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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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BEYOND SCREENS: INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON ACADEMICS AND PERSONAL LIVES OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS (UG) OF TRIBAL POCKETS OF ODISHA

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the perceptions of the Under Graduate (UG) students on social media and its impact on their academic performance, personal development, career growth and even life itself. In the digital era, social media platforms have transformed communication, learning, and information access. While often criticized for distraction and mental health concerns, social media also offers significant educational opportunities including collaborative learning, resource sharing and professional networking. This research adopts a descriptive survey method involving 60 undergraduate students. Findings of the study reveal that students perceive social media as a dual-purpose tool for both beneficial and challenging. Constructive usage enhances knowledge, communication skills and career awareness, whereas excessive use may adversely affect the academic focus of the students. The study also highlights the importance of digital literacy and responsible usage strategies to maximize benefits while minimizing risks.

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INTRODUCTION

The early 2000s marked the rise of social media as a transformative force in digital communication, with platforms such as MySpace (2003) and Facebook (2004) ushering in new modes of interaction. Soon after, Twitter (now X), Instagram and WhatsApp expanded the landscape, reshaping how individuals connect, share information, and access content. For undergraduate (UG) students, social media quickly became embedded in both academic and personal spheres facilitating peer networking, collaborative learning, and access to educational resources, while simultaneously influencing social interactions and campus engagement. The proliferation of smart phones and affordable mobile internet further accelerated this trend, particularly in India. The launch of Reliance Jio in 2016 democratized digital access, bringing millions online and fueling the rapid growth of platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. Alongside these global platforms, regional applications like Share Chat, Moj, Koo, and Roposo have catered to diverse linguistic and cultural audiences, underscoring the localized nature of India's digital ecosystem. In rural and tribal districts such as Koraput, Odisha, the increasing penetration of smart phones and social media presents both opportunities and challenges. While these platforms have the potential to bridge educational gaps and promote digital inclusion, students also face significant hurdles ranging from misinformation, and social

distraction and time management issues to mental health concerns, comparison pressures. Understanding students' perceptions of social media's influence on their academic careers and personal lives is therefore critical. Such insights can inform educators, policymakers, and curriculum designers in crafting strategies that encourage healthy usage, mitigate risks, and leverage social media as a tool for learning and empowerment. Social media's evolution must also be understood within the broader trajectory of digital globalization. By collapsing geographical boundaries, platforms have enabled unprecedented flows of information, ideas, and cultural exchange. For students, this has meant exposure to diverse perspectives, global academic communities, and opportunities for cross-border collaboration. At the same time, the ubiquity of social media has blurred the lines between formal and informal learning, with knowledge increasingly accessed through interactive, peer-driven networks rather than traditional classroom hierarchies. Equally important is the socio-economic dimension of social media adoption. In contexts such as India, where disparities in infrastructure and educational access remain pronounced, digital platforms have emerged as both equalizers and disruptors. They provide marginalized students with entry points into knowledge economies, yet they also risk reinforcing inequalities when digital literacy, device ownership, or language barriers limit participation. The rise of regional platforms highlights the importance of inclusivity, ensuring that students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds are not excluded from the digital conversation.

Moreover, the psychological and behavioral implications of social media use warrant close attention. For UG students navigating formative years of identity development, these platforms often serve as spaces for self-expression, validation, and community-building. However, the same mechanisms can foster unhealthy comparison, cyber bullying, and dependency, raising questions about the balance between empowerment and vulnerability. The dual nature of social media as both a catalyst for growth and a source of risk underscore the need for nuanced inquiry into its role in shaping academic trajectories and personal well-being.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The study of Neelamalar and Chitra (2009) on the impact of social networking sites on Indian youth revealed that most of college students actively access the internet and computers primarily for communication. The study further emphasized that social media offers quicker and easier interaction compared to traditional methods.

Kuppuswamy and Narayan (2010): studied the impact of social networking websites on youth education using survey methods. The findings of the study stated that social media has both positive and negative effects depending on students' interests and usage patterns.

Shabnam and Mundhe (2014): Explored how youth express their views on social issues through social networking sites. Their findings revealed that students frequently discuss topics such as corruption, education, social activities, and personal matters, highlighting social media's role in shaping consciousness and civic engagement. The study of IIM-Rohtak Study (2025) on social media usage by youth revealed that the average screen time of a male is 6 hours 45minutes while that of a female is 7 hours 5 minutes. The study also revealed that about 60.66 percent of the youth use social media platforms, with its highest usage during evening hours. The highest viewership more than 50 percentiles of content related to entertainment.

The National Survey (2023) indicated that 60% of youngsters aged 9-17 spend over 3 hours daily on social media or gaming platforms.

A study conducted by IGNOU (2023) on the impact of social media on Academic Performance identified that the uses of social media with respect to education are to understand the relation between them and to examine the impact of those factors on academic performance. The study explored the impact of social media on various aspects, including teenager's body image and adjustment levels.

Singh and M Karmakar (2025) in their study explored social media's role in science communication, highlighting its potential for science-science and science-society connections. Above all, the above studies revealed mixed views on the impact of social media on students. The studies pointed both adverse and advantages of social media on students' academic career and perspective of life. The present study was an attempt to answer the following questions with collecting and analyzing empirical data on impact of social media on students' career and life from their perceptions and own analytical views.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How do the undergraduate students perceive about the role of social media in their academic and personal lives?
- In what ways do social media contribute to undergraduate students' career development and professional growth?
- How does the use of social media influence undergraduate students' academic performance and learning outcomes?
- What strategies can effectively promote responsible and balanced social media use among undergraduate students?

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To explore the constructive perceptions of undergraduate students regarding social media.

- To identify the ways in which social media supports undergraduate students' academic and career development.
- To evaluate the overall effectiveness of social media in enhancing students' academic experiences and personal lives.
- To examine the impact of social media on undergraduate students' mental health and social relationships.
- To propose effective strategies for encouraging responsible and productive social media use among undergraduate students.

METHOD & MEDIA

The study employed a descriptive survey method to investigate undergraduate students' perceptions and experiences of social media in their daily lives from Vikram Dev University, Jeypore a semi-rural higher education institution of Odisha coming under Koraput district which is also popularly known as tribal heartland. The research conducted on perceptions of UG Students from tribal and rural backgrounds enrolled in the streams like Arts, Science, and Commerce. Using purposive sampling, 60 active social media users across first, second, and third years were selected.

Independent variables included gender, academic stream, year of study, types of internet access (mobile data, Wi-Fi, or none), and devices used (smart phone, laptop, or tablet). Dependent measures comprised students' perceptions of social media captured through Likert-scale items, reported challenges and satisfaction levels, and the perceived impact of social media on their academic journey and personal lives. For gathering relevant data for the study, a structured questionnaire in Google form was developed and administered as the primary tool. The questionnaire consisted of both closed-ended questions and Likert-scale statements designed to capture the degree of agreement or disagreement on specific issues.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In order to know the UG students' perception regarding social media, a question was asked whether the social media makes learning easiest or not. The responses of the students presented in the table-1.

Table 1. Social media: Easiest way of learning

Responses	Number of students	Percentage(%)
Yes	48	80.0%
No	12	20.0%

According to the table no.1, out of 60 surveyed students, 48 (80%) answered "Yes" believing social media as the best ways and means for the easiest learning, whereas, the remaining 12 students (20%) did not consider social media as the easiest learning method. This reveals that 80% of the students' perception on social media as the most convenient learning tool.

Similarly, responding the question whether social medias are the substitute of books, the responses of the UG students were stated in the Table 2.

Table 2. Social Media as a Substitute of Books

Response	Number of students	Percentage(%)
Yes	38	63.3%
No	22	36.7%
Total	60	100%

According to the survey of 60 students, 38 (63.3%) affirmed that social media serves as a substitute for books, while the remaining 22 students (36.7%) did not agree the statement by saying 'No'. This indicates that a clear majority perceive social media is the substitute of books in the learning process.

Further, the students were asked about the primary use of social media in their daily lives. They replied in the following way (Table-3).

Table 3. Primary use of social media

Primary use	Number of students	Percentage %
Staying connected with family and friends	12	20%
Entertainment	18	30%
Academic purposes	15	25%
News and current events	15	25%

The table 3 reflects that the largest proportion of students 18 (30%) were using social media primarily for entertainment, while 15 students (25%) indicated its use for academic purposes and for accessing news or current events. A smaller segment of 12 students (20%) engaged with social media to maintain connections with family and friends. These results highlight entertainment as the pre-dominant primary use of social media followed with academic purposes, to be updated about news and current events and staying connected with family and friends.

A question was asked regarding social media platforms frequently used by UG students, the reply of the students reflected in the Table 4.

Table 4. Social Media platform used by students most frequently

Type of Internet Platform	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
Face book	7	11.6 %
WhatsApp	12	20.0%
YouTube	27	45.0%
Instagram	10	16.7%
Others	4	6.7%
Total	60	100%

The table 4 reveals that YouTube emerged as the most frequently used platform, with 27 students (45%) relying on it. WhatsApp followed with 12 students (20%), while Instagram (16.7%) and Facebook (11.6%) accounted for moderate usage. A smaller group of 4 students (6.7%) reported using other platforms. These results confirm YouTube's dominance in students' social media preferences. How many times do students spend on Social Media? Answering this question, students replied in the following way (Table 5).

Table 5. Time spent on social media by students

Time in hours	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
Less than 1 hour	12	20.0%
1-2 hours	8	13.4%
2-4 hours	28	46.6%
More than 4 hours	12	20.0%
Total	60	100%

According to the survey of 60 students, 12 (20%) reported spending less than one hour on social media, while 8 (13.4%) spent between one and two hours. The largest group, 28 students (46.6%), engaged for two to four hours daily, and another 12 (20%) exceeded four hours. These findings indicate that the majority of students devote two to four hours per day to social media use.

Major Findings

YouTube emerged as the most frequently used platform, with 45% of students relying on it, followed by WhatsApp at 20%. Nearly half of the students (46.6%) reported spending 2–4 hours daily on social media, indicating moderate but consistent usage. A majority of students (80%) believe that social media is the easiest and most convenient way of learning. Evening time is the peak usage period, with 60% of students accessing social media then, while 20% extend their usage into late night. Entertainment is the primary use for 30% of students, while 25% each use social media for academic purposes and news/current events.

About 63.3% of students consider social media is substitute for books, reflecting its role as an alternative learning resource. Three-fourths of the respondents (75%) believe social media negatively impacts health, highlighting concerns about well-being. 60% of students perceive social media as an alternate to teachers or mentors, showing its influence on academic guidance. 60% of students agree that spending more time on social media makes them feel disconnected from the real world, pointing to social isolation risks. Overall, students perceive social media as a dual-purpose tool beneficial for learning, communication, and career awareness, yet challenging due to health issues, reduced academic focus, and social disconnection.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- To explore constructive perceptions of social media, students should be encouraged to use platforms like YouTube and WhatsApp for collaborative learning and resource sharing.
- To identify the ways social media supports academic and career development, institutions can guide students toward professional networking platforms such as LinkedIn for career awareness.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of social media in students' lives, colleges can promote balanced daily usage by setting healthy time limits and encouraging offline activities.
- To examine the impact on mental health and social relationships, awareness programs should highlight the risks of excessive use and promote digital well-being practices.
- To propose strategies for responsible use, educators can discourage social media during lectures except for academic purposes to reduce distractions.
- To strengthen responsible and productive engagement, students can be motivated to create academic content such as short videos, blogs, or info graphics to transform social media into a tool for knowledge sharing.

CONCLUSION

The study revealed that undergraduate students perceived social media as a dual-purpose tool simultaneously beneficial and challenging. On the positive side, social media enhances learning, facilitates access to information, and supports career awareness. It was widely regarded as a substitute for traditional resources such as books and even teachers, underscoring its strong educational potential. At the same time, the findings highlighted critical concerns: excessive use contributed to health issues, reduced academic focus, and feelings of social disconnection. These results underscored the importance of digital literacy programs and responsible usage strategies. Educators and policymakers were encouraged to promote balanced engagement with social media, leveraging its constructive aspects for academic and career development while mitigating risks to health and social well-being. Ultimately, social media emerged as a powerful tool for student empowerment when used judiciously, but unchecked usage risked undermining both academic achievement and personal growth.

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