

The Double-Edged Digital Platform: Impact of Social Media on the Academic Performance of Media Students in Karachi

Muskan Riaz¹, Dr. Taha Shabbir², Dr Humera Yaseen³ and Samina Abbasi³

Abstract

This study investigates the impact of social media usage on the academic performance of media students in Karachi, with particular focus on three dependent variables: creative intelligence, worldview development, and technological efficiency. As social media has become a constitutive feature of contemporary student life functioning simultaneously as an entertainment platform, professional portfolio space, and educational resource its effects on academic outcomes remain contested and context-dependent. Grounded in Uses and Gratifications Theory (Lazarsfeld & Stanton, 1944) and Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), this research employed a quantitative design, gathering primary data from 300 undergraduate and postgraduate media students across public and private universities in Karachi through a structured Likert-scale questionnaire. Data were analysed using Chi-Square statistical tests in SPSS. Results revealed statistically significant associations between social media usage and all three dependent variables: creative intelligence ($\chi^2 = 38.127$, $df = 16$, $p = .001$), worldview development ($\chi^2 = 41.818$, $df = 16$, $p < .001$), and technological efficiency ($\chi^2 = 38.127$, $df = 16$, $p = .001$). More active social media users demonstrated higher levels of creative thinking, broader global perspectives, and greater confidence in digital tools. However, the study simultaneously documented significant negative consequences including distraction from coursework (reported by 52% of respondents), time-management failures (58.7%), missed academic deadlines (53%), and mental fatigue following heavy use (58.3%). The findings argue that social media is a fundamentally ambivalent academic tool whose effects are contingent upon intentionality, self-regulation, and digital literacy rather than upon usage volume per se. The paper concludes with evidence-based recommendations for educators, institutions, and students seeking to optimise social media's academic potential while mitigating its well-documented harms.

¹Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto Institute of Science and Technology, Karachi – Pakistan

²Indus University, Karachi – Pakistan

³Preston University, Karachi – Pakistan

⁴Special Education Department, Karachi University – Pakistan

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Introduction

The relationship between social media use and academic performance has generated substantial scholarly debate over the past decade, producing empirical findings that are simultaneously promising and cautionary. Social media platforms Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, Twitter/X, and WhatsApp among the most prominent have transformed the information and communication landscape in which contemporary university students pursue their studies, creating new opportunities for collaborative learning, peer support, and access to educational resources while simultaneously introducing unprecedented potential for distraction, cognitive overload, and the displacement of study time (Smith, 2021; Junco, 2012).

The case of media students is particularly instructive and analytically distinctive. Unlike students in disciplines with limited professional engagement with digital platforms, media students inhabit a uniquely dual relationship with social media: it is simultaneously a subject of their academic study, a tool of their professional practice, and an ever-present feature of their personal social environment. Students in media programmes are expected to develop competencies in digital storytelling, content production, audience analysis, and platform strategy competencies for which social media engagement may function as both training ground and distraction. Understanding how this dual relationship plays out in terms of academic outcomes is therefore not only a matter of educational psychology but of direct relevance to media education programme design and pedagogy (Muhammad Saqib, 2023; Walelign, 2021).

Pakistan presents a particularly urgent and underexplored context for this inquiry. The country has experienced a dramatic expansion in internet and smartphone penetration among youth, with social media adoption among university students growing rapidly across major urban centres (Khurram, 2020). Despite this growth, empirical research specifically examining the social media-academic performance relationship among Pakistani media students remains limited, and the existing

literature is largely dominated by studies conducted in Western or East Asian contexts whose findings may not transfer readily to Pakistan's distinctive socio-educational environment (Zubair & Sheikh, 2021). This study addresses that gap directly, focusing on media students enrolled in public and private universities in Karachi Pakistan's largest city and primary hub of media education and industry.

The study is organised around three primary research objectives, each corresponding to a dependent variable of academic significance: (RO₁) to determine the impact of social media usage on the creative intelligence of media students; (RO₂) to evaluate the impact of social media usage on the information quality and worldview of media students; and (RO₃) to investigate the relationship between social media usage and technological efficiency. Three corresponding hypotheses are tested: H₁, that there is a significant relationship between social media usage and technological efficiency; H₂, that there is a significant relationship between social media usage and students' worldview; and H₃, that there is a significant relationship between social media usage and creative intelligence. The paper proceeds through a review of relevant literature, description of methodology, presentation of findings, statistical hypothesis analysis, discussion, and conclusion with recommendations.

Review of the Literature

❖ Social Media and Academic Performance: The Global Evidence Base

The body of research examining social media's effects on academic performance is extensive, methodologically diverse, and characterised by findings that resist easy generalisation. Junco (2012) conducted one of the foundational studies in this area, examining multiple dimensions of Facebook use among college students and finding that time spent on Facebook for non-academic activities was negatively associated with grade point average, while specific forms of Facebook use such as checking for updates or sharing links showed differential relationships with academic engagement. The study's central finding that it is the nature of social media use rather than its aggregate volume that most powerfully predicts academic outcomes has been replicated and extended by subsequent research (Rosen, Carrier, & Cheever, 2013; Zhang & Leung, 2016).

Research consistently identifies distraction as the primary mechanism through which social media exerts negative effects on academic performance. Rosen et al. (2013) documented that students who were interrupted by social media notifications while studying showed significant performance decrements compared to

uninterrupted peers, with the effect intensifying as interruption frequency increased. The phenomenon of 'technoference' the intrusion of technology into academic activities has been associated with reduced reading comprehension, shorter attention spans, and greater procrastination. Wang and Zhang (2019) found that social media addiction, characterised by compulsive and uncontrolled use, was significantly associated with lower academic performance across multiple measures, with the relationship mediated by reduced study time and disrupted sleep patterns.

Against these findings, a substantial body of research documents social media's positive academic affordances. Walegign (2021) demonstrated that collaborative use of social media platforms particularly for resource sharing, peer support, and group study coordination was associated with improved academic engagement and better comprehension of complex concepts. Amry (2014) found that WhatsApp-based social learning groups produced measurable academic gains compared to traditional classroom-only instruction, particularly for collaborative tasks requiring ongoing communication. The positive effects of social media appear most pronounced when students use platforms deliberately for academic purposes: following educational accounts, participating in discipline-specific communities, accessing tutorial content, and coordinating collaborative projects (Pasek, More, & Hargittai, 2009).

For media students specifically, social media functions as a professional laboratory as well as an academic tool. Platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok provide spaces for students to practise content creation, develop audience understanding, experiment with visual communication, and build professional portfolios. This professional-academic duality means that what appears as recreational use from an external perspective may in fact constitute discipline-relevant skill development. Muhammad Saqib (2023) noted that media students who are actively engaged on social platforms tend to develop digital literacy and professional communication competencies that are increasingly indispensable in contemporary media careers, suggesting that the academic cost-benefit calculus for media students may differ meaningfully from that applicable to students in other disciplines.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in two complementary theoretical frameworks that together provide an integrated account of why and how students engage with social media and what consequences that engagement has for their academic development. The first is Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), developed by Lazarsfeld and Stanton (1944) and elaborated by subsequent communication scholars. UGT posits that

media audiences are active, purposive users who select media and content in order to satisfy specific psychological and social needs, including the needs for information, social integration, entertainment, personal identity reinforcement, and escapism. Applied to social media, UGT predicts that students' academic outcomes will vary based on the gratifications they seek from social media use: students seeking information, peer connection, and intellectual stimulation through social media will derive academic benefits, while students seeking entertainment, escapism, or emotional regulation will be more susceptible to academic disruption. This framework explains why aggregate measures of social media use time are poor predictors of academic outcomes what matters is the functional orientation of use, not its volume.

The second theoretical foundation is Albert Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory (SLT), which holds that individuals learn new behaviours, attitudes, and cognitive patterns by observing and modelling others in their social environment. In the context of social media, SLT predicts that students who are exposed to peers, mentors, and influencers demonstrating high-quality academic work, creative production, and effective study habits will be inclined to observe and imitate these behaviours, thereby enhancing their own academic performance. Conversely, students whose social media networks are dominated by content celebrating academic disengagement, distraction, or superficial entertainment may be socialised toward less academically productive behaviours through the same observational learning mechanism. SLT thus provides a theoretical account for the differential effects of social media on creativity, worldview, and technological efficiency: these outcomes depend not only on how much students use social media but on what they observe and what they are inclined to model.

Methodology

❖ Research Design and Sample

This study employed a quantitative research design appropriate to its objective of establishing measurable associations between social media usage patterns and academic performance dimensions across a representative sample of media students. Quantitative methodology was selected over qualitative alternatives because the research objectives required statistical assessment of relationships between variables rather than in-depth exploration of individual experiences, and because a sufficiently large sample was needed to permit generalisable conclusions and meaningful Chi-Square analysis.

The study population comprised media students currently enrolled in undergraduate and postgraduate programmes at public and private universities in Karachi. The city was selected as the research site because it is Pakistan's largest urban centre, hosts the country's highest concentration of media education institutions, and provides a demographically diverse student population representative of urban Pakistani media students. A total of 300 participants were recruited through purposive sampling, with equal representation from private ($n = 150$) and public ($n = 150$) universities to ensure balanced institutional coverage. The sample included 165 male (55%) and 135 female (45%) respondents, with the largest age cohort falling in the 26–35 range (42.7%), followed by 36–45 (28.7%), 18–25 (14.7%), and above 45 (14.0%). In terms of educational level, 37.7% were postgraduate students, 25% undergraduates, 24.7% doctoral students, and 12.7% from other categories.

❖ Research Instrument and Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire comprising two components: demographic items (institution type, gender, age, educational level) and 20 substantive items assessed on a five-point Likert scale, measuring social media usage patterns and their self-reported effects on academic creativity, worldview development, and technological efficiency. The questionnaire was pre-tested on a pilot sample of 30 students prior to full deployment, with revisions made based on participant feedback to improve clarity and reduce ambiguity. The survey was administered online through Google Forms, distributed via university email lists, WhatsApp groups, and social media channels. All participation was voluntary, anonymous, and informed by a clearly stated explanation of the study's purpose. Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional research ethics committee prior to data collection.

Quantitative data analysis was performed using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, cumulative distributions) were computed for all survey items to characterise the sample's social media usage patterns and self-reported academic effects. Chi-Square analysis was employed to test the three research hypotheses, examining whether statistically significant associations existed between social media usage patterns (independent variable) and each of the three dependent variables: technological efficiency (H_1), worldview development (H_2), and creative intelligence (H_3). The threshold for statistical significance was set at $p < .05$, consistent with standard practice in social science research.

Results and Findings

❖ **Descriptive Findings: Social Media Usage Patterns**

The descriptive findings paint a picture of students deeply embedded in social media environments, with usage patterns that simultaneously reflect productive academic engagement and concerning levels of distraction. The most striking finding regarding usage intensity was that over 54% of respondents spent more than three hours per day on social media 35.7% strongly agreeing and 18.7% agreeing with the statement that they use social media for more than three hours daily. This places the majority of the sample in the category of high-volume users for whom the distinction between purposive academic engagement and habitual recreational use is a matter of particular importance.

Social media engagement during academic activities was widespread: 70% of respondents reported frequently checking social media while attending lectures or reading 36.7% strongly agreeing and 33.3% agreeing with this behaviour. This finding is consistent with the literature on technology-based distraction in educational settings (Rosen et al., 2013) and raises particular concerns about the impact of concurrent social media use on reading comprehension and lecture engagement. Usage motivation was primarily entertainment-oriented for a majority of students: approximately 60% indicated they use social media mainly for entertainment purposes rather than academic ones, though this did not preclude simultaneous academic benefit through exposure to field-relevant content.

Importantly, academic use of social media was also substantial. Approximately 59% of respondents reported following educational or academic-related pages on social media, and 60.3% agreed that they access academic material through social media that is not available elsewhere. These findings suggest a population of students who are simultaneously heavy recreational users and meaningfully engaged with social media's educational affordances a pattern consistent with UGT's prediction that students seek multiple, sometimes simultaneous gratifications from media use.

❖ **Negative Academic Effects: Distraction, Time Management, and Mental Fatigue**

The study documented a consistent pattern of negative academic consequences reported by significant majorities of the sample. Distraction from academic work was the most widely acknowledged harm: 52% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that social media distracts them from completing schoolwork on time, and

53% acknowledged having missed deadlines or important academic activities due to social media distraction. These figures are particularly striking given that they represent self-reported acknowledgements rather than externally measured outcomes, suggesting that the actual incidence of distraction-related academic harm may be even higher than reported figures indicate, given tendencies toward social desirability in self-assessment.

Time management emerged as a closely related area of concern. Of respondents, 58.7% acknowledged struggling to manage their time effectively due to frequent social media use 30% strongly agreeing and 28.7% agreeing. Exam-period social media use was especially notable: 56.4% reported that their social media usage actually increases during critical examination periods, precisely when reduced usage would most benefit academic performance. This counterintuitive pattern is consistent with research on procrastination and stress-driven media seeking (Rosen et al., 2013), in which high-stakes academic pressure paradoxically drives increased social media use as a form of anxiety management or avoidance behaviour.

Mental fatigue was a further significant finding. A total of 58.3% of respondents reported feeling mentally tired after extended social media use and acknowledged that this fatigue negatively affected their study performance. This finding aligns with cognitive load theory's prediction that extended engagement with high-stimulation digital content depletes the cognitive resources necessary for sustained academic concentration, with particular implications for media students whose coursework frequently requires extended periods of creative and analytical engagement. Grade impact was candidly acknowledged: 57.3% agreed or strongly agreed that their grades had dropped due to excessive social media use, and 48% believed that curtailing their social media use would improve their academic performance a striking self-awareness about the costs of current usage patterns.

❖ **Positive Academic Effects: Creativity, Worldview, and Technological Efficiency**

Against these documented harms, the study also recorded substantial positive academic effects that were reported by majorities or near-majorities of respondents across the three key dependent variables. On creative intelligence, 53.4% agreed or strongly agreed that social media use enhances their creativity in academic assignments and projects. Respondents reported drawing inspiration from visual content on Instagram and YouTube, using platform exposure to generate ideas for multimedia projects, and leveraging the diversity of creative approaches visible on

social media to expand their own creative repertoires. This finding is consistent with SLT's prediction that observation of creative models on social media can facilitate creative development through imitation and adaptation.

The impact on worldview was similarly positive for a majority of the sample. A total of 61.4% reported that social media keeps them updated on current trends in their area of study, and 44% reported making academic comparisons with peers on social media a behaviour that, while potentially anxiety-inducing, also reflects engagement with standards of academic quality observable in peer work. The broad exposure to diverse cultural perspectives, global debates, and multidisciplinary content that social media affords appears to contribute to the development of more cosmopolitan, critically informed worldviews among engaged students, consistent with research on digital media and global citizenship education (Ali, 2021).

On technological efficiency, the data supported the hypothesis that social media engagement builds practical digital skills applicable to academic and professional contexts. Students reported increased confidence in using digital tools for academic collaboration, accessing online resources, and producing multimodal content a finding of particular relevance for media students whose professional formation requires advanced digital literacy. The collaborative dimension of social media engagement was also noteworthy: 56.4% reported using social media to collaborate with classmates on academic projects, and 58.6% reported using social media to seek help from peers or mentors for academic challenges. These collaborative uses represent social media functioning as a genuine academic support infrastructure an extended study group and mentorship network that supplements formal institutional support.

Hypothesis Testing and Statistical Analysis

❖ H₁: Social Media Usage and Technological Efficiency

The first hypothesis proposed that there is a statistically significant relationship between social media usage and technological efficiency among media students. Chi-Square analysis revealed a Pearson Chi-Square value of 38.127 with 16 degrees of freedom and a significance level of $p = .001$, well below the threshold of $p < .05$ required to reject the null hypothesis. This result provides strong statistical support for H₁: differences in students' social media usage patterns including frequency, purpose, and platform preferences are meaningfully associated with differences in their technological proficiency. Students who used social media more actively and purposively demonstrated stronger confidence in navigating digital academic tools,

managing online learning environments, and applying technological solutions to academic tasks. The Chi-Square test assumptions were satisfied, and the distribution of responses across categories was appropriate for a valid analysis, supporting confidence in the robustness of this finding.

❖ H₂: Social Media Usage and Worldview Development

The second hypothesis proposed a significant relationship between social media usage and students' worldview formation. The Chi-Square test yielded a value of 41.818 ($df = 16, p < .001$), the strongest statistical result of the three hypotheses and one that provides compelling evidence for the worldview-shaping power of social media engagement. This finding is well explained by both theoretical frameworks. From a UGT perspective, students actively seek social media content that satisfies informational and identity-formation needs, and their selective engagement with global, cultural, and discipline-relevant content progressively expands their cognitive and evaluative horizons. From an SLT perspective, regular observation of diverse opinions, lifestyles, and intellectual approaches on social media facilitates the modelling of broader and more nuanced worldviews than would be accessible through traditional educational channels alone. It should be noted that 4 cells (16.0%) had expected frequencies below 5, indicating some sparse data categories that warrant caution in interpreting category-level conclusions; the overall relationship is nonetheless robust.

❖ H₃: Social Media Usage and Creative Intelligence

The third hypothesis proposed a significant relationship between social media usage and creative intelligence. The Chi-Square analysis returned values identical to H₁ ($\chi^2 = 38.127, df = 16, p = .001$), again rejecting the null hypothesis and confirming a statistically significant association. More active social media users demonstrated higher self-reported creativity in academic contexts, drawing on the abundance of visual, textual, and multimedia creative models available on platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok to generate novel ideas, experiment with presentation formats, and develop a more sophisticated aesthetic sensibility. Consistent with SLT, students appear to engage in a process of creative observation and modelling absorbing creative approaches from peers, influencers, and content creators they encounter on social media and applying adapted versions of these approaches in their own academic work. This finding reinforces the case for distinguishing between different forms of social media engagement in research on academic outcomes: creative production-oriented engagement on social media may

function as a form of informal creative education that supplements and enriches formal media training.

Discussion

The aggregate picture that emerges from these findings is one of fundamental ambivalence: social media is neither straightforwardly beneficial nor straightforwardly harmful to the academic performance of media students in Karachi, but is instead a tool whose academic effects are powerfully shaped by how, why, and how deliberately it is used. This conclusion is consistent with the theoretical frameworks guiding the study and with the broader empirical literature, and it has important implications for educational practice, institutional policy, and individual student behaviour.

The positive findings significant associations between social media usage and creative intelligence, worldview development, and technological efficiency demonstrate that social media platforms can function as genuine academic resources when students engage with them purposively. For media students in particular, whose professional formation requires precisely the capacities that active social media engagement appears to develop digital literacy, creative thinking, global awareness, collaborative skills this finding argues for a reconceptualisation of social media from educational liability to educational asset, provided that the conditions of purposive, self-regulated engagement are met. The high percentage of students following academic pages (59%), accessing unique academic material (60.3%), and using social media for peer-assisted learning (58.6%) demonstrates that many students are already engaging in these productive uses, even if the same individuals also engage in distracting uses simultaneously.

The negative findings distraction (52%), time-management failures (58.7%), missed deadlines (53%), grade decline (57.3%), and mental fatigue (58.3%) are equally significant and must not be dismissed in the enthusiasm for social media's educational potential. These are not marginal effects affecting a minority of students: they are majority experiences that reflect a structural problem in how students currently manage their relationship with social media. The finding that social media usage actually increases during examination periods for a majority of students points to a specific failure of self-regulation under conditions of academic stress precisely the conditions under which effective self-regulation is most critical.

The theoretical frameworks illuminate these patterns productively. From a UGT perspective, students who use social media primarily to satisfy escapism and

entertainment needs will experience predominantly negative academic consequences, while those who use it primarily to satisfy information, learning, and social integration needs will experience predominantly positive consequences. The challenge for students, educators, and institutions is to shift the balance of social media use motivation toward the productive gratifications a challenge that requires both individual awareness and institutional scaffolding. From an SLT perspective, the social media environments students inhabit the networks they belong to, the accounts they follow, the content they are exposed to shape the models available for observational learning, and interventions that enrich these environments with academically productive models can leverage social media's observational learning potential for educational gain.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine the impact of social media usage on the academic performance of media students in Karachi, focusing on three dependent variables creative intelligence, worldview development, and technological efficiency that are of particular relevance to students whose academic formation and professional futures are deeply intertwined with digital media environments. The principal finding is unambiguous: social media exerts a statistically significant influence on all three variables, and that influence is fundamentally double-edged. Students who use social media actively, purposively, and with some degree of self-regulation experience measurable academic benefits across all three dimensions. Students who use it primarily for entertainment, without self-imposed boundaries, and in ways that displace rather than supplement academic engagement, experience the distraction, time-management failure, and grade decline that much of the literature predicts.

The study contributes to the literature in several respects. First, it addresses a significant empirical gap by focusing on media students in Karachi a population and context inadequately represented in the existing English-language literature. Second, by operationalising academic impact through the three specific constructs of creative intelligence, worldview, and technological efficiency rather than through the more commonly used but blunt instrument of GPA the study provides a more nuanced account of social media's academic effects that is particularly well suited to the specific competency profile of media education. Third, the simultaneous documentation of positive and negative effects within the same sample challenges binary framings of social media as either educational enabler or educational obstacle, and argues for a more contextually sensitive approach.

For practice, the findings recommend a multi-level institutional response. Universities should develop and integrate digital literacy programmes that specifically address purposive social media use for academic ends, helping students distinguish between productive and unproductive usage patterns and equipping them with the self-regulatory tools to act on that distinction. Time management training tailored to digital environments should be incorporated into student induction and ongoing academic support programmes. Faculty members should actively design social media engagement into course structures setting up academic discussion groups, assigning platform-based projects, and modelling purposive professional use rather than positioning social media as an external distraction to be resisted. Awareness campaigns targeting the examination period, when the distracting pull of social media is most academically consequential, can help students develop context-sensitive self-regulation strategies. Future research should address this study's limitations through mixed-method designs that add qualitative depth to quantitative patterns, longitudinal designs that track changes in behaviour over time, platform-specific analyses that distinguish the distinctive academic effects of different social media environments, and broader geographic and disciplinary samples that test the generalisability of these findings beyond Karachi's media students.

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Correspondence:

Dr. Taha Shabbir

tahashabbir5@gmail.com
