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THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON INSTITUTE STUDENTS

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Abstract
This article reviews recent research on how social media affects students of higher education institutes. Drawing on survey studies from several countries and on systematic reviews of mental health and sleep, it weighs the academic benefits of social media, including its use in foreign language learning, against its risks. The evidence suggests that the outcome depends mainly on how, and for how long, students use these platforms. Purposeful and moderate use supports collaboration, vocabulary and speaking practice, while heavy, entertainment-driven use is linked to distraction, weaker academic results, poorer sleep and higher anxiety and depression. The article ends with practical recommendations for students and institutes.

Keywords. social media, institute students, academic performance, foreign language learning, distraction, student engagement, mental health, sleep quality, time management, digital literacy.

Introduction

Social media has become part of everyday student life. Students use it to chat with friends, follow news, share lecture notes and look for jobs, often for several hours a day. This raises a practical question for every institute: does social media help students learn, or does it get in the way?

Research gives a mixed answer. Some studies link social media to higher engagement and better results, while others link it to distraction, lower grades and poor well-being. The aim of this article is to summarize what recent studies report about both sides and to suggest how students and institutes can reduce the harm while keeping the benefits. The article is a literature review supplemented by the author's informal observations as a student of Shahrisabz State Pedagogical Institute. It does not present survey data; it relies on the published studies listed in the References.

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Main part

The literature reviewed below is grouped into four themes: the academic benefits of social media, its role in foreign language learning, its risks for studies and well-being, and observations from the author's own institute. Practical recommendations follow.

1. Benefits of social media for students

The main benefit is collaboration and access to information. Platforms let students share materials, discuss assignments and reach teachers and classmates outside the classroom. A study of 70 students at Makerere University found that heavier social media use went together with higher student engagement, and that engagement was in turn related to academic performance [1].

The purpose of use also matters. A study of 202 university students in Pakistan reported that using social media for academic activities had a significantly positive effect on cumulative grade point average [2]. A systematic review of 52 studies adds that moderate use supports social connectedness, peer cooperation and access to mental health information [3]. Social media therefore works best as a tool for study and communication, not as a replacement for them.

2. Social media and foreign language learning

For students of foreign languages, social media offers something that a limited number of classroom hours cannot: regular, authentic contact with the language. A mixed-methods study at a Sudanese university found that 87% of third-level EFL students used social media daily for language learning, with the largest self-reported gains in vocabulary (82%), listening (76%) and speaking fluency (69%) [4]. A survey of 356 adult EFL learners in Saudi Arabia showed that Instagram and Twitter were the platforms most used for vocabulary learning, and that 61% of the learners had set their accounts to English [5].

Short videos also give learners a reason to speak. In a study with 28 participants, Instagram vlogs in a basic-level speaking class improved pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary and general use of the language, and learners reported more confidence and motivation [6]. A review of empirical studies concluded that social media can raise learners' willingness to communicate in the foreign language by increasing self-confidence and motivation and reducing anxiety [7]. These studies mostly measure perceptions and are small, so they show promise rather than proof.

3. Risks for studies and well-being

Distraction and lower results. In a survey of 71 students at Walter Sisulu University in South Africa, 84.5% spent more than four hours a day on social media and 39.4% agreed that it harmed their assignment completion; the authors concluded that it acts mostly as a distraction, especially for first-year students [8]. A study of 122 students in Sargodha, Pakistan, found a statistically significant link between social media use and weaker concentration and achievement [9]. A South African survey of 100 undergraduates also reported a negative effect on academic performance [10].

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Sleep. A study of 727 students in Saudi Arabia found that social media addiction was linked to depressive symptoms and that insomnia partly explained this link [11]. Research among Somali university students points the same way: poorer sleep quality helped explain how social media addiction related to lower academic engagement, while fatigue did not [12].

Mental health. A systematic review of 182 studies, with meta-analyses of 98 of them, found small but significant positive associations between social media use and both depression and anxiety, and positive associations between problematic use and depression, anxiety and sleep problems [13]. A review focused on college students links problematic use to social comparison and fear of missing out [14].

A caution. Most of these studies are cross-sectional surveys with small samples, so they show association, not proof of cause. Heterogeneity across studies is high [13], and the Makerere result above runs in the opposite direction [1]. Students with sleep or mood problems may also use social media more, not only the other way round.

Table 1 summarises the empirical studies discussed above.

Table 1. Empirical studies on social media and students

Source	Country	Sample	Main finding
[1]	Uganda	70 students	Heavier use went with higher engagement
[2]	Pakistan	202 students	Academic use raised cumulative GPA
[4]	Sudan	EFL students	87% used it daily; self-reported gains in vocabulary, listening and speaking
[5]	Saudi Arabia	356 EFL learners	Instagram and Twitter most used for vocabulary; 61% used English account settings
[6]	Indonesia	28 learners	Instagram vlogs improved speaking; more confidence and motivation
[8]	South Africa	71 students	39.4% said it harmed assignment completion
[9]	Pakistan	122 students	Heavier use linked to weaker concentration and achievement
[10]	South Africa	100 undergraduates	Negative effect on academic performance
[11]	Saudi Arabia	727 students	Addiction linked to depressive symptoms; insomnia partly explained the link
[12]	Somalia	566 students	Poorer sleep quality linked addiction to lower academic engagement

4. Observations at the institute

At Shahrisabz State Pedagogical Institute, as in the studies reviewed, social media is part of daily student life. In the author's experience as a second-year student of Foreign Language and Literature, many students feel that these tools make their studies and everyday tasks easier.

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This is an informal observation, not a measured result, but it is consistent with the benefits of academic use reported in the literature [2], [4]. The same students are also exposed to the risks of distraction and lack of sleep described above. A survey of students would be a useful next step to measure how widespread each pattern is.

5. Recommendations

For students. Set a daily time limit and track it with the phone's built-in screen-time tool. Turn off notifications during lectures and study blocks, and keep the phone out of reach at night to protect sleep. Use platforms for study groups, course news and, for language students, for content and practice in the target language, and keep entertainment for breaks.

For institutes. Teach time management and digital literacy in the first semester, when first-year students are most exposed [8]. Use social media in teaching on purpose, for example class groups, shared project work and structured speaking or vocabulary tasks [6]. Include sleep and screen habits in student well-being programmes, and offer counselling for students who show signs of problematic use, anxiety or depression.

Conclusion

Social media is neither simply good nor simply bad for institute students. The studies reviewed show that purposeful and moderate use can support engagement, collaboration and language practice, while long, entertainment-driven use is associated with distraction, lower academic results, poorer sleep and worse mental health. Because most evidence comes from small surveys, future research should use larger samples and follow students over time, including students in Uzbekistan. In practice, the goal for students and institutes alike is balanced, purposeful use.

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