

An Empirical Study of Social Media Effects on University Students in Sultanate of Oman

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Abstract

The usage of social networking sites such as WhatsApp, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat and Pinterest has brought many opportunities, changes and challenges. The impact of this type of media can be social, psychological, and economic. The social impact is a major concern since these technologies with their rapid spread have succeeded in influencing the attitudes of various groups of individuals. Among all other age groups in Oman, teenagers make up a major segment in the demographic structure of the country. The present research aimed to contribute to this understanding by investigating the impact of social networking media on academic performance, health and social interactions in Oman. A sample of 242 students from University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Nizwa were selected for the study. The findings of the study revealed that 55% of the students in University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Nizwa use Instagram. 25% of the students use WhatsApp. 30% of the students in University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Nizwa use three social media platforms. 32% of the students spend 3 to 5 hours daily on social media. 45% of the University students stated that they are attracted towards social media.

Keywords: Social media usage, Health issues, Social interactions and behavior, academics.

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INTRODUCTION

Children and young adults are being exposed to significant risks on social media from the amount of damaging information available online. A study carried out by senior management students of Modern College for Business and Science (MCBS) indicates nearly 70 per cent of Omani youth between the age of 15 and 25 years are on social media up to 15 hours a day. The research, conducted by Manal Al Hadhrami and Munal Al Maawali on a cross-sectional basis, underlines the core problem of many young people addicted to the social media. It has revealed what we already know, that a lot of youth find it hard to live without the social media," 22-year-old Manal Al Hadhrami, told the Observer. "Unfortunately, many students around my age fail to concentrate on their studies. It is shocking to find out a big number among them spend up to 15 hours a day on social media. It leaves them with only nine hours of

sleep, meals, studies, family gatherings and friends. Omani parents are also concerned about social media "pollution" on the minds of their children saying the online trend is taking most of their time. "I see very little of my 15-year-old daughter. She locks herself in her bedroom with her mobile phone for hours. She is also online until 2 in the morning. It is frightening to think what she is reading or who she is communicating with," Muhammed Al Junaibi, an employee of the Ministry of Civil Service, said. Other parents voice their concerns on the anti-social trends of their children and the impact it would have on their future. "I have three children between the age of 10 and 17 years. They are all hooked to social media. They spend hours staring at the small screens of their phones. They don't talk to each other or their parents. They don't even want to go out with their families. "They even take their meals in their rooms. In other words, they socialise very little and I am sure this undesirable habit will have a negative impact on their

future,” Khalfan Al Suleimani, an Information Technology business entrepreneur, said. “On Snapchat, they want to see who viewed their videos and photos. On WhatsApp, they look for the blue double ticks and quick but positive answers. If they don’t get that, they try again and again until they get depressed. If they get all that, they want more and that’s how they get addicted,” Sharifa Al Qarni, a psychologist and counsellor, said (Oman Observer, April, 7, 2018).

Statement of the problem

WhatsApp is the most popular social media app used in Oman, according to data shared by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology. “People over the age of 18 are using WhatsApp in Oman with 92% of them using WhatsApp in 2020. This is a 3% increase compared to 2019,” YouTube is the second most popular with 81% of people using the platform in 2020. “This is an 11% rise compared to 2019,” 56% of people are using Facebook, making it the third most popular social media platform in the Sultanate. The percentage of IMO usage in the Sultanate touched 47% and 44% for Instagram. As for the Twitter application, the percentage of usage in the Sultanate in 2020 has reached 25%. 24 percent was the rate of use of the Snapchat application for the year 2020 by individuals aged 18 years and over, and 10 percent was the rate of use of the LinkedIn application (Times News Service, February 23, 2021). The most popular application for publishing text, images and videos is "WhatsApp", where 19 per cent of Omanis publish seven or more times a day, followed by Snapchat and Instagram. More than half of Omanis believe that the use of social media has a positive effect on their social and practical lives. A third of Omanis used social networking sites or applications to buy or search for some goods and services, and one in five Omani used social media for commercial purposes, such as promoting or selling a particular good or service. The use of social media for commercial purposes is significantly higher among females than males. The most popular applications for purchasing and searching for goods and services were Instagram, followed by WhatsApp. Eight per cent of Omanis are highly confident in the quality and price of products purchased through social media. Four out of 5 Omanis view that the use of children under the age of 13 for social media has a very negative or negative impact on their social and academic lives. While 6 per cent believe there is a positive effect in one form or another. 12 per cent, however, believe that the impact of social media depends on what and how they are used (Times of Oman, June 22, 2019). Thus this study focuses on the usage of social media sites by the students in UTAS, Nizwa and identifying the impact of social media on their academic performance, health and social interactions.

Significance of the study

The burst in the use of social networking sites such as WhatsApp, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat and Pinterest has brought many opportunities,

changes and challenges into our world. The impact of this type of media can be social, psychological, and/or economic. For many societies, the social impact is a major concern since these technologies with their rapid spread have succeeded in influencing the attitudes of various groups of individuals. The role that social media played in the recent unrests in the Arab world is an example of such an impact. Oman, like all other countries, is also facing the same challenge. Among all other age groups in Oman, teenagers from 13 to 19 years old make up a major segment in the demographic structure of the country. Therefore, it is very important to study and understand the impact of the rapidly-growing social networking media on this group. The present research aims to contribute to this understanding by investigating the impact of social networking media on academic performance, health and social interactions in Oman. Previous studies are limited in Oman. Thus this study is highly relevant and significant.

Objectives of the Study

1. To understand the types of social media sites used by the students of the university
2. To find out the purpose for which social media sites are used by university students.
3. To identify the factors that affect health due to social media usage.
4. To determine the factors that affect the social behavior due to social media usage.
5. To analyse the factors that affect academic performance due to social media usage.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ibe (2016) determined the influence of social networking on academic adjustment of 607 in-school adolescents in Enugu Education Zone of Enugu State. In-school adolescents are exposed to various categories of social networks such as Facebook, twitter, eskimi Myspace, blogs, email, WhatsApp and YouTube. Poor study habits, identity theft, sexual solicitation are dangers associated with the use of social networking. There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of in-school adolescents from urban and rural, male and female areas on the influence of social networking academic adjustment. Mohammad Said (2015), investigated the effect of social media on academic performance of 227 students of College of Business at Universiti Utara Malaysia through the mediation of student engagement. There is no direct relationship between social media and academic performance, but the effect was mediated by behavioural engagement. Social media has the potential to be used in a learning environment as it promotes engagement of student in class and subsequently their academic performance and success. Mowafy (2018) studied the social media effects on the academic performance among 442 university students of Nile University in Egypt. The findings explained the perception of Nile university students of social media effects on their academic performance, and to what extend do they use social media for academic

related purposes, and it explores the effect of the different academic majors, academic status and gender on the social media usage perception and usage. Seleshi & Abebe (2022) examined the influence of purpose of Social media use, time spent on social media and their interaction on academic performance of 110 Grade eleven students from a private high school in Addis Ababa. 67% of the students used social media for non-education purposes and on average these students spent more time on social media than those who used social media for education purposes. The students who used social media for education purposes scored significantly higher in all three subjects (English, Mathematics and Chemistry) than those who used social media for non-education purposes. Students who spent shorter time on social media daily scored significantly better in all three subjects than those who spent longer. Spending more time on social media for non-education purposes is harmful to students' academic performance. According to Maqableh *et al.*, (2015), social networks sites (SNSs) are dominating all internet users' generations, especially the students' communities. Academic institutions are increasingly using SNSs which impact students' academic performance. They investigated 366 students from the University of Jordan. There was a significant impact of SNS on the student's academic performance. Also, there was a significant impact of SNS use per week on the student's academic performance, whereas no differences are found in the impact of use of SNSs on academic performance due to age, academic achievement, and use per day to most used sites. Nor *et al.*, (2021) studied the impact of social media usage on academic performance among 341 accounting students in public and private universities. It was found to have insignificant relationship with academic performance. It indicates that frequent access to social media might lead to poor academic performance. Non-academic usage of social media are found to have significant positive relationship with accounting students' academic performance. Gilbert (2018) assessed the impact of social media on academic performance of selected college students. They studied the actual impact of daily communication of youth in social media. Social networks becomes an integral part of the students' full life, took up most of their free time. In social networks, there are also things useful for the development of the students. Communication with peers through social networks can help a student socialize, find new friends, discuss with them issues related to studies. Vardanush (2019) analysed how frequent social media usage can affect mental health. He focused on the frequent usage of social media and its relevance to depression. 200 participants aged 18 and over, residing in California, and current social media users were the respondents. Individuals with increased levels of social media usage were shown to have a positive correlation with depression symptoms. This study showed that social media use has the potential to affect individuals' mental health. Ahmed (2016) assessed the impact of social media on the academic performance and grades of 57

second year medical students at the College of Medicine, University of Babylon, Iraq. The study assessed the type of social media they use frequently, time spent on these media in hours per day, the reasons for use of these media and the effect of social media on their grades. Time spent by students on social media and Facebook messenger was correlated with combined grades of physiology and anatomy courses. All students have been using Facebook and 96.5% have been using Facebook messenger. Other popular applications were telegram, Instagram and ask.fm. Average time spent on social media was 5.07 ± 2.93 hours and on Facebook messenger was 1.80 ± 1.45 hours per day. Forty-two percent of students reported that social media have positive effect on their academic performance. No correlation has been found between time spent on social media or Facebook messenger and students combined grades of physiology and anatomy. Social media and in particular Facebook and Facebook messenger are very popular among second year medical students. Time spent on social media seems to have no influence on second year medical student's grades and academic performance. Chandrasena & Ilankoon (2022) aimed to assess the use of social media and its association with academic performance, well-being, and interpersonal relation of 220 health sciences undergraduates from University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka. All undergraduates had social media accounts, and WhatsApp was the most frequently used social media site (96.0%), followed by Facebook (70.9%), mainly for communicating (85.1%), entertainment (83.4%), and online learning (65.7%). Most undergraduates (72.0%) spent 2–5 hours daily on social media sites and followed social media 1–10 times per day (54.9%). The majority of them wished to use social media for academic purposes (94.9%), and the most preferred site for academic work was WhatsApp (65.1%). Most undergraduates' self-reported Grade Point Average (GPA) (46.3%) was <2.9. There was a statistically significant association between the mean GPA and frequencies of using social media. Perceived social media addiction and duration of sleep, activities of daily living, and study time were found to be significantly associated. Asem (2019) investigated if there is a significant correlation between the purposes of use, time spent by students, motives and gratifications, and university students' academic performance. 971 responses were collected and it was found that participants use social media more for socialization and entertainment needs rather than academic needs and purposes. This study suggested a statistically significant correlation existed between time spent on social media and participants' entertainment purposes of use and their academic performance. There is no significant correlation between participants' socialization and academic purposes of use, instrumental and ritualistic motives, and students' GPA. According to Saleem *et al.*, (2019) social media use has increased in the last twenty years not only with higher education students but with students, employees and others across all age levels. The study was conducted among students of Mazoon

College, Muscat. There is a direct correlation between the numbers of hours of using social media with student's grade. The results also showed unmarried students are using social media more than married students and about 40% have various friends which may lead to building positive relationships that will allow for ideas and knowledge transmission between them.

Research gaps

Most of the previous studies focused mainly on the impact of social media on academic performance alone. Few studies focused on the impact of social media on health issues of users. Most of the literature reviews aimed to study the impact on their academic performance. But these studies also mentioned that social media affects the health and the behaviour of users. Moreover, studies related to these three issues are limited in Sultanate of Oman. This research addresses these gaps by studying the impact of social media on academics, health and social interactions of Omani students in a University.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

It is a causal study as it studied the impact of social media usage on academics, social interactions and health. The study area was students studying in

University of Technology and Applied sciences, Nizwa. The period of study was from February 2023 to May 2023. The population of students studying in UTAS, Nizwa is 5692 (Source: Registration Department, UTAS, Nizwa, March 2023). There are four major departments in UTAS, Nizwa, English Language Center, Business Studies, Engineering and Information Technology Department. This was taken as the sampling frame. The sample size was determined as 361 (Krejcie and Morgan, 1970). These samples were collected from students in each department by using proportionate stratified sampling. The sampling method adopted for the collection of samples was simple random sampling method, where in the respondents were contacted on a random basis. Primary data was collected online using Google form, with the help of a structured questionnaire in English and Arabic. Pilot study was done among 25 respondents to identify the validity of the questions. The tools used for analysis coefficient of variation, mean and standard deviation.

Analysis of the Study

The sample size determined was 361. The data is collected from 242 respondents with a response rate of 67%. The analysis of the study is done with the responses from 242 University students. The demographic profile of the students is mentioned below.

Table 1: Academic profile of students

Gender	No of respondents	In percentage
Male	104	43%
Female	138	57%
Total	242	100
Department		
English Language Center	61	25%
Engineering	54	22%
Business Studies	84	35%
Information Technology	43	18%
Total	242	100
Level of Study		
Foundation	77	32%
Diploma First year	57	23%
Diploma Second year	51	21%
Advanced Diploma	24	10%
B. Tech	33	14%
Total	242	100

Table 1 shows the academic profile of the student respondents. 57% of the respondents are females and 43% are males. 35% of the respondents are from Business department, 22% from Engineering, 25% from English Language center and 18% from Information

Technology department. 32% of the students are from foundation level and 23% from first year diploma and 21% of participants are from diploma second year. Only 10% of the students are from advanced diploma and 14% are from B.Tech level.

Table 2: Social media mostly used by students

Social media used	No of responses	In Percentage
Instagram	132	55%
Pinterest	2	0.5%
Snap chat	20	8%
Twitter	7	2.5%
WhatsApp	60	25%
You Tube	21	9%
Total	242	100

It is revealed from table 2 that 55% of the students in University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Nizwa use Instagram. 25% of the students use

WhatsApp. These are the two social media platforms mostly use by the students. 9% of the students use You Tube and 8% of the students use Snap chat.

Table 3: No of social media platforms used

No of Social media platforms used	No of responses	In Percentage
One	3	1%
Two	19	8%
Three	72	30%
Four	65	27%
Five	37	15%
More than five	46	19%
Total	242	100

Table 3 reveals the number of social media platforms used by the students. 30% of the students in University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Nizwa use three social media platforms. 27% of the students use

four social media platforms and 19% of them use more than five social media sites. This shows the high involvement of students in using social media by the students.

Table 4: Time spent on social media daily

Time spent	No of responses	In Percentage
<3 hours	54	22%
3 - < 5 hours	77	32%
5 - <7 hours	62	25.5%
7 - <9 hours	26	11%
9 - < 11 hours	16	6.5%
> 11 hours	7	3%
Total	242	100

The daily usage of social media is explained in table no 4 based on the average time. 32% of the students spend 3 to 5 hours daily on social media. 25.5% of the students spend 5 to 7 hours a day on social media. 11% of the students spend 7 to 9 hours on social media daily.

Nearly 7% of the students spend 9 to 11 hours on social media and 3% of them spend more than 11 hours in social media. This shows that students devote more time in a day on social media itself.

Table 5: Moment of accessing social media

Accessing social media	No of responses	In Percentage
Any spare moment	94	39%
During social occasions	9	3.5%
During free time	120	50%
Meal times	7	2.5%
At college and in between classes	12	5%
Total	242	100

It is analysed through table 5 the moment of accessing social media. 50% of the students access the social media during free time. 39% of the students get accessed to social media in any spare moment. This also

shows the involvement of students in social media is high. This affects the interpersonal communication of the students as they are accessing the social media during free time.

Table 6: Frequency of usage of social media

Frequency of using social media	No of responses	In Percentage
Regular user	133	55%
Occasional user	67	28%
Use rarely	42	17%
Total	242	100

The frequency of using social media is analysed from table 6. 55% of the students are regular users of social media and 28% are occasional users. Only 17% of

the students use social media rarely. This analysis also reveals the high usage and involvement by students in social media.

Table 7: Purpose of using social media

Purpose of using social media	No of responses	In Percentage
Watching movies	32	13%
To browse and pass time	86	36%
Playing music	9	4%
Playing games	7	2.5%
To watch news	37	15%
Internet shopping	11	4.5%
Video making through Instagram and TikTok	22	9%
Chatting on WhatsApp/Face book	23	10%
Academic purpose	15	6%
Total	242	100

Table 7 explains the purpose of using social media by the University students. 36% of the students use social media to browse and pass the time. 15% of the

students use social media platforms to watch the news. 13% of the students use the platform for watching movies and 10% of the students use for chatting in WhatsApp.

Table 8: Attracted towards social media

Attracted towards social media	No of responses	In Percentage
Strongly Agree	27	11%
Agree	58	24%
Moderate	109	45%
Disagree	32	13%
Strongly disagree	16	7%
Total	242	100

The social media usage is analysed from table 8. 45% of the University students stated that they are attracted towards social media. 24% of the respondents

agree and 11% of the students strongly agree that they are attracted towards social media.

Table 9: Addicted to the use of social media

Addicted to social media	No of responses	In Percentage
Strongly Agree	31	13%
Agree	40	17%
Moderate	93	38%
Disagree	50	21%
Strongly disagree	28	11%
Total	242	100

Table 9 explains the students addiction towards social media. 38% of the students opined that they are moderately addicted to social media. 17% of the students

agree and 13% of them strongly agree that they are addicted to the usage of social media.

Table 10: Factors that affect the health due to social media usage

Sl. No	Statements	Mean	SD	CV = (SD/Mean)x 100
1	I sit in one position continuously while using social media	2.59	1.05	40.54
2	I have neck pain while using social media	2.55	1.14	44.70
3	I get pain on my hand holding the device while using social media	2.77	1.18	42.59
4	I get pain on my fingers after typing and swiping the screen	2.49	1.25	50.20
5	I have poor eyesight after using social media	2.94	1.15	39.11
6	I gained a lot of weight due to social media usage	2.16	1.17	54.16
7	I feel stressed and irritable after using social media	2.47	1.16	46.96
8	I face difficulty in learning and concentration after using social media	2.63	1.18	44.86
9	I could not sleep properly due to social media usage	2.68	1.21	45.14
10	I have poor eating habits due to social media usage	2.37	1.24	52.32
11	My physical exercise has affected due to social media usage	2.66	1.20	45.11
12	I show aggressive behavior due to usage of social media	2.25	1.16	51.55
13	Sometimes I feel anxious and depressed after using social media	2.57	1.17	45.52
14	Sometimes usage of social media influenced self-harming behaviors and causes suicidal tendencies.	2.36	1.23	52.11

The coefficient of variation (CV) is a relative measure of variability that indicates the size of a standard deviation in relation to its mean. Higher values indicate that the standard deviation is relatively large compared to the mean. The lower the value of the coefficient of variation, the higher the precision of the estimate. The CV value with the lowest value is considered to be most reliable and consistent variable. In this analysis it is clear

that the usage of social media has affected the eyesight of the students. Among the health issue related factors in table no.10, poor eye sight due to social usage is the most reliable factor (39.11). The second most consistent factor is that students sit in one position continuously for longer hours (40.54). Obesity is not a consistent variable (54.16) that influences the health of students due to social media usage.

Table 11: Factors that affect Social interactions of students due to social media usage

Sl. No	Statements	Mean	SD	CV = (SD/Mean)x 100
1	Usage of social media has reduced my time spending with my family members	2.71	1.15	42.43
2	I communicate less with my family members because of social media usage	2.55	1.19	46.66
3	At times I faced humiliation and torturing while using social media	2.29	1.24	54.14
4	I met with accidents while using social media	2.23	1.24	55.60
5	I always check for social updates while walking	2.75	1.21	44
6	I feel I lack social skills (Interactive skills) due to more usage in social media	2.52	1.20	47.61
7	I always check phones in a social event even iam physically present	2.82	1.14	40.42
8	Due to social media usage, I become more self-confident	3.07	1.07	34.85

Table 11 analyses the various factors that influence the social interactions of students due to usage of social media. The coefficient of variation value explains that students became more self confident in themselves due to the usage of social media (34.85). This

is the most consistent and reliable factor. The second most consistent factor is that even in attending a social event, students use social media (40.42). This will reduce the interpersonal relations and interaction with others.

Table 12: Factors that affect student academics due to social media usage

Sl. No	Statements	Mean	SD	CV = (SD/Mean) x 100
1	My grades are improving with the study materials shared on social media platforms	2.99	1.12	37.45
2	Teachers share assignments and class activities on social media platforms	2.99	1.15	38.46
3	Academic discussions on social media groups helps me to understand the topics	3.31	1.09	32.93
4	I use social networking sites to share knowledge with my classmate	3.32	1.17	35.24

Sl. No	Statements	Mean	SD	CV = (SD/Mean) x 100
5	I use materials obtained from social sites to complement what was taught in the class	3.16	1.08	34.17
6	Social media improves my reading skills	3.41	1.17	34.31
7	Stopping use of social media would improve my academic performance	3.02	1.14	37.74
8	Social media reduces my concentration in studies	2.93	1.14	38.90
9	Social media reduces my writing skills, grammar and spelling	2.5	1.15	46
10	I get more distracted from studies when social media is added to academics.	2.69	1.10	40.89
11	My grades have reduced due to my engagement on social media.	2.50	1.12	44.8

Table 12 analyses the factors that influences the students' academics due to social media usage. The most consistent and reliable factor that academic discussions on social media helps to understand the topics better (32.93). The second most reliable factor is that social media helps students to refer additional materials that what was taught in the class (34.17).

Findings of the Study

The findings if the study are summarized as follows:

1. 55% of the students in University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Nizwa use Instagram. 25% of the students use WhatsApp. These are the two social media platforms mostly use by the students. 9% of the students use You Tube and 8% of the students use Snap chat.
2. 36% of the students use social media to browse and pass the time. 15% of the students use social media platforms to watch the news. 13% of the students use the platform for watching movies and 10% of the students use for chatting in WhataApp.
3. 30% of the students in University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Nizwa use three social media platforms. 27% of the students use four social media platforms and 19% of them use more than five social media sites.
4. 32% of the students spend 3 to 5 hours daily on social media. 25.5% of the students spend 5 to 7 hours a day on social media. 11% of the students spend 7 to 9 hours on social media daily. Nearly 7% of the students spend 9 to 11 hours on social media and 3% of them spend more than 11 hours in social media.
5. 45% of the University students stated that they are attracted towards social media. 38% of the students opined that they are moderately addicted to social media. 17% of the students agree and 13% of them strongly agree that they are addicted to the usage of social media.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are hereby made in light of the findings for the impact of social media on academic performance, health, and social interaction among students in University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Nizwa, Sultanate of Oman.

1. Develop social media guidelines to promote responsible social media use and reduce the negative impact on academic performance.
2. Encourage offline social interaction to promote healthy social interaction and face-to-face communication skills.
3. Conduct social media awareness campaigns to educate students on the potential negative impact of social media and provide tips for responsible use.
4. Conduct research on the impact of specific social media platforms to gain more in-depth insights into the ways social media affects students.
5. Collaborate with other universities to compare the impact of social media on students in different contexts.
6. Monitor social media use to identify patterns and inform the development of social media guidelines and awareness campaigns.
7. Encourage self-reflection and help students develop self-awareness to make informed decisions about their social media use.
8. Foster a culture of by promoting a healthy balance between online and offline activities to reduce the negative impact of social media on academic performance, health, and social interaction.

CONCLUSION

The results show that social media has taken over the student's whole life and consumes the majority of his free time. From the results derived, it may be concluded that there is a clear relationship between the social media and the academic performance, health and social interaction among the students of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences in Nizwa, Oman and they need to control and manage their usage of social media sites. In order to better understand and find more elements to measure the factors that affect a student's academic performance, health, and social interaction through collaborative learning in higher education institutions, the researchers propose more studies and the addition of factors that have an impact on a larger sample size for future work. Finally, students themselves must be aware of the risks associated with excessive use of social media and behave properly on these platforms. Students should use social media less frequently in order

to avoid developing an addiction to these platforms. Students need to be cautious while using these sites and aware of its risks. Despite the advantages that students can derive from social media networks, such as information sharing, relationship building, participating in group discussions from near and far, among others, there is to some extent addiction and distraction of attention caused by the use of social media, which could have serious consequences. According to the study findings, social media is a two-edged sword. It is more useful for the modern society but the hidden risks and challenges are high. Students should strike a balance in using the latest technological inventions in social media without affecting their health, social behaviour and academic growth.

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