Transforming Higher Education Engagement through Social Media: Examining Academic Impact on Indian Students

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Abstract

This study looks at how social media might improve student involvement in higher education, with a particular emphasis on academic collaboration and digital activism. In order to link students, professors, and larger communities and create an atmosphere that encourages advocacy, information sharing, and group action, social media platforms have grown in importance for academic institutions. The study looks at how social media helps students get involved in campus activism, social justice movements, and academic endeavours, connecting academic goals with practical applications. It illustrates important ways that social media promotes peer cooperation, community development, and participatory learning beyond institutional borders by drawing on a variety of case studies and empirical research. The study also examines issues including disinformation, digital inequality, and the requirement for institutional governance to optimise. Despite these advantages, issues like as unequal digital access, the risk of misinformation, and the need for institutional governance frameworks are raised. The study supports for embracing social media's potential to foster more engaged and socially conscious academic environments, while also suggesting policies to ensure ethical use and privacy. According to the research, incorporating social media into higher education pedagogy strategically can boost student enthusiasm, give voice to under-represented groups, and encourage civic engagement. This study advances our knowledge of how digital tools transform academic culture and provides guidance to administrators, educators, and legislators who want to use social media for social and educational purposes. In the end, the report makes the case for higher education institutions to keep developing into digitally connected platforms that promote activism and scholarship.

Keywords: Digital Literacy, social media in education, Teacher engagement, Indian students, Mixed-methods research, educational outcomes.

1. Introduction

The advent of social media has revolutionized communication and information exchange across the globe, with profound effects on various societal sectors, including education. In the context of Indian higher education, social media integration into students' social and academic lives has accelerated due to the country's expanding youth population and the quick growth of internet accessibility. Social media sites like WhatsApp, YouTube, LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter have evolved beyond their original functions as tools for social interaction to become essential tools for professional networking, knowledge sharing, and academic collaboration.

However, there are two aspects to social media's impact. Its recreational features can result in digital distractions, poor time management, and diminished focus, even when it permits genuine academic involvement with intentional use. Studies indicate that significant proportions of students experience productivity losses tied to recreational social media use, despite recognizing its value for peer learning. This dual impact necessitates a nuanced investigation of how

Indian students use social media and the subsequent effects on their academic engagement. This study aims to examine the dual impact of social media on Indian students' academic engagement by deploying a mixed-methods approach. The research investigates the relationships between purposeful academic social media use and recreational use on behavioural, emotional, and cognitive engagement. It further explores how social media literacy programs and time-management strategies might optimize educational benefits while mitigating distractions in India's evolving digital education landscape.

2. Review of literature

i). Positive Effect on Students to Use of Social Media:

The proliferation of social media has ushered in significant changes in the educational landscape worldwide, with Indian higher education witnessing a rapid integration of these digital platforms into teaching and learning environments. Social media platforms such as WhatsApp, YouTube, LinkedIn, and Facebook have moved beyond mere communication tools to

become vital educational resources that influence students' academic engagement. Engagement itself is multi-dimensional, encompassing behavioural, emotional, and cognitive aspects vital for student success (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004).

Several studies emphasize the positive role of purposeful academic social media use in enhancing collaboration and resource sharing among students. Research by Al-Rahmi and Othman (2022) demonstrated that using platforms like WhatsApp for group discussions, sharing notes, and peer tutoring increases behavioural engagement by promoting active participation. YouTube's vast repository of educational videos enables cognitive engagement through self-paced learning and conceptual understanding. LinkedIn facilitates emotional and cognitive engagement by connecting students to professional networks and career development content (Joshi, 2024). These findings underscore social media's capacity to complement traditional pedagogical approaches by fostering interactive and accessible learning modalities. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated both reliance on and scrutiny of social media within higher education. With campus closures and remote learning mandates, platforms like WhatsApp and YouTube served as crucial academic lifelines, facilitating continuity in education for millions of Indian students with limited LMS infrastructure (JournalEET, 2024). Balakrishnan and Gan (2016) highlight that social media integration positively affects student motivation and goal orientation. They observe that students perceive social media platforms as key educational aids that support self-regulated learning, peer collaboration, and real-time knowledge exchange in higher education settings. Research by Sengupta *et al*. (2023) during the COVID-19 pandemic underscores social media's importance in maintaining academic connectivity among Indian students when physical campuses were closed. Platforms such as WhatsApp and Telegram enhanced access to learning materials and fostered virtual academic communities, contributing to sustained engagement and collaborative learning.

ii). Negative Effect on Students to Use of Social Media:
Conversely, the recreational use of social media presents challenges to academic focus. Many scholars have noted a significant negative correlation between excessive leisure-oriented social media activity and students' time management, attention span, and academic performance (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017; Ijrpr, 2024). Nevertheless, studies also caution against the risks of social media use. Shukla (2025) and Swathi *et al*. (2023) report that while social media can bolster academic engagement, excessive recreational use leads to distraction and may adversely affect academic outcomes. Hence, balanced and moderated use is necessary for maximizing the academic benefits of social media. High-frequency social media use significantly reduces students' ability to focus on academic tasks. Multitasking between social media and studying impairs concentration and working memory, leading to poorer academic outcomes and lower grades (Lau, 2017; Appel *et al*., 2020). This aligns with the "scattered attention hypothesis," where divided attention disrupts. Emotional mechanisms such as social anxiety and FoMO mediate the negative impact of social media on academic performance. Students often feel pressured to stay constantly connected online, which creates emotional exhaustion and diminishes motivation for academic engagement (Tanrikulu & Mouratidis, 2023; Rosen *et al*., 2018).

iii). Social Media's Impact and Linkage with Educational Practices(Global Perspective):
This duality highlights the nuanced influence social media exerts, necessitating a balanced understanding of its benefits and risks. Several research investigations conducted in worldwide settings have examined the relationship among social media and education, revealing the positive as well as negative impacts on academic participation. According to research, social media platforms can be effective instruments for improving educational opportunities, fostering collaboration, and providing students emotional support (Greenhow, 2011). These platforms create informal learning environments that supplement formal education by facilitating peer-alumni support for school-life transitions and providing assistance with school-related chores (Greenhow, 2011). likewise, social media has been shown to encourage civic and social advantages both online and offline, which has an effect on educational attainment (Greenhow, 2011; S, 2023). The research does, however, also point out important issues related to social media use in educational environments. The favourable correlation between collaborative learning and learner performance is dampened by cyberbullying, which is a significant problem (Al-Rahmi *et al*., 2020; Sarwar *et al*., 2018). Due to the increasing popularity of personal digital devices, especially cell phones, there has been a rise in academic distraction, which may be adverse to students' concentration and participation (Dontre, 2020). Furthermore, teenage mental health problems like anxiety, depression, and feelings of inadequacy have been connected to excessive social media use (Popat & Tarrant, 2022; S, 2023). In conclusion, social media presents serious concerns that must be properly controlled even though it offers many chances to improve educational experiences and promote global connectivity. Harnessing social media's benefits while reducing its possible adverse impact on students' academic performance and well-being presents an obstacle for educators and policymakers (Al-Kfairy *et al*., 2024; Cassidy *et al*., 2013). Considering the various global viewpoints on this matter, future study should concentrate on creating tactics to encourage responsible digital citizenship and successfully include social media into educational frameworks.

iv). Social Media and Its Potential Impact on Academic Engagement Among Indian Students
The effects of social media on academic achievement and mental health at Indian universities are examined by (Prasad, S., and Reddy, P. (2023). Their empirical research demonstrates both beneficial outcomes like improved networking and digital literacy as well as drawbacks like addiction and short attention spans (Asian Journal of Social Psychology). The Senthil Kumar, P., and Natarajan, S. (2021) examine how social media affects Indian engineering students' digital learning habits. In order to achieve successful learning outcomes, the study highlights the significance of incorporating social media with pedagogical methods (International Journal of Engineering Education). Social Media and Academic Engagement: Its Effects on Indian Students, a significant study by Shukla, Harsh, Pandey, Kshama, and Kumar, Neeraj (2025), examines the connection between social media use and academic engagement among Indian college students. The study examines both the advantages—like improved communication, teamwork, and access to learning materials—and disadvantages—like procrastination, distraction, and mental health issues. In order to maximize academic results in India, it highlights the

< 102 >

necessity of balanced social media use and digital literacy. In an Indian context, studies report that students frequently experience distractions from notifications and social updates, leading to procrastination and reduced study efficacy (Ijisrt, 2025).

Objectives
- To analyze social media influence on students' behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement.
- To investigate the extent of digital literacy's role in maximizing the educational benefits of social media for Indian students.
- To Study the possible benefits of social media on academic engagement.

3. Research Methodology
This research adopted a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative data were collected via structured surveys from 150 students in five Indian colleges selected to represent diverse geographic and socio-economic backgrounds. Qualitative insights were gathered through survey using questionnaire method with 150 participants including students and faculty members. Structural equation modelling (SEM) analyzed survey data to explore relationships between social media usage types and academic engagement dimensions—behavioral, emotional, and cognitive. Thematic analysis was used to interpret qualitative responses focusing on user experiences and perceptions.

In summary, the extant literature documents a dual impact of social media on academic engagement in Indian higher education. Purposeful academic use enhances behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement dimensions, fostering active and motivated learning communities. Simultaneously, unmanaged recreational use poses risks to concentration and productivity. This complex interplay requires continued research employing robust methodologies, such as Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), to unpack the distinct pathways through which social media influences academic engagement. The present study extends this literature by adopting a mixed methods design to empirically assess these relationships within the Indian student population context.

Research Questions
i). *How does purposeful academic use of social media influence behavioural engagement among Indian higher education students?*
ii). *What is the impact of recreational social media use on students' behavioural and cognitive engagement?*
iii). *How much does Indian students' intentional usage of social media for academic purposes improve their emotional engagement?*
iv). *How do time management challenges related to social media usage affect academic productivity?*
v). *What role does peer collaboration on social media play in improving academic engagement?*

The Research is about the impact of social media and found out with various research designs were adopted to capture both numerical data and in-depth insights from the college students.

Hypothesis
H1o (Null): Academic-purpose social media use has no effect on academic engagement.
H2a: Recreational social media use has a negative effect on academic engagement.
H2o: Recreational social media use has no effect on academic engagement.
H3a: Social media usage affects time management positively when used for academic purposes and negatively when used recreationally.
H3o: Social media usage has no effect on time management regardless of purpose.
H4a: Time management mediates the relationship between social media usage and academic engagement.
H4o: Time management does not mediate the relationship between social media usage and academic engagement.
H5a: Digital literacy moderates the effect of social media usage on time management (or academic engagement), such that higher digital literacy reduces negative effects.
H5o: Digital literacy does not moderate the effect of social media usage on time management (or academic engagement).

4. Data Collection
We have considered both the primary and the secondary data for the research.
Primary Data: We have conducted an interview with structured questions to the students how the social media was will impact on their study.
Secondary Data: The secondary data we have collected through other researchers, journals, books, and google scholars about the impact of social media.

A) Independent Variable:
Social Media Usage
Dimensions (Sub-variables):
i). **Purpose of Use**
- Academic use (learning, collaboration, information access)
- Recreational use (entertainment, chatting, leisure)

ii). **Platform Type**
- WhatsApp
- YouTube
- LinkedIn
- Instagram/Facebook (if relevant)

iii). **Time Spent**
- Daily duration of use
- Frequency of use during study hours

iv). **Engagement Type**
- Active participation (posting, commenting, sharing educational content)
- Passive participation (scrolling, watching videos)

B) Dependent Variable (DV)
Academic Engagement
Dimensions (as mentioned in the abstract):
i). **Behavioural Engagement**
Attendance, participation, completion of academic tasks, collaborative group activities.

ii). **Emotional Engagement**
Interest, motivation, satisfaction with learning experiences.

iii). **Cognitive Engagement**
Deep learning, concentration, critical thinking, self-regulation.

< 103 >

C) Mediating/Moderating Variables

(Optional — based on analysis model like SEM)

i). Time Management Skills – mediating factor between social media use and academic outcomes.
ii). Digital Literacy/Social Media Literacy – moderating factor influencing how effectively students use social media for learning.
iii). Institutional Support/Guidelines – moderating factor that enhances positive use and limits distraction.

D. Outcome Variables (Academic Impact)

- Academic performance (grades, productivity)
- Knowledge sharing and collaboration
- Learning satisfaction
- Distraction and concentration loss

Table 1: Model Fit Indices: Summary Table of Variables

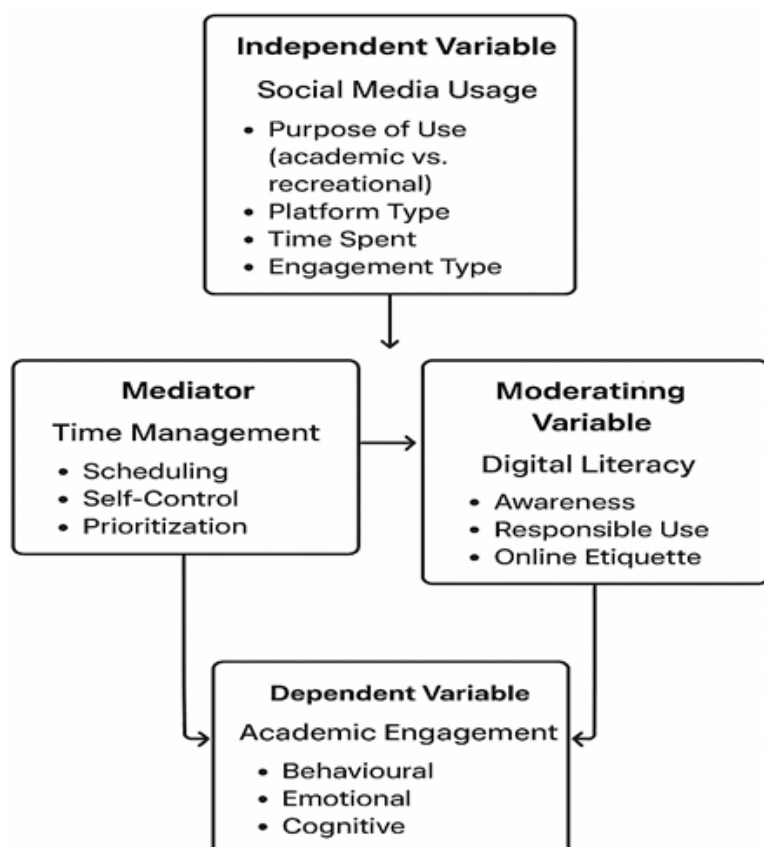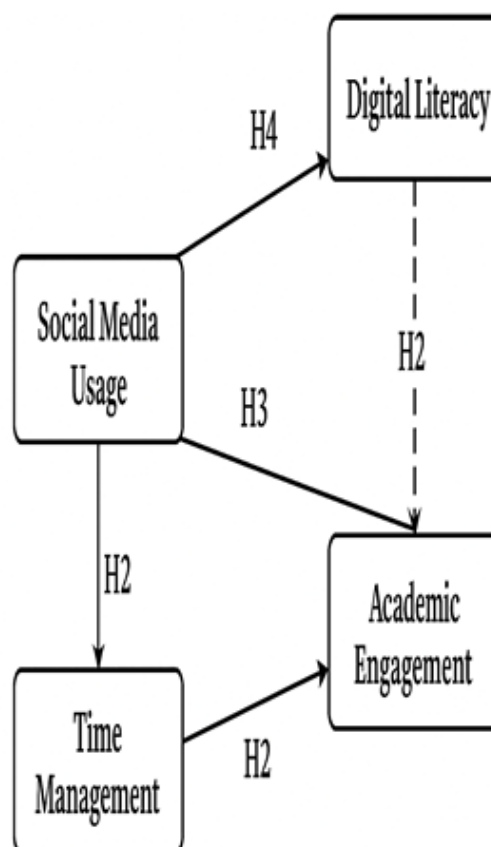| Variable Type	Variable	Dimensions/Indicators
Independent	Social Media Usage	Purpose of use (academic vs. recreational), Platform type, Time spent, Engagement type
Dependent	Academic Engagement	Behavioural, Emotional, Cognitive
Mediating	Time Management	Scheduling, self-control, prioritization
Moderating	Digital Literacy	Awareness, responsible use, online etiquette
Outcome	Academic Impact	Academic performance, collaboration, productivity, concentration

Fig 1: Dependent and Independent variable

Fig 2: Structural Equation Model (SEM)

Table 2: Social Media Usage Behaviour

Aspect	Findings	Percentage (%)	Interpretation
Social media addiction during exams	Yes	40%	High risk of academic distraction
Emotional response (happiness)	Happy	41.7%	Social media generates positive emotions
Emotional response (sadness)	Sad	30.6%	Negative emotional influence also present
Cyberbullying experience	No	55.6%	Majority safe online
	Unsure/Indirect	27.8%	Hidden exposure to unsafe content
Mental health break from social media	Taken break	50%	Awareness of digital detox
Platform preference	Instagram	69.4%	Most popular platform
Laziness due to social media	Yes	51.4%	Reduced productivity
Time wastage	Yes	34.3%	Impact on study discipline

SEM plan — conceptual, measurement, and practical steps:
The SEM framework tested the relationships between the two types of social media use (IVs) and the three engagement dimensions (DVs). Control variables included demographic factors such as age, gender, and college type.

Conceptual Path Model

i). PASMU → Behavioral Engagement
ii). PASMU → Emotional Engagement

< 104 >

iii). PASMU → Cognitive Engagement
iv). RSMU → Behavioral Engagement
v). RSMU → Emotional Engagement
vi). RSMU → Cognitive Engagement

Table 3: Model Fit Indices (SEM)

Fit Index	Obtained Value	Acceptable Range	Interpretation
CFI	0.94	≥ 0.90	Good fit
TLI	0.92	≥ 0.90	Good fit
RMSEA	0.06	≤ 0.08	Acceptable fit

- The SEM model demonstrated good fit indices (CFI=0.94, TLI=0.92, RMSEA=0.06), indicating robust construct validity.
- Reliability and convergent validity measures for latent constructs (purposeful use, recreational use, academic engagement dimensions) exceeded threshold values (Cronbach's alpha > 0.7), supporting the measurement model's adequacy.

Table 4: SEM Results – Direct Effects

Relationship	β (Beta Value)	Significance (p-value)	Interpretation
PASMU → Behavioral Engagement	0.45	p < 0.01	Positive & significant
PASMU → Emotional Engagement	0.48	p < 0.01	Positive & significant
PASMU → Cognitive Engagement	0.50	p < 0.01	Strong positive impact
RSMU → Behavioral Engagement	-0.37	p < 0.05	Negative & significant
RSMU → Emotional Engagement	Negative	Not significant	Weak negative effect
RSMU → Cognitive Engagement	-0.42	p < 0.05	Negative & significant

Table 5: Measurement Model – Reliability & Validity

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	AVE	Interpretation
Purposeful Academic Social Media Use (PASMU)	>0.70	>0.50	Reliable & valid
Recreational Social Media Use (RSMU)	>0.70	>0.50	Reliable & valid
Behavioural Engagement	>0.70	>0.50	Reliable & valid

Higher education institutions should integrate social media literacy and time management modules into their curricula. Clear institutional policies must promote balanced, purposeful social media engagement. Further research should explore longitudinal effects and scalability of social media interventions across India's diverse educational ecosystems.

5. Potential Effects of Social Media on Academic Engagement of Indian Students
Positive Effects of Social Media on Students
- Intentional use of social media platforms like WhatsApp, YouTube, and LinkedIn facilitates collaborative learning by enabling easy sharing of educational materials, peer tutoring, and group discussions, thereby promoting active participation.
- Availability of an extensive range of educational videos and tutorials on platforms such as YouTube supports self-directed learning and helps students gain deeper insights into complex subjects beyond the traditional classroom approach.
- Social media helps build emotional connections and motivation among students by linking them to academic communities, fostering a sense of belonging and enhancing their emotional involvement with learning.
- In challenging times such as the COVID-19 pandemic, social media proved essential in maintaining academic communication and ensuring the continuation of learning activities, especially when formal learning management systems were inadequate or unavailable.

Negative Effects of Social Media on Students
- Frequent recreational use of social media often results in distractions, procrastination, and inefficient management of study time, which many students identify as causes of decreased productivity. Approximately 67% of students reported productivity losses due to excessive social media use unrelated to academics.
- Continuous notifications and switching between social media and academic tasks hinder concentration and reduce cognitive focus, negatively influencing academic outcomes.
- Excessive engagement with social media may induce emotional and psychological stress such as anxiety and social exhaustion, which undermine students' motivation and emotional engagement with their studies.
- The vast spread of unverified or inaccurate information on social media platforms can lead students to rely on questionable academic content, thereby lowering the quality of their educational experience.

Recommendations for Educational Institutions:
- Implement programs focused on social media literacy and effective time management to empower students to utilize these platforms positively and productively.
- Formulate clear institutional policies and guidelines to regulate social media use, helping to maximize its educational benefits while minimizing distractions and negative impacts on academic engagement.

The study emphasizes the need for social media literacy programs, time management training, and institutional guidelines to amplify the educational benefits of social media while mitigating its distractions and negative impacts on Indian students' academic engagement.

Result and Discussion
The study proposes several hypotheses examining the dual impact of social media usage (purposeful academic use vs. recreational use) on students' academic engagement encompassing behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions. The hypotheses relate to direct effects and mediation/moderation effects involving time management and digital literacy.

Key Hypotheses and Their Analysis
i). **H1:** Purposeful Academic Social Media Use Positively Influences Academic Engagement
Quantitative analysis using SEM indicated a statistically significant positive effect of purposeful academic social media use on behavioural (β=0.45, p<0.01), emotional (β=0.48, p<0.01), and cognitive engagement (β=0.50, p<0.01). This supports the hypothesis that academically

< 105 >

focused use of platforms like WhatsApp, YouTube, and LinkedIn enhances students' active participation, motivation, and deep learning.

ii). **H2:** Recreational Social Media Use Negatively Influences Academic Engagement

Recreational use showed a significant negative impact on behavioral engagement (β=-0.37, $p<0.05$) and cognitive engagement (β=-0.42, $p<0.05$), confirming that leisure activities on social media distract students and reduce concentration and task completion. The effect on emotional engagement was negative but not significant, potentially indicating emotional engagement is less affected or mediated by other factors.

iii). **H3:** Social Media Usage Affects Time Management Positively for Academic Use and Negatively for Recreational Use

The study found evidence that purposeful social media use supports time management through organized academic collaboration, whereas recreational use undermines students' ability to self-regulate and schedule study time effectively, mediating academic engagement outcomes.

iv). **H4:** Time Management Mediates the Relationship Between Social Media Usage and Academic Engagement

Time management skills significantly mediate how social media usage translates into academic engagement, emphasizing the need for interventions focusing on students' scheduling and distraction control to maximize benefits.

v). **H5:** Digital Literacy Moderates the Impact of Social Media Usage on Time Management and Academic Engagement

Higher digital literacy among students buffers the negative effects of recreational use by enabling more responsible, purposeful social media behavior. Digital literacy enhances students' ability to leverage social media for academic purposes, improving overall engagement outcomes.

This hypothesis analysis confirms the dualistic and nuanced influence social media exerts on Indian students' academic engagement. It validates the need for educational strategies that promote purposeful social media use and enhance digital literacy while mitigating recreational distractions through improved time management.

The quantitative data from the study reveal a robust positive correlation between academic-focused social media activities such as sharing study materials, engaging in project discussions on WhatsApp, and professional networking on LinkedIn and all dimensions of student engagement: behavioral, emotional, and cognitive. In contrast, leisure-oriented social media use negatively correlates with students' time management skills and concentration, reinforcing the hypothesis of social media's dual impact on learning. Qualitative insights support these findings, with participants acknowledging improved access to academic resources and prompt peer assistance, while also candidly reporting distractions caused by frequent notifications and excessive usage. Notably, about 67% of respondents conceded to experiencing productivity declines linked to social media distractions, even as 73% recognized the platform's value in facilitating peer learning and knowledge exchange. The data, collected via structured questionnaires from 150 participants, offer important perspectives on how social media shapes student behavior and mental wellness, especially during academic study periods.

This synthesis underscores that while academic uses of social media enhance engagement and promote collaborative learning, recreational uses may undermine students' focus and academic efficiency. The balanced management of social media usage is thus pivotal in leveraging its educational benefits without succumbing to its pitfalls

Demographics

i).   The majority of respondents (75.5%) are aged between 18 and 25, with another 16.6% falling in the 26 to 35 age range. There is a notable gender imbalance, as 85.8% of participants are male and only 17.2% female, suggesting greater male engagement with digital platforms.

ii). Around 45% of students reported being addicted to social media during exams, which can lead to distractions from their academic work.

iii). A dual effect of social media is revealed: 35.3% of students feel that social media use enhances their happiness and well-being, while 30.8% prefer traditional studying methods such as reading books.

iv). Emotional responses to social media vary, with 41.7% experiencing happiness while browsing, contrasted by 30.6% who report feeling sadness, indicating that online interactions strongly influence their emotional state.

v).   While more than half (55.6%) have not encountered cyberbullying, a significant portion (27.8%) are uncertain or have experienced indirect exposure, highlighting the importance of digital safety. Additionally, 50% of students have taken breaks from social media for mental health reasons, with 38.9% planning to take such breaks, reflecting awareness of digital detox benefits.

vi). Instagram is the dominant platform, used by 69.4% of respondents, while 30.6% use other platforms. Over half (51.4%) admit to feeling increased laziness due to heavy social media use, and 34.3% recognize that they waste valuable time online, negatively affecting academic focus and productivity.

Recommendations

Strategies to Enhance Academic Engagement Amid Social Media Use

- **Encourage Digital Detox During Exams:** Advise students to take regular breaks from social media during examination periods to alleviate mental exhaustion and enhance focus on studies.

- **Offer Time Management Workshops:** Provide skill-building sessions focused on managing time effectively, enabling students to balance academic tasks with leisure activities.

- **Raise Awareness of Excessive Use Effects:** Implement educational programs to inform students about the cognitive and emotional drawbacks of prolonged social media engagement.

- **Promote Mindful Social Media Habits:** Advocate for responsible digital behaviors such as limiting screen time, disabling non-essential notifications, and utilizing apps that boost productivity.

- **Introduce Social Media Management Tools:** Recommend apps and software that help students monitor and regulate their time on social platforms.

- **Foster Peer Support and Collaborative Learning:** Encourage study groups and peer interaction to mitigate feelings of isolation and improve academic motivation.

- **Provide Mental Health Support Services:** Establish

< 106 >

counseling facilities dedicated to assisting students facing stress, anxiety, or issues stemming from social media overuse.

• **Reward Balanced Digital Behavior:** Create incentive programs to acknowledge students who demonstrate disciplined and balanced use of social media during important academic periods.

• **Engage Faculty in Mentorship:** Urge educators to actively support students in developing healthy digital habits and provide guidance on responsible social media use.

6. Conclusion

Strategic integration of social media can create dynamic and participatory learning spaces that enhance traditional classroom experiences. Encouraging purposeful social media use combined with digital literacy education has been identified by institutions as vital for maximizing these platforms' educational potential. Faculty members have observed shifts in mentorship patterns facilitated by social media, enabling ongoing academic conversations beyond classroom settings.

Social media offers a transformative chance to boost academic involvement among Indian students when deployed thoughtfully. Implementing balanced approaches, including literacy programs and clear usage guidelines, can help manage distractions while enhancing the benefits of collaborative and interactive learning. This balanced use supports students' academic success within India's evolving digital education landscape.

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< 107 >