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Social Media Engagement and Academic Performance among Generation Z in Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract

The rapid growth of digital technology and social media has greatly influenced the daily lives and learning habits of young people. Generation Z, usually defined as those born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, is often described as the first generation to grow up completely surrounded by digital technologies. For them, social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, and Twitter are not just tools for entertainment but also important spaces for communication, information sharing, and learning. Through these platforms, students can easily access study materials, interact with friends and classmates, and take part in online discussions. At the same time, however, social media can also become a source of distraction that may interfere with students' focus on their studies.

This study explores how social media engagement influences the academic performance of Generation Z students in Himachal Pradesh. To understand this relationship, a quantitative research approach was used, and data were collected through a structured questionnaire from 100 students studying in various colleges and universities across the state. The results show that social media plays both a helpful and a challenging role in students' academic lives. On the one hand, it supports learning by providing easy access to educational resources and encouraging communication and peer learning. On the other hand, spending too much time on social networking sites can reduce study time, disturb concentration, and affect academic performance.

Overall, the study suggests that social media itself is not necessarily harmful. Its impact largely depends on how students manage and balance their online activities with their academic responsibilities. When used responsibly, social media can become a useful tool that supports learning and academic growth.

Keywords: Social Media, Generation Z, Academic Performance, Digital Culture, Students, Sociology, Himachal Pradesh.

Introduction

The contemporary world has undergone profound transformations due to the rapid advancement of digital technology and the widespread expansion of the internet. Over the past two decades, technological innovations have changed not only the way people communicate but also how they access information, build relationships, and participate in social and educational activities (Kohnová & Papula, 2020). One of the most significant outcomes of this digital transformation is the emergence of social media as a dominant medium of communication and interaction. Social media platforms have reshaped the structure of modern society by providing individuals with instant connectivity, easy access to information, and new forms of social engagement (Asare-Donkoh, 2018; El-Badawy & Hashem, 2015). These platforms enable users to share ideas, exchange knowledge, and maintain social networks beyond geographical boundaries. Among different social groups, young people—particularly those belonging to Generation Z—have been the most influenced by these technological developments (G & Sushmitha, 2025; Verma, 2025).

Generation Z generally refers to individuals born during the late 1990s and early 2000s who have grown up in an environment characterized by advanced digital technologies (G & Sushmitha, 2025; Verma, 2025). Unlike previous generations, who witnessed the gradual development of digital tools, Generation Z has been exposed to smartphones, high-speed internet, and social networking platforms from a very early age. Because of this early exposure, digital technology has become deeply integrated into their everyday lives. For many members of this generation, the use of digital devices and social media is not simply an option but a routine part of daily activities. Social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, and Snapchat have become central spaces where young people communicate with friends and family, share personal experiences, consume entertainment, and gather information (Asare-Donkoh, 2018; El-Badawy & Hashem, 2015; Verma, 2025).

The widespread use of social media has also significantly influenced the field of education. In recent years, these platforms have increasingly been recognized as valuable tools that can support learning and academic engagement (Kohnová & Papula, 2020; Thanji & Vasantha, 2018). Students today often rely on online platforms to access educational videos, attend virtual lectures, participate in academic discussion forums, and share study materials with classmates (Kohnová & Papula, 2020; Mansour, 2019). Educational channels and digital learning tools provide tutorials, recorded lectures, and explanatory materials that help students understand complex academic concepts and can enhance their motivation (Kohnová & Papula, 2020; Mansour, 2019; Thanji & Vasantha, 2018). Similarly, social media and messaging applications allow students to create study groups where they can exchange notes, discuss assignments, and collaborate on academic tasks (Asare-Donkoh, 2018; Kohnová & Papula, 2020). Digital libraries, online journals, and educational applications have further expanded students' access to knowledge, allowing them to learn beyond the traditional boundaries of classrooms and textbooks (Mansour, 2019; Thanji & Vasantha, 2018).

The integration of digital technologies into education has created new possibilities for flexible and interactive learning. Students can now learn at their own pace, explore a variety of learning resources, and connect with peers and educators across different locations (Kohnová & Papula, 2020; Thanji & Vasantha, 2018). These opportunities are particularly important for students living in geographically challenging regions, where access to educational resources may otherwise be limited. In this sense, social media and digital platforms have the potential to enhance educational opportunities and improve academic engagement (G & Sushmitha, 2025; Verma, 2025).

However, despite these advantages, the growing presence of social media in students' daily lives has also raised concerns among educators, parents, and researchers. Many scholars argue that excessive engagement with social networking platforms can negatively affect students' academic performance and mental health (Arora et al., 2025; G & Sushmitha, 2025; Verma, 2025). Students often spend a considerable amount of time browsing social media feeds, watching entertainment videos, or engaging in online conversations. While these activities may provide relaxation and social interaction, they can also reduce the time available for academic study and preparation (Asare-Donkoh, 2018; G & Sushmitha, 2025). Moreover, frequent notifications and constant digital stimulation may disrupt students' concentration and reduce their ability to focus on academic tasks for extended periods (Arora et al., 2025; Holly et al., 2023).

Another concern relates to the potential psychological and social effects of social media usage. Continuous exposure to online content may create pressure among students to maintain an active digital presence or to compare themselves with others (Hartney, 2022; Holly et al., 2023). The desire for online recognition, such as likes, comments, and followers, may influence students' behavior and priorities, sometimes amplifying peer pressure and social comparison (Arora et al., 2025; Hartney, 2022). As a result, students may devote significant attention to their online identities rather than their academic responsibilities (Arora et al., 2025; Verma, 2025). These patterns highlight that social media is not only a technological tool but also a powerful social environment that shapes attitudes, relationships, and cultural practices (El-Badawy & Hashem, 2015; Holly et al., 2023).

From a sociological perspective, social media platforms function as virtual social spaces where individuals interact, exchange ideas, and construct social identities. Young people use these platforms to express themselves, build friendships, and participate in communities that share similar interests (Asare-Donkoh, 2018; El-Badawy & Hashem, 2015). At the same time, these digital interactions can influence their perceptions, aspirations, and motivations. Peer influence and social comparison within online networks may indirectly shape students' academic behavior, study habits, and levels of motivation (Arora et al., 2025; Hartney, 2022; Holly et al., 2023; Park et al., 2023).

In the context of Himachal Pradesh, these issues are particularly relevant. Himachal Pradesh, a mountainous state in northern India, has experienced significant digital expansion in recent years, similar to broader trends in digitalisation and youth engagement with technology reported in other regions (G & Sushmitha, 2025; Verma, 2025). Improvements in internet connectivity, the increasing availability of smartphones, and various government initiatives aimed at promoting digital education have expanded access to online platforms across the state, opening new possibilities for social media use in education (Mansour, 2019; Thanji & Vasantha, 2018). As a result, students in both urban and rural areas are increasingly using social media and digital technologies for communication, information gathering, and academic purposes (G & Sushmitha, 2025; Verma, 2025).

Despite these developments, there has been relatively limited research focusing specifically on the sociological impact of social media on students in Himachal Pradesh. Most existing studies have concentrated on urban populations or broader national and international contexts (Asare-Donkoh, 2018; El-Badawy & Hashem, 2015; Thanji & Vasantha, 2018). Therefore, examining the relationship between social media engagement and academic performance within this regional context becomes particularly important.

The present study aims to explore the relationship between social media engagement and academic performance among Generation Z students in Himachal Pradesh. By

analyzing patterns of social media usage, the amount of time students spend on these platforms, and the purposes for which they are used, the research seeks to understand how digital engagement influences students' academic lives (G & Sushmitha, 2025; Verma, 2025). In doing so, the study attempts to identify both the opportunities and challenges associated with social media in the educational context. The findings may contribute to a better understanding of how digital technologies shape the learning experiences of young people and may help educators, policymakers, and parents develop strategies that encourage responsible and productive use of social media among students (Arora et al., 2025; Holly et al., 2023; Park et al., 2023).

Review of Literature

The digital world has reshaped how young people learn and connect, especially for Generation Z—those born between 1997 and 2012, who grew up with smartphones as constant companions. Scholars from sociology, psychology, and education have delved into how platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube both empower and challenge students' academic journeys. This review weaves together key insights, highlighting the dual-edged sword of social media: its power to spark collaboration and access, alongside risks like distraction and mental strain. By drawing on global and regional studies, we uncover patterns that feel all too real in everyday student life, while spotting gaps for future exploration, particularly in places like Himachal Pradesh where digital divides meet mountain cultures.

At its best, social media feels like a lively classroom extension, making education more interactive and inclusive. Holly et al. (2022) paint a vivid picture of teens navigating blended online-offline worlds, where digital tools open doors to endless info and global chats. This isn't just theory—it's the kid scrolling for a quick science explainer or joining a study group on Discord. Mansour (2019) echoes this, showing how multimedia apps and discussion forums ramp up motivation, turning passive learners into active participants who grasp concepts through videos and shared notes. Thanji et al. (2018) add that e-learning's flexibility lets students pace themselves, a game-changer for diverse needs, though they gently remind us it can't fully replace the buzz of in-person talks. In Europe, Kohnová and Papula (2020) surveyed 877 Slovak high schoolers—future-focused Gen Z—and found guys leaning on YouTube for facts, while gals favored Instagram's visual vibes for group learning. Their takeaway? These platforms shine for collaborative projects, especially post-COVID, urging schools to weave in fun tutorials that stick long after graduation. Closer to home, G and Sushmitha (2025) spotlight hyper-connected India's Gen Z, where AI tutors and borderless teamwork redefine success beyond grades. They argue digital literacy isn't a perk—it's essential for self-directed study, like picking resources or scheduling cram sessions. Even in Ghana, Asare-Donkoh (2018) discovered social media's upsides in rural-urban schools, from Kumasi's bustling cafes to Assin South's quiet villages, where it fuels info-sharing amid booming mobile data (over 20 million subscribers then). El-Badawy and Hashem (2015) back this with questionnaire data showing no direct hit to smarts from moderate use—in fact, it can sharpen intellectual growth if kept in check.

But let's be real: the scroll can suck you in, turning study time into meme marathons. Excessive use often chips away at focus and sleep, as Park et al. (2023) reveal in their scoping review of digital mental health tools for Gen Z. With screen time soaring, apps and VR mindfulness offer hope for anxiety relief, but spiritual apps lag, and access gaps hit low-income kids hardest. Arora et al. (2025), reviewing 22 studies from Bengaluru, link passive scrolling on Instagram to rising depression and body woes, though active chats build support networks. They stress nuances—like how boys and girls experience peer pressure differently—and call for awareness drives to curb

addiction's grip. Verma's (2025) hefty Indian thesis dives deeper, blending surveys on everything from cyberbullying's sting to FOMO's quiet creep, pushing for ethical guidelines that celebrate connections without the burnout. Globally, sociological lenses show social media as a virtual hangout fostering communities and activism, yet breeding comparison traps that dent self-esteem (Frison & Eggermont, 2016; Twenge et al., 2017). In Ghana again, Asare-Donkoh notes distractions pulling kids from books, while urban-rural divides amplify inequities—think spotty internet in Saboba versus Kumasi's high-speed hubs. Hartney (2022) ties it to broader maturity quests, where digital gateways promise happiness but demand discipline. Studies like Junco (2012) and Liu et al. (2016) split hairs: chatting mid-study tanks grades, but targeted sharing boosts engagement. Turkle (2011) humanizes it—teens explore identities safely online, yet risk empathy dips from screen-only bonds.

Most research clusters in cities or broad datasets, overlooking rural nuances like Himachal Pradesh's blend of tech adoption and traditional values. Here, Gen Z juggles snowy treks with TikTok trends, where spotty signals heighten divides. While positives like collaborative learning dominate hopeful narratives, negatives—mental health dips, distraction—loom large without tailored fixes. Future work should zoom in on regions like this, blending empirical data (beyond self-reports) with inclusive tools, ensuring social media lifts all learners, not just the plugged-in few. This tapestry of studies reminds us: social media isn't villain or hero—it's a tool we shape. By fostering balance, from parental nudges to policy tweaks, we can help Gen Z thrive in their wired world.

Objectives of the Study

The present research aims to achieve the following objectives:

To investigate patterns of social media usage among Generation Z students in Himachal Pradesh and its association with academic performance, study habits, learning behavior, time management, and concentration.

To identify positive and negative impacts of social media on students' academic outcomes and propose strategies for responsible usage to enhance educational well-being.

Research Methodology

Research Design: The study adopts a quantitative research design to examine the relationship between social media engagement and academic performance. A cross-sectional approach was used to collect data at a single point in time.

Study Area: The research was conducted in Himachal Pradesh, a state that has experienced rapid digital expansion and increasing internet accessibility. Educational institutions across the state have gradually adopted digital learning practices, making it an appropriate setting for studying social media usage among students.

Sampling: A total of 100 Generation Z students were selected as respondents. These students were enrolled in undergraduate and postgraduate programs in various colleges and universities in Himachal Pradesh.

A simple random sampling method was employed to ensure that students from different academic backgrounds and disciplines were included in the study.

Data Collection: Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire consisting of multiple-choice and close-ended questions. The questionnaire focused on the following aspects:

- Frequency of social media usage
- Types of social media platforms used
- Daily time spent on social media

- Purpose of using social media
- Perceived impact of social media on academic performance

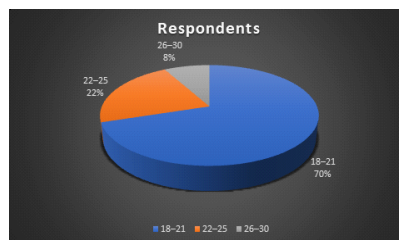
Variables

Independent Variable: Social Media Engagement

Dependent Variable: Academic Performance

Data Analysis and Interpretation

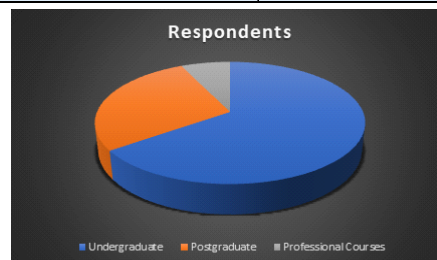
Age Group	Respondents
18–21	70
22–25	22
26–30	8



The majority of respondents belong to the **18–21 age group**, indicating that undergraduate students form the largest proportion of Generation Z participants in the study.

Table 2: Educational Qualification

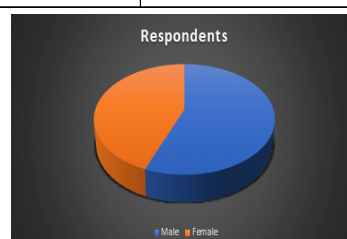
Qualification	Respondents
Undergraduate	65
Postgraduate	28
Professional Courses	7



The findings show that undergraduate students constitute the majority of respondents, highlighting the relevance of social media engagement among students at this stage of education.

Table 3: Gender Distribution

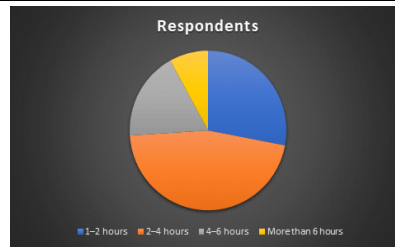
Gender	Respondents
Male	56
Female	44



The sample includes both male and female students, ensuring gender representation in the study.

Table 4: Time Spent on Social Media Per Day

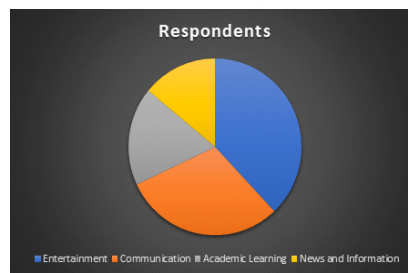
Hours	Respondents
1–2 hours	28
2–4 hours	46
4–6 hours	18
More than 6 hours	8



The data indicate that a significant proportion of students spend **two to four hours daily** on social media platforms.

Table 5: Purpose of Using Social Media

Purpose	Respondents
Entertainment	38
Communication	30
Academic Learning	18
News and Information	14



Entertainment and communication are the primary motivations for social media use among students.

Findings

The findings of the study reveal several important patterns regarding social media usage among Generation Z students.

First, social media has become a routine part of students’ daily lives. Most respondents reported spending several hours each day on various social networking platforms.

Second, while students primarily use social media for entertainment and communication, a notable proportion also utilize it for educational purposes such as accessing study materials, watching tutorial videos, and participating in academic discussions.

Third, moderate use of social media appears to support academic learning by providing access to information and facilitating peer interaction. Students can easily share notes, discuss assignments, and collaborate on academic tasks through digital platforms.

Fourth, excessive use of social media can negatively influence academic performance. Students who spend long hours on social networking sites often experience reduced

study time and difficulty maintaining concentration.

Fifth, the study highlights the importance of time management and self-discipline. Students who effectively manage their social media usage are better able to balance online activities with academic responsibilities.

Discussion

From a sociological perspective, social media functions as a powerful social institution that shapes patterns of communication, interaction, and cultural exchange. For Generation Z students, social media platforms serve not only as communication tools but also as spaces where identities are constructed and social relationships are maintained. The findings of the present study suggest that social media has both empowering and challenging effects on students' academic lives. On one hand, digital platforms enable students to access educational resources and connect with peers across geographical boundaries. This promotes collaborative learning and knowledge sharing.

On the other hand, the addictive nature of social media and the constant flow of digital content may create distractions that interfere with academic tasks. Students often feel compelled to check notifications, respond to messages, or browse online content even while studying. The influence of peer networks also plays a significant role. Students may experience social pressure to remain active on social media platforms in order to maintain social connections and online visibility. This may lead to increased time spent online at the expense of academic activities.

Therefore, addressing the challenges associated with social media usage requires a balanced approach that recognizes both its benefits and its potential risks.

Conclusion

The study examined the relationship between social media engagement and academic performance among Generation Z students in Himachal Pradesh. The findings indicate that social media plays a complex and multifaceted role in students' academic lives.

While social media provides access to educational resources and promotes communication and collaboration, excessive usage may negatively affect academic performance by reducing study time and concentration. The impact of social media depends largely on how students manage their online activities and balance them with academic responsibilities. The study emphasizes the need for promoting digital literacy and responsible social media usage among students. Educational institutions should encourage the integration of social media as a learning tool while also guiding students on how to avoid digital distractions. Parents, teachers, and policymakers must work together to create awareness about the responsible use of digital technologies. By adopting effective time-management strategies and utilizing social media for academic purposes, students can benefit from digital platforms without compromising their educational achievements.

In conclusion, social media is an integral part of modern student life. When used responsibly and purposefully, it can serve as a valuable resource for enhancing learning and academic success.

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