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**RESEARCH PAPER**

## Exploring the Perceptions of Pakistani University Undergraduate Students on Social Media Addiction and its Impact on their Academic Performance

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**ABSTRACT**

Social media is being extensively used as an easily accessible source of communication worldwide. It facilitates people to have a quick and easy connection beyond geographical barriers. However, deep concerns are being shown about social media addiction among young people and its negative effects. This study aimed to find out the perceptions of university undergraduates about social media addiction on their academic performance. A qualitative case study method was used to collect data from students at the University of Malakand Chakdara, Dir Lower, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore the views of 21 students based on their personal experiences of using social media. The thematic analysis method was applied to analyze the data. The findings showed that spending much time on social media restricted them from preparing for class assignments and their timely submission. Students spent a lot of time on social media, which badly affected their exam preparation. It was also discovered that extensive engagement of students on social media resulted in poor academic grades. Students further reported that spending more time on social media added to their stress and anxiety, and they became physically exhausted after engaging increasingly with peers and friends. This has caused sleeplessness among them; they experience headaches and feel sleepy during class time, and it has severely affected their motivation to study. It has caused poor classroom attention during the teacher's lecture due to physical and mental exhaustion. It is suggested that the results of this study may further be investigated in other contexts for confirmation.

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**KEYWORDS** Social Media Addiction, Academic Performance, University Undergraduates, Stress, Anxiety

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**Introduction**

College and university students are currently spending much time on social media networks connecting with others through expressing ideas and sharing experiences (Aljuboori et al., 2020). Social media refers to multiple approaches to communication people use for sharing and exchanging ideas and concepts through digital networks and forums (Salam, et al., 2024; Chukwuere & Chukwuere, 2017; Asghar et al. 2025). It has become an indispensable, crucial, fast, and extensively used means of communication among people in all spheres of life, including education (Haddad et al., 2021). In recent years, the volume of social media websites has increased, which has given the younger generation more opportunities for interaction. Social media platforms have millions of young people all over the world and are constantly growing. It is reported that approximately 95% undergraduate students are using different forms of social

media (Eid & Al-Jabri, 2016). Similarly, more than 80% students of universities use the internet daily. Most of these use social media platforms to connect with peers and friends (Alahmar, 2016). However, despite this, social media addiction has been declared potentially hazardous for students' academic growth and development (Kolharet et al., 2021). Students who spend much time on social media have been reported to show poor academic grades, low self-esteem, and decreasing motivation for learning. They do not take an active part in classroom activities due to poor attention and mental health (Arif, 2019). Side by side with these developments, social media is also frequently being used by students for engaging, collaborating, and learning with other classmates. Students also use it more frequently for entertainment than for learning (Steers et al., 2016).

Studies have shown that students frequently use social media which has a drastic impact on their academic performance (Kircaburun et al., 2020). Students who spend much time on social media for entertainment and less time on studies outperform those who spend less time on social media. Numerous students are reported to suffer from stress and exhaustion, or were poorly prepared for their class-based assignments. Even such students demonstrated low grades in the examination (Abbas et al., 2020). Moreover, studies have shown that many students in Pakistani higher education institutions are deviating from routine academic engagements due to increasing attention towards social media. The examination results also testify that students who spend time on social media show poor performance in semester-based exams (Raza et al., 2020).

### **Social Media**

Social media addiction refers to a change in the behaviour of the user in which they show compulsive engagement with social media usage that ultimately has negative effects on different aspects of their life, relations, work motivation, mental health and education (Muzaffar, et al., 2019; Lau, 2017). Social media has become a popular source for entertainment that provides students with wider options for social interaction. They can easily connect with their like-minded people on internet platforms and share their ideas and experiences. It has allowed them more flexible time and options for sharing their life experiences online, which was otherwise restricted (Muzaffar, et al., 2020; Kwok et al., 2021). As an alternative to digital discourses, social media has been evolving into a better substitute for many social engagements. It is taken to be a cheaper, quicker, and wider-reaching network for communication and interaction, including educational pursuits (Balakrishnan & Gan, 2016). University students are reported to use social media networks excessively due to the easy availability of smartphones. Others use this platform for connecting and staying close to their acquaintances (Azizi, Soroush & Khatony, 2019). It is used equally by businesspeople, professionals, and students alike. In the current times, younger people are spending more time exchanging ideas, emotions, personal data, images, and videos at a faster pace than before (Kolharet et al., 2021). It has become a popular platform for social communication, providing students with an easy platform for interaction with others in the university, thus fulfilling their needs (Mushtaq & Benraghda, 2018).

In the past few years, the use of social networks has increased enormously among Pakistani students in the academic arena (Raza et al, 2020). Digital networks have become the greatest sources of socialization for students. Students are increasingly taking an interest in social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, WhatsApp, and Instagram for exchange of communication (Hawi & Samaha, 2017). Moreover, digital networks have provided an alternative to students for the traditional boring classroom-

based lectures and closed academic sessions conducted by teachers face-to-face (Sahin, 2017). Students can now use these networks for the exchange of academic experiences, reading materials, and research work. However, these engagements have consequences for students in varying forms and degrees (Ahmad et al., 2019)

Social media has become a popular forum for students in higher education for communication and exchange of ideas with their peers and teachers. However, some students remain preoccupied with using social networks to communicate with others and sharing ideas (Abbas et al., 2019). Researchers have reported that the use of social networking for academic activities has given birth to more hurdles as it narrows down teacher-student interaction in class (Rafi, 2020; Mushtaq & Benraghda, 2018). On many occasions, teachers find it difficult to facilitate students about using social media as students consider it a private matter and feel uncomfortable sharing information about using different social media platforms (Salloum et al., 2018). Studies have indicated that more than ninety percent of the students in universities are using social networks for social interactions like sending messages, exchanging classroom assignments with peers, and sharing routine activities. They use it as a routine for spending engaged time with their friends on different social network sites. The extent to which students use social media could have both merits and demerits on their academic performance, such as low exam grades, poor classroom participation, and less motivation for participating in academic activities (Zhao, 2021).

Social media has rapidly become a highly popular social networking for promoting relations among people in educational centers worldwide. In the context of Pakistan, the use of social media networks and platforms among students has also increased recently (Rafi, 2020). Researchers have raised concerns about the potential negative effects of its usage among youngsters, especially related to their academic preparation and development. There is little evidence about how students at higher education institutions use social media platforms and whether they have any effect on their academic performance. For this purpose, this study explores the perceptions of students of the education department of the University of Malakand about using social media and its potential impact on their academic performance.

## **Literature Review**

### **Studies on the Addition of social media and its impact on academic performance**

The following section discusses the literature on the impact of social media on students' academic performance. The studies have been conducted in various contexts of the world. Moreover, this section highlights the research gap for undertaking this study.

Ugwu and Umenduka (2025) conducted a mixed study at the university level in Nigeria and found that overuse of social media created difficulties for students, and the students could not balance their studies, which led them to distraction and poor academic performance. In another study, Fauzi et al. (2021) conducted in Malaysia using a cross-sectional research design, the study found that social media addiction did not affect the academic performance of the students. The findings implied that social media addiction had no negative effect on the academic performance of the students. Similarly, Tin et al. (2024) examined the influence of social media on university level student using a quantitative research design. It was found that although social media caused addiction, mental well-being of students, yet these things did not have a significant effect on the academic performance of the students. Therefore, the study suggested that social media

affects the experiences of the learners, but it had no direct impact on their academic performance. In another survey study, the researcher investigated the social media addiction among university-level students; the findings showed a moderate level of addiction among students and their academic performance. Furthermore, the study findings implied that other factors, such as their study habits, time management, and most importantly, their motivation level, could influence their academic performance. Likewise, Faudzi (2019) examined that social media opens opportunities for students for educational benefits, but the excessive use could negatively affect their studies; the balanced use of social media is recommended for academic success. In the UAE, the researcher conducted the quantitative research design and the study found that overuse of social media networking affects the academic achievement of the students, so the students may be aware of the use of social media (Alhrahshah & Almajali, 2023)

In a similar study in the US, Ning and Inan (2024) conducted a correlation study, and the researchers found that social media addiction did not directly affect the performance of the students. However, it had an indirect effect through increased stress, anxiety and reduced self-control. In a very recent study, Gupta et al. (2026) undertook a bibliometric analysis of Internet addiction among students at the college level. The analysis reported that there was a close link between the excessive use of the Internet and the academic level problems of the students, such as mental health issues and low levels of well-being. In China, Zhao (2023) conducted a study using a quantitative research design, and the study found that intensive use of social media has brought about addiction among the students, which ultimately affects their academic performance. In Kuwait, a study was carried out using a quantitative research design, and the findings showed that excessive use of social media has negative effects on the academic performance of the students. (Al-Menayes, 2015) In another recent research study conducted in Nigeria using a quantitative research design (Okoeke, 2025), the researcher found that social media is beneficial if it is used appropriately and effectively, but it causes negative effects if it is used unnecessarily for the overuse of entertainment.

The above studies show that the use of social media has a greater relationship with the academic performance of the students as students can benefit from it. However, most of the studies indicate that excessive use of social media has an adverse effect on the academic performance of students. Some studies reported a negative relationship between the use of social media and the academic performance of the students (Ugwu & Umenduka, 2025; Al-Menayes, 2015; Zhao, 2023; Alhrahshah & Almajali, 2023). However, some findings do not show a significant relationship between social media addiction and their academic performance (Fauzi et al., 2021; Basri et al., 2022; and Tin et al., 2024). These findings imply that social media can provide both positive and negative influences on the performance of the students. In the above studies, the majority of the researchers employed quantitative methods. Using questionnaire surveys and statistical analysis. So these studies have provided a limited undertaking of the personal experiences of the students regarding social media use.

The above discussion highlights the need for a qualitative case study to explore the students' perceptions of the use of social media. Therefore, this study aims to fill the gap by exploring students' experiences and perceptions of social media use and its influence on academic performance within a specific educational context. This approach will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the role of social media in students' academic life.

## **Material and Methods**

The researchers applied a qualitative case study research method to investigate the experiences of students with using social media platforms and their impact on their academic performance. Qualitative case study research provides a holistic, deep, and context-driven understanding of the problem under discussion (Yin, 2009; Eisenhardt, 1989). This case method was helpful to delve deep into the perspectives of the students about their views on social media use. This case study method was suitable for this study in collecting comprehensive, deeper, and robust data through semi-structured interviews.

### **Participants**

A total of 21 students (14 male and 07 female), semester 7<sup>th</sup> (n =09) and semester 8<sup>th</sup> (n=11) (enrolled in BS and Bachelor of Studies 4 years and B.Ed. 2 years) in the Department of Education, University of Malakand were recruited as respondents in the study. The students were selected based on convenience sampling using the principle of availability and willingness. For this purpose, individually, the students were asked for permission to get their consent regarding participating in the study. The students were briefed about the purpose of the study before the interview.

### **Semi-structured Interview**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the students to explore their experiences with using social media and its effect on their academic performance. During the interview, the respondents were made to feel at ease through the introduction of the research purpose. Full freedom was given to each of the respondent students to express their views without any interference from the interviewer's side. Each of the interview remained for 15 to 25 minutes. During the interviews, using a predetermined thematic framework, a blend of cross and open-ended questions was put to the students to explore more information regarding the problem under investigation and its multiple effects. Follow-up questions were asked when the respondents got stuck during the interview to provide more room for them to easily share information comprehensively. As far as possible, leading questions were avoided to reduce the possibility of giving biased opinions. To avoid this, the respondents were given more time to think and evaluate the question and then to frame the answer. The questions were asked based on the critical incident method which enabled the students to recall their past experiences of using social media and its critical effects on their academic performance. This method helped to avoid hypothetical scenarios, and an easy space was created during the interviews to enable the respondents to share their views freely and without any feeling of pressure. Data was recorded through note-taking during the interviews. The respondents did not allow for recording the interview or audio taping due to personal reasons and cultural restrictions. However, the note-taking was facilitated through one of the authors. Each of the interviews was concluded on a good note by asking the respondents whether they wanted to say more or to close it.

### **Data Analysis**

The interview data related to each research question were analyzed using the thematic analysis method. The qualitative interview data were transcribed. The transcription of each interview was thoroughly checked, read, and reread for presentation as evidence to the qualitative data collected based on the questions. The

thematic analysis method of Braun and Clark (2006) was used to analyze the data. This method was useful in finding out patterns in the data based on the sorting and coding process. During this process, the content of the interviews was focused, and common themes were finally identified. In the familiarization stage, we carefully read and re-read the data. Secondly, based on the initial codes were generated and coded the meaningful ideas in the data related to the research questions. Thirdly, we grouped all the codes for creating potential themes based on how they related to each other as well as the research questions. Fourthly, we reviewed and refined the themes that we created to ensure that they accurately reflected the collected data and had complete coherence with the data. Fifthly, we labeled each theme and named them based on how they were related to each other and the research questions. Finally, the report was produced with in-depth descriptions.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical guidelines were observed during the conduct and reporting of the research study. Before conducting the semi-structured interviews, proper permissions were obtained from the respondents. Also, the purpose of the study was explained to them. They were informed that the privacy of their identity and the information collected from them would be used only for research purposes and would not be shared without their prior permission.

### **Results and Discussion**

Based on an analysis of qualitative data collected from 21 students and using thematic analysis, four important themes emerged, which are discussed below.

#### **Exam grades**

Exam grades are an important determinant of students' academic development. They play a role in the academic journey of students (Nyaanga & Mbirithi, 2024). Social media is a very helpful platform to accumulate more knowledge and make good preparation for the examination. However, during the interviews, most respondents discussed the effects of social media on their studies. Highlighting this aspect, one student said

*"I have observed.....ummm.... you know.... many students complain that they got lower grades in exams as they were engaged with friends all the time on social media.....umm...this thing is increasing day by day among university graduates.."*

Some of the students were very much against the reckless use of social media among university students. They argued that the trend had increased in the last few years.

Another student commented,

*"I have many friends who are always busy on mobile in the hostel.....ummmm...I see them talking with friends on social media or even spending time using entertainment.....to me this is not encouraging.....These students of my class generally get lower grades....I have observed this..."*

One more respondent stated:

*“These social media platforms cause addictions. When we become addicted to it, we waste our time and energy.”*

A student highlighted his views in the following words.

*“You know.....I was also like using social media too much in my first year....umm...I obtained low marks in my different subjects.....I decided to use it less in my free time and gave attention to my studies...Now I have improved my grades....I think social media has affected students' ability to obtain good grades in exams....I have experienced this....”*

Another respondent shared that:

*“I always spend most of my time on social media platforms for getting entertainment, which ultimately affects my grade point”*

The comments from students suggest that spending excessive time on social media platforms always has negative effects on their academic performance, which is reflected in their low CGPA.

Am another student reported that:

*“While searching for the academic-related material for lectures, assignments, presentations, and projects, I come across some irrelevant materials which compel me to leave my academic work and drag me to those entertaining contents, then it becomes difficult for me to concentrate and focus on my academic searches and preparation, and my whole time is then wasted”*

Some of the students freely shared their views in the interview sessions. They also highlighted some positive effects of social media. But the majority of them spoke against the increasing use of mobile and social media and its negative effects on the examination performance of university graduates.

One of the students said.

*You know...ummmmm.... Using social media platforms properly, I can get related content for my assignment and other tasks, so it also helps me very positively.*

*But when we use it all the time, it becomes a hurdle in the way of academic progress.... many students don't understand this, and they suffer.....”*

### **Stress and anxiety**

Social media is a good source of entertainment. However, it also creates many avenues for having fun and social amusement at the cost of physical and mental health. Sometimes it leads to mental stress and discomfort (Woffers & Utz, 2022; Awoke & Zikargae, 2023). However, others have found that socializing can cause depression and anxiety, which leads to social withdrawal. Most of the students shared their views during the interview session that they were increasingly using social media to interact with others. They thought it to be useful for social links, but they realized that it affected their study time.

Highlighting this point, one student said.

One of the respondents reported that:

*“You know...ummm...I was using social media for interaction with friends and classmates all the time...slowly I realized that I developed a habit of being isolated from others.....umm...I feel stressed now....I feel drained and empty...”*

Another student reported that

*“ I am a freelancer.....I know how to use social media....you know...I see myself now away from my family members....I spend much time on mobile doing different types of activities....I do not feel good now....I have developed a stressful situation.....Sometimes I wish to quit it, but I cannot do it....”*

According to many of the students, social media was very informative. The students used it to chat with friends. It appeared from their views that they felt isolated and stressed due to the overuse of it.

Another respondent said that:

*“I know....social media is a good platform for social interaction....but....hmmmm...I do not like it that we spend all the time on social media.....I am suffering from a headache and stress due to spending too much time on social media. I suggest that students should use it moderately... it is very useful, but it also has its own negative effects on health”*

Based on the above data, it was concluded that mostly undergraduate students used it for watching news, entertainment, music, and chatting at the cost of academic tasks. However, despite this, they feel stressed and bored.

### **Sleeplessness and Exhaustion**

Social media is a good source of entertainment. People use it to get relaxation and ease after a tough working routine. However, it turns out to be a source of sleeplessness and disturbance if continuously (Chen et al, 2026). Most of the students replied that spending more time on social media badly affected their health. They replied that it caused an increasing headache problem, and they feel bored all the time after using it. Due to prolonged use, they feel improper sleep accompanied by tiredness.

One of the respondents remarked that:

*“You see....umm....social media is a good platform for creating social links....but it is becoming too popular among students and deviating them from their studies.....ummm...I have felt and experienced it in my hostel life.....you know....I see many students are facing sleep issues....they sit late at night on mobile...”*

One more respondent replied that

*“Using social media really make feel tired sometimes. I feel as if I am drained internally and want to sleep for hours and hours”*

Another respondent narrated “

*“I know that using social media is helpful in many ways, like I feel good while chatting with friends and connecting with my classmates. But I think it has drained my energy as it has negatively impacted my sleep.”*

From the above comments and views from the participants, it can be inferred that social media greatly affects the health of students, as it causes sleeplessness. among the students, which leads to psychological exhaustion, which is one of the major causes of mental and psychological decadence.

### **Social Seclusion**

Social media is increasingly considered to connect people together and shorten distances. But in many cases, it has proved highly destructive for those who use it incessantly or are overly dependent on it (Horan, 2024). They remain cut off from their social relations which leads to a state of isolation and social withdrawal.

During the interviews, a student said that:

*"It has a bad effect on my health, as I feel most of the time that I want to be alone. This is the biggest problem for me."*

During the interviews, the students said that spending time on social media heavily reduced their physical activities. It limited their physical activities. Highlighting this situation, one of the respondents said that:

*"Nowadays, I use social media most of the time frequently. I know it is a good entertaining source, but slowly I feel that I don't want to use it anymore".*

One student replied,

*"I am happy that I am using social media. It has given me many benefits. It has helped me in my studies and to a greater extent, I like it. But I am becoming too sensitive. I don't like to talk to others now. I am becoming more negative. I don't like people to be close to me".*

Majority of respondents said that due to social media, they cannot go out with friends and cannot do physical exercise like sports and games.

Another respondent narrated that:

*"I have experienced this that many students have become really disengaged physically.....you know...we live in the same hostel, but we have little interaction.... To me, this is really distributing.....I see students going away from one another.....they like spending time on social media.....they are totally disengaged....."*

The findings indicate that using social media excessively has negative effects on mental health and physical activities of undergraduate students, as students spend more of their time using social media and don't take part in any game or any other physical activities.

### **Discussion**

The analysis in this study showed that students spending a lot of time on social media did not show good results in the examination. The majority of the students stated that spending a lot of time to social media has a negative effect on their exam grades. These findings support the results of former studies which stated the negative effects of the increasing use of social media on students' academic progress (Sutherland *et al*, 2018). Nigerian university students are reported to be affected due to spending much time on social media. The students showed poor academic results in their examination and did

not show any motivation for improving their exam grades (Olowu & Seri, 2012). This study further discovered that consistent use of social media has negatively affected the undergraduates' health in universities. It causes severe headache and psychological decadence, such as stress and anxiety. This result supports the findings of previous research. For example, Shana (2012) reported that students who use social media for long hours develop stress and isolation. They do not show active participation in social pursuits. These students become socially isolated and develop stress and anxiety eventually. According to Talaue et al (2018), those students who use social media incessantly and do not interact with friends and classmates show signs of social withdrawal and social isolation. Such students also demonstrate signs of stress and depression because of spending more time on screens.

This study further showed that the use of social media for longer hours has harmed undergraduate students' health. It has caused sleeplessness among the students as they use social media for long hours at night. This habit of the students has cost them in terms of physical exhaustion and sleeplessness, due to which they cannot pay attention to the lectures of teachers in class. This finding is well in line with the results of previous studies. Research has revealed that using social media excessively, specially on bedtime hours, causes delayed sleep, reduced sleep duration and even poor sleep quality among students (Al-Menayes, 2015). Some other researchers have stated that students reported burning eyes, disturbed sleep, and headache after using social media for longer hours (Simsek et al., 2019). These findings revealed that the undergraduate university students spent longer hours on social media, and this has led to their social reclusion. This result also supports the findings of earlier studies. For example, from the existing research, it becomes clear that social media has negative effects on the physical activities of undergraduate students as well. It takes a major share of their time, which they could spend with friends and other social circles; however, incessant use of social media has distracted them from social reclusion and isolation. Hence, young people become crippled socially and become socially isolated (Sayadan & Dulek, 2019).

## **Conclusion**

The negative effects of increasing use of social media were manifested in this study among university undergraduates. The study suggested that spending a longer time on social media negatively affected students' academic results. Those students who spend a major part of this time on social media without proper attention towards their studies do not produce good grades in examinations. Spending time for longer hours during bedtime on social media also affects the mental and physical health of students. They suffer from sleeplessness and physical exhaustion. Such students show signs of sleeplessness, stress, and anxiety. This study provided evidence that spending much time on social media also affects students' focus and limits them to themselves. They do not interact freely and become socially isolated and reclusive. This behaviour will restrict them from greater participation in important social pursuits. Thus, they cannot contribute widely to society as a socially active member of the society. This study also helps to conclude that spending a longer time on social media platforms causes poor academic results. Such students produce poor grades due to not giving the required attention to their studies.

## **Recommendations**

At the university level, social media is an interactive and widely required platform for students to join different learning groups/online classes, so its use is

indispensable and critically required. However, students should be trained not to engage in such activities on social media, which can negatively affect their academic achievements.

- It is suggested that teachers and parents should monitor their children and set a schedule for study and the use of social media, and they should be in close interaction with their children,
- For students, it is suggested that they can get help from social media while doing their research/project, or assignment, and they should inculcate positive aspects of social media and the entertainment sites should be moderately used.
- Social Media may also be used for refreshment or obtaining some information, but for a limited time to avoid its effects on physical health and other important social activities. For this purpose, the students may install or activate different positive digital applications on their mobiles to get more benefits and avoid wasting time on social media.
- The university should organize programs in the form of workshops and seminars to enhance digital awareness among students and train students on the responsible use of social media platforms.
- Universities should organize more offline extracurricular activities such as sports galas, cultural events and community engagement projects that boost more physical activities and interaction among students.

### **Implications of the study**

The study has practical implications for the students, teachers, and the university administration. First, the instructors can devise a strict mechanism to be followed in the classes and outside the classes for the proper use of social media platforms. Students should also adapt to the right and moderate use of social media tools in their academic lives. Moreover, the findings of this study have provided some evidence from a developing world context in the wake of the recent health and social pandemics on educational institutions as they are rapidly shifting to technology-based education. Higher education institutions can use the findings of this research study to take measures to improve the academic performance of the students. Therefore, the findings of this research may be used for formulating policies for the purpose of bringing about improvement not only in the curriculum dynamics of higher education but also to guide university students and teachers about the use of social media as a positive source for teaching and learning.

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