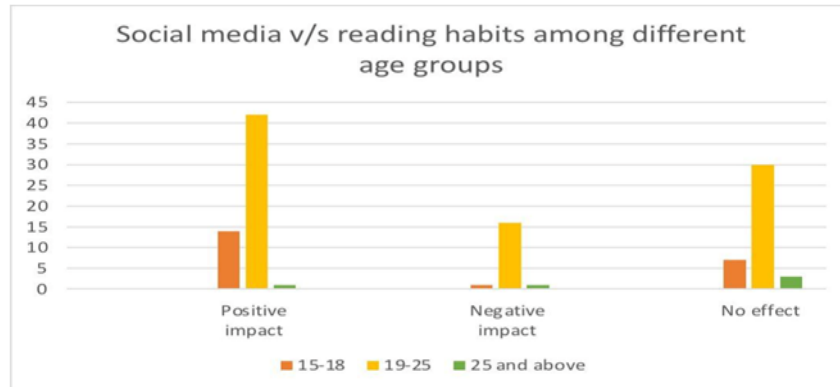


Figure 6: effect of social media on reading habits

According to the graph Figure 6, among respondents in the 19–25 age group, 16 said that social media use had negatively impacted their reading habits, 42 said that social media use had improved their reading habits, perhaps as a result of digital platforms, and 30 said social media did not affect their reading habits. In the 15–18 age range, 1 respondent, using social media has caused them to read less. According to 14 respondents, their reading habits have improved. 7 respondents said their reading habits have not been impacted by social media. 1 respondent in the 25+ age range stated that their use of social media has caused them to read less. 1 of the participants reported an improvement in their reading habits. According to 3 respondents, social media has no impact on their reading preferences.

### Discussion

This study examined the effects of social media on reading habits, mental health, and educational outcomes across three age groups, revealing diverse patterns of use and consequences that are consistent with prior research. Interpreted through the lens of Cognitive Load Theory, the findings suggest that the manner and intensity of social media use play a critical role in shaping cognitive, academic, and psychological outcomes.

Most respondents, particularly those aged 19 to 25, reported using social media primarily for entertainment, with daily usage ranging from one to five hours. Only a small proportion reported using these platforms for learning purposes, supporting earlier observations that the perceived rewards of recreational engagement often outweigh academic motivations (Kirschner, 2010). From a cognitive load perspective, prolonged exposure to non-educational content may increase extraneous cognitive load, thereby limiting the mental resources available for sustained learning and academic tasks. Consistent with this interpretation, excessive engagement with entertainment-oriented social media was associated with negative impacts on academic performance (Huang, 2018).

The findings further highlight the dual role of social media in education. While many respondents acknowledged the value of online learning networks and digital resources, others reported distraction and reduced concentration. This aligns with evidence on the negative effects of multitasking on academic focus, alongside the potential of social media and mobile technologies to support informal and collaborative learning when used purposefully (Junco, 2012). Within an attention economy framework, social media platforms compete aggressively for users' attention through notifications, short-form content, and algorithm-driven feeds, which may fragment focus and undermine deep learning despite the availability of educational content.

Mental health outcomes also reflected this duality. Some respondents described social media use as relaxing, whereas others reported anxiety, mood fluctuations, or reduced self-esteem. Previous studies similarly document both adverse psychological effects and potential benefits, depending on patterns of engagement, social comparison, and duration of use (Primack *et al.*, 2017; Keles, McCrae, 2020). These mixed outcomes can be understood as a function of cognitive and emotional overload arising from constant connectivity and attentional switching.

Regarding reading habits, the shift toward digital media produced varied effects. While some respondents reported improved access to diverse content, others experienced a decline in deep, sustained reading. This pattern is consistent with earlier findings on the transition from linear, in-depth reading to more fragmented, surface-level engagement in digital environments (Liu, 2005). Platforms characterised by rapid visual stimuli and short content cycles, such as Instagram and TikTok, further reinforce these consumption habits (Boyd, 2007), potentially reshaping attention spans and reading behaviours over time.

Overall, viewed through cognitive and attentional theories, the findings underscore the need for balanced and intentional social media use. Structured educational integration, alongside digital literacy interventions, may help reduce cognitive overload and promote more meaningful engagement, thereby maximising educational and cognitive benefits while minimising negative effects on mental health and reading practices.

### **Conclusion**

This study demonstrates the multifaceted influence of social media on reading habits, mental health, and educational outcomes among individuals aged 19 to 25. Although social media platforms provide opportunities for interactive learning, peer collaboration, and access to academic resources, the findings indicate that their predominant use remains oriented toward entertainment rather than education. The data suggest that higher levels of engagement with social media are associated with less favourable academic and well-being outcomes for a substantial proportion of respondents.

With respect to reading habits, the results indicate a noticeable shift rather than a complete decline. While 60 respondents reported a reduction in time spent on traditional reading activities, this trend reflects a partial displacement of reading practices, potentially toward shorter or digital content formats, rather than an absolute disengagement from reading. This pattern highlights the need to distinguish between changes in reading depth and format when interpreting the impact of social media on literacy-related behaviours.

Mental health outcomes also reveal significant concerns, with 65% of respondents reporting experiences of anxiety or mood fluctuations associated with social media use. Similarly, 70% of participants acknowledged that excessive engagement with social media negatively affected their academic performance. These findings underscore the importance of moderated usage, as the adverse effects appear to be linked primarily to prolonged or unregulated exposure rather than to social media use per se.

Despite these challenges, the study reinforces the potential of social media as a supportive pedagogical tool when applied in a structured and purposeful manner. Strategic integration of social media into formal educational settings, alongside targeted awareness initiatives and digital literacy programmes, may help mitigate negative outcomes while enhancing collaborative and resource-based learning opportunities.

Future research should employ longitudinal designs to examine the sustained effects of social media on reading behaviours, academic achievement, and mental health over time. Comparative studies across age groups, cultural contexts, and educational systems would further clarify how usage patterns shape outcomes. Additionally, the development and evaluation of technological interventions – such as screen-time monitoring tools and content-curation applications – may offer practical solutions for encouraging balanced and informed social media engagement, thereby maximising educational benefits while supporting overall well-being.

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