

Undergraduate Students' Perceptions of Social Media's Impact on Academic Career and Personal Life: A Study from Koraput District, Odisha

Mr. Manas Tripathy¹, Ms. Anshita Panda², Mr. Subhransu Padhy³

¹M.Sc. B.Ed. M.A (Education), TGT (PCM), PM SHRI Government High School, Jayapur, Odisha, India

²M.Sc. B.Ed. M.A (Education), Guest Faculty, Vikram dev Higher Secondary School, Jayapur, Koraput, Odisha, India

³M.A. M.Ed., Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of Education and Education Technology, University of Hyderabad, Telangana, India

Abstract

Social media has become an inseparable part of the everyday life of undergraduate (UG) students, shaping the way they learn, communicate and spend their free time. The present study examines how UG students at Vikram Dev University, Jeypore, in the Koraput district of Odisha perceive the influence of social media on their academic career and personal life. A descriptive cross-sectional survey design was adopted, and sixty students were selected through purposive sampling from among those with prior experience of using social media. Data were gathered through a structured questionnaire administered via Google Forms and analysed using descriptive statistics. The findings show that YouTube and WhatsApp are the most frequently used platforms, and that a majority of the respondents spend between two and four hours daily on social media, mostly during the evening. While eighty per cent of the students consider social media the easiest way of learning and sixty-three per cent view it as a substitute for books, seventy-five per cent also believe it has a negative effect on health, and sixty per cent feel it disconnects them from the real world. The study highlights the dual nature of social media in the lives of students from a semi-rural, tribal-dominated region and calls for structured digital literacy initiatives, sensible time-management guidance and school-level interventions that can help students use these platforms more purposefully for their academic growth.

Keywords: social media, undergraduate students, academic performance, digital literacy, Koraput district, tribal education

Introduction

Social media emerged in the early 2000s with platforms such as MySpace and Facebook and has since grown into one of the most powerful forces shaping how young people communicate, learn and see themselves. What began as a space for casual networking among young adults has turned into an academic and social tool used by students across the world. Undergraduate students today depend on these platforms not only to stay in touch with friends but also to share

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notes, join discussion groups, follow subject-related pages and prepare for examinations. The spread of affordable smartphones and mobile data, especially after the launch of Reliance Jio in 2016, opened social media to millions of first-time users in India, and recent estimates place the number of active social media users in the country at well over four hundred million (IIM-Rohtak, 2024).

This rapid, almost effortless access to information and entertainment, however, has come with concerns. Researchers have repeatedly pointed to the darker side of heavy social media use, including reduced attention span, procrastination, sleep disturbance and a steady erosion of face-to-face interaction (Mahat & Mundhe, 2014; Lahiry et al., 2019). At the same time, the same platforms that distract students from their studies also connect them to scholarships, government e-learning portals and peer-support networks that would otherwise be out of reach, particularly in areas with limited institutional infrastructure. This dual character of social media, as both an academic resource and a source of distraction, makes it worth studying closely rather than judging it in absolute terms.

The present study is set in Koraput district of Odisha, a tribal-dominated region where more than half the population belongs to Scheduled Tribes and the literacy rate, as per the 2011 Census, stood at around forty-nine per cent. Educational institutions in the district, including Vikram Dev University in Jeypore, cater largely to first-generation learners from rural and semi-urban backgrounds. For these students, a smartphone is often the only window to the wider academic and social world, which makes their relationship with social media both more intense and more consequential than it might be for students in urban centres with richer institutional support. Understanding how these students actually perceive social media, rather than assuming either a wholly positive or wholly negative effect, can help teachers, parents and policy makers design more realistic interventions.

Government-run digital initiatives add another layer to this picture. Programmes launched under the Digital India mission, such as e-Pathshala, DIKSHA and SWAYAM, were designed precisely to channel the same digital habits that draw students to entertainment platforms toward structured, curriculum-linked learning. Whether students in a semi-rural university actually use social media this way, or whether they mainly experience it as a source of entertainment and distraction, as suggested by earlier studies on networking sites (Kuppuswamy & Shankar, 2010), is an empirical question this study attempts to answer.

Against this background, the present study set out to examine how undergraduate students in this setting understand and respond to social media's presence in their academic and personal lives, grounded in the rationale, objectives and research questions outlined below.

Review of Literature

Early Indian research on social networking already recognised its dual pull on student life. Neelamalar and Chitra (2009), in their study on new media and Indian youth, found that most college students used the internet chiefly to communicate with others because it was quicker and more convenient than traditional means. Arora (2014), studying networking behaviour among Indian youth in Delhi, similarly noted that students used these sites as much for self-expression and opinion-sharing as for entertainment. A related picture emerged from

Kuppuswamy and Shankar (2010), who reported that networking websites carried both positive and negative consequences for education depending on how individual students chose to use them. Mahat and Mundhe (2014), studying college-going youth between twelve and thirty years of age, observed that students actively used these platforms to express opinions on corruption, education and other social issues, and Jain et al. (2012) reported a similar trend among Delhi NCR youth, who engaged with pressing social issues on these platforms rather than treating them purely as sources of leisure.

More recent evidence points to the scale this engagement has reached. A widely reported IIM-Rohtak (2024) study, based on responses from nearly thirty-nine thousand young Indians, put the average daily screen time of young Indians at close to seven hours, with entertainment content accounting for over half of what they view. This figure indicates that the sheer volume of time students give to these platforms has grown well beyond what earlier studies described, making questions about its academic consequences more urgent.

International literature adds further nuance. Aslan and Polat (2024), working with university students in Turkey, found that social media addiction was linked to lower academic self-efficacy and success, a relationship mediated by loneliness and depression. Fruehwirth et al. (2024) traced a causal link between heavier social media use and worsening mental health among American college students well into the COVID-19 pandemic, once campuses had reopened and students had returned to in-person routines. Closer to the Indian higher-education context, Rana et al. (2023) and Khan (2024) both reported that social media's effect on learning habits and academic achievement among university students was mixed rather than uniformly negative, a conclusion also reached by Dhiman (2022) and Sharma and Behl (2022) in their studies of Indian university populations, where outcomes depended heavily on students' personality traits and how purposefully they engaged with the content. Purnama and Asdlori (2023) went further, arguing that social media plays a genuine role in shaping students' social perception and interaction when used with intent, while Siddhartha et al. (2020), studying undergraduate use patterns, found that most students combined academic and non-academic use rather than favouring one over the other.

Not all of this literature paints Indian tribal or semi-rural districts in the same light as urban campuses. Studies on the digital divide consistently show that rural households still lag behind urban ones in smartphone ownership and basic digital skills (Shahzad et al., 2022; Bankawat, 2024), and Koraput's own socio-economic profile, marked by low literacy and a large tribal population, makes it a distinct setting in which to test whether the broadly reported patterns of social media use and its academic consequences actually hold. The present study addresses this gap by examining UG students' first-hand perceptions in exactly this setting.

Rationale of the Study

Social media has become deeply woven into how undergraduate students learn, socialise and spend their free time, yet its consequences for academic career and personal wellbeing remain a matter of debate rather than settled fact. Existing research captures its benefits, such as easier access to information and peer collaboration, alongside its costs, including distraction, poor time management and mental health strain, but rarely from the vantage point of students in a tribal-dominated, semi-rural district such as Koraput, where getting this balance right matters

more given the limited availability of alternative learning resources. By inviting undergraduate students at Vikram Dev University to share their constructive views on social media, this study aims to build a grounded understanding of how the platform actually functions in their academic and personal lives, one that can inform realistic, locally relevant strategies for promoting responsible use, digital citizenship and online resilience among students navigating the digital world.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine undergraduate students' perceptions of social media as a resource for academic learning.
2. To describe the patterns of social media use among undergraduate students, including platform preference, time spent, and timing of use.
3. To assess the perceived impact of social media on undergraduate students' academic performance, health, and social wellbeing.
4. To identify strategies for promoting more responsible and purposeful social media use among undergraduate students.

Research Questions

1. What are undergraduate students' perceptions of social media as a resource for academic learning?
2. What patterns characterise undergraduate students' social media use, in terms of platform choice, time spent, and timing?
3. What impact does social media use have on undergraduate students' academic performance, health, and social wellbeing?
4. What are effective strategies for promoting responsible social media use among undergraduate students?

The Uses and Gratifications perspective offers a useful lens for reading these patterns: it treats media users not as passive recipients but as people who actively choose platforms to satisfy particular needs, whether for information, entertainment, social connection or a sense of identity. Applied to undergraduate students, this view suggests that the same student may turn to WhatsApp for peer support, to YouTube for exam preparation and to Instagram purely for leisure, often within the same evening. The present study borrows this framing loosely, treating students' reported motivations for using social media as a starting point for understanding why the same tool can be experienced as both helpful and harmful within a single respondent's daily routine.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive, cross-sectional survey design, considered appropriate for capturing students' existing perceptions and experiences without manipulating any variable. It was carried out at Vikram Dev University, Jeypore, located in the Koraput district of Odisha, an institution that draws students largely from tribal and rural backgrounds across the region. A purposive sample of sixty undergraduate students, drawn from the first, second and third

years across the Arts, Science and Commerce streams, was selected on the basis of one inclusion criterion: prior experience of using social media. Of the sixty respondents, thirty-six (60.0%) were male and twenty-four (40.0%) were female; thirty students (50.0%) belonged to the Arts stream, eighteen (30.0%) to Science and twelve (20.0%) to Commerce, and the sample was fairly evenly spread across the three academic years, with thirty students (50.0%) in their third year (Table 1).

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered in person via Google Forms, combining closed-ended items with five-point Likert-scale statements to capture the degree of agreement or disagreement with specific views about social media. The instrument was reviewed by a panel of academic experts prior to administration to check its content validity, clarity and suitability for the target group. The background variables recorded included gender, academic stream, year of study, type of internet access and device used, while the study's core variables of interest covered students' perception of social media, the challenges they associated with it, and its perceived impact on their academic career and personal life. As the design was descriptive rather than correlational, these background and outcome variables were each summarised independently using frequencies and percentages, without testing statistical relationships between them. Formal permission was obtained from the college administration before data collection, and all participants were briefed about the purpose of the study and gave informed consent. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout, and the collected responses were analysed using descriptive statistics, namely frequencies and percentages, computed with the help of SPSS.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 60)

Variable	Category	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	36	60.0
	Female	24	40.0
Academic Stream	Arts	30	50.0
	Science	18	30.0
	Commerce	12	20.0
Year of Study	1st Year	15	25.0
	2nd Year	15	25.0
	3rd Year	30	50.0

Results and Discussion

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the sixty respondents. The sample was drawn fairly

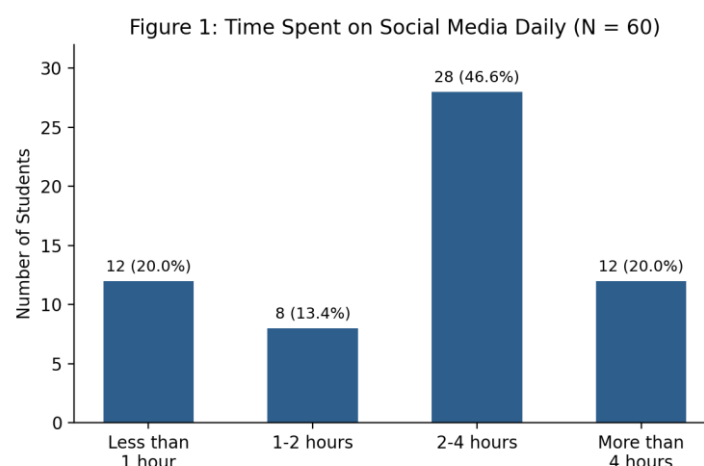
evenly across the three academic years, though third-year students formed exactly half the group, and Arts students outnumbered those from Science and Commerce, a pattern that mirrors the general enrolment trend in semi-rural institutions where the Arts stream tends to be more accessible and affordable. The slightly higher share of male respondents (60.0%) may reflect either greater availability of male students at the time of data collection or the composition of the university's overall student body.

Platform choice and time invested: Table 2 shows that YouTube was by far the most frequently used platform, chosen by twenty-seven students (45.0%), followed by WhatsApp (20.0%), Instagram (16.7%), Facebook (11.6%) and other platforms (6.7%). This preference for video-based and messaging platforms over text-heavy networks such as Facebook is broadly consistent with national trends reported by the IIM-Rohtak (2024) study, which found YouTube, Instagram and WhatsApp to be the platforms most used by Indian youth for both entertainment and communication.

Table 2: Social Media Platform Used Most Frequently

Platform	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
Facebook	7	11.6
WhatsApp	12	20.0
YouTube	27	45.0
Instagram	10	16.7
Others	4	6.7
Total	60	100.0

In terms of time spent, close to half the respondents (46.6%) reported spending between two and four hours daily on social media, while one in five spent more than four hours and another one in five spent less than an hour (Figure 1). Taken together, nearly two-thirds of the sample spend two hours or more on these platforms every day, a volume of engagement that, while lower than the seven-hour average reported among Indian youth nationally (IIM-Rohtak, 2024), is still substantial for students balancing coursework, assignments and, in many cases, part-time responsibilities at home.



Learning value and its limits: Eighty per cent of the students (48 of 60) agreed that social media was the easiest way of learning, and sixty per cent felt it could substitute for a teacher or guru, findings that echo Neelamalar and Chitra's (2009) observation that students gravitate toward the internet because it is quicker and more convenient than conventional study methods (Table 3). Sixty-three per cent went further, describing social media as a substitute for books altogether, a view that, while understandable given the ready access to explainer videos and study material on YouTube and WhatsApp groups, also raises questions about the depth and reliability of the learning students are drawing from these sources.

Table 3: Students' Perceptions of Social Media as a Learning and Health-related Resource

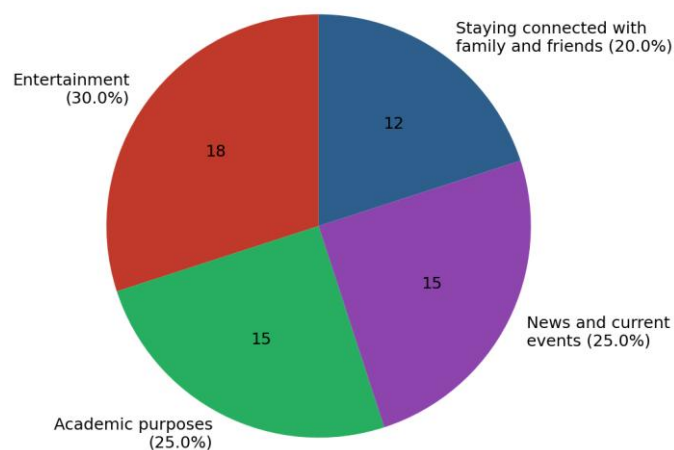
Statement	Yes (%)	No (%)
Social media is the easiest way of learning	80.0	20.0
Social media is a substitute for books	63.3	36.7
Social media is an alternate of guru/teacher	60.0	40.0
Social media has a negative impact on health	75.0	25.0

At the same time, these convenience-driven views sat alongside clear concerns. Seventy-five per cent of respondents believed that social media has a negative impact on health, and sixty per cent agreed that spending more time on these platforms leaves them feeling disconnected from the real world. This finding is consistent with the growing body of evidence linking heavy social media use to poorer mental well-being and reduced face-to-face engagement among students (Fruehwirth et al., 2024; Aslan & Polat, 2024). The coexistence of high perceived learning value and high perceived health risk within the same sample suggests that Koraput's undergraduate students are not naive users of these platforms; rather, they appear aware of the trade-off but continue to rely on social media because, in a region where access to teachers, libraries and coaching is limited, it remains one of the cheapest and most convenient sources of information available to them.

When and why students log on: The majority of respondents (60.0%) used social media mainly in the evening, and a further twenty per cent used it late at night, with only a small minority logging on during class hours or in the morning. This timing pattern suggests that social media use, for most students in the sample, is concentrated outside instructional hours rather than actively competing with classroom time, even though late-night use raises separate concerns about sleep and next-day alertness that several respondents themselves flagged when they agreed that social media use could lead to sleeping disorders.

Regarding the primary purpose of use, entertainment was the single largest category, chosen by thirty per cent of respondents, while academic purposes and news or current events accounted for twenty-five per cent each, and staying connected with family and friends made up the remaining twenty per cent (Figure 2). This distribution captures the core tension running through the findings: academic use is real and meaningful for a quarter of the sample, but it competes directly with entertainment as the dominant motivation, which helps explain why so many students simultaneously value social media as a learning aid and worry about its effect on their focus and well-being.

Figure 2: Primary Use of Social Media (N = 60)



Educational and policy implications: Taken as a whole, these findings position social media in the lives of Koraput's undergraduate students much as the wider literature describes it elsewhere, as a genuinely double-edged tool (Purnama & Asdlori, 2023; Siddhartha et al., 2020). It lowers the cost of accessing information in a district where formal educational infrastructure remains thin, and it connects students to peers and current events they might otherwise miss. But it also draws heavily on their time, particularly in the evening and at night, and a majority of the respondents themselves recognise its costs to health and to their sense of connection with the world around them. What distinguishes this sample from more urban student populations studied elsewhere is less the direction of these effects than the stakes attached to them: in a district with limited access to alternative learning resources, students appear to lean on social media more heavily for straightforward academic support, which makes the question of how to help them use it well, rather than whether to allow it at all, the more useful one for teachers and institutions to address. Digital-literacy sessions built into

orientation programmes, guidance on separating reliable academic content from entertainment, and school- or college-level discussions on healthy screen-time habits could go some way toward helping students in similar districts draw more consistent academic value from platforms they are, in any case, going to keep using.

Conclusion

This study set out to understand how undergraduate students at a semi-rural university in Koraput district perceive the role of social media in their academic career and personal life, and the four research questions that guided it point to a fairly consistent picture. Students see social media chiefly as a convenient academic resource, evident in the eighty per cent who call it the easiest way of learning and the sixty-three per cent who view it as a substitute for books. YouTube and WhatsApp dominate their daily use, concentrated mainly in the evening and late-night hours, and this usage carries a genuinely mixed effect on academic performance and wellbeing: it supports quick access to material but competes with study time when most usage is concentrated, echoing the mixed findings reported by Rana et al. (2023) and Khan (2024) in other Indian university settings, while three in four students believe social media harms their health and six in ten feel disconnected from the world around them, findings that place this tribal-dominated district squarely within the wider pattern of concern documented among student populations elsewhere (Fruehwirth et al., 2024; Aslan & Polat, 2024). As for strategies to promote more responsible use, the students' own concerns about health and disconnection point toward the same practical answer that the wider literature converges on: structured, time-bound use paired with basic digital literacy training, rather than blanket restriction, is what this population appears to need most.

For a region where formal educational infrastructure remains limited, the sensible response is not to discourage social media use but to help students use it with more purpose. Colleges could build short digital-literacy modules into orientation programmes, teaching students to separate reliable academic content from entertainment and misinformation, while structured discussions between teachers, parents and students on healthy screen-time habits, particularly around late-night use, could address the sleep and disconnection concerns students themselves have flagged. Given that this study relied on a modest, purposively drawn sample from a single institution, future research covering a larger and more geographically varied group of tribal and rural students, ideally combining survey data with in-depth interviews, would help confirm whether these patterns hold more broadly across Odisha's tribal belt.

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