



THE NATIONAL
RESEARCH INSTITUTE
PAPUA NEW GUINEA

SPOTLIGHT

MISUSE OF SOCIAL MEDIA BY STUDENTS CAN AFFECT THEIR ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Akam Tom

Volume 17, Issue 7

www.pngnri.org

Key Points

- The negative impacts of social media on students' academic performance in Papua New Guinea (PNG) is a worrying issue.
- In PNG, the use of social media by students continue to increase.
- Misuse of social media by students contributes to some students dropping out of school and producing poor results.
- To address the issue associated with the misuse of social media by students, PNG need to have rigid policies and regulations in place to filter, restrict and regulate illicit content such as pornographic and sexual contents.

inquire
inform
influence

May 2024



MISUSE OF SOCIAL MEDIA BY STUDENTS CAN AFFECT THEIR ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

By Akam Tom

The use of social media has become very popular all around the world, including Papua New Guinea (PNG), because of the great development of technology in recent years (Agwi and Ogwueleka, 2018). People from all walks of life, including students, are heavily involved in the use of social media for various reasons, weighing both pros and cons, which this paper will closely discuss (Agwi and Ogwueleka, 2018). Social media is an important part of today's world. It helps people stay connected and share ideas, thoughts, and opinions with others in a safe and secure environment. It can also be used to promote businesses, stay informed about current events and trends, help build relationships with others, and allow users to interact with people from around the world to build meaningful connections.

The Internet was first introduced in Papua New Guinea on March 12, 1997 (Pye et al., 2023). This technology, often referred to as the "Information Superhighway", was launched by the sole carrier of communications traffic, PNG Post and Telikom (Pye et al., 2023). In 2023, there were 1,272,000 Facebook users, accounting for 13.6 percent of the entire population. The largest age group of Facebook users was between 18 to 24 years old (Table 1). There were 86,100 Instagram users, making up 0.9 percent of the entire population, with the largest age group also being 18 to 24 years old. Additionally, there were 1,211,100 Messenger users, representing 12.9 percent of the entire population, with the largest age group also being 18 to 24. Lastly, there were 398,000 LinkedIn users, accounting for 4.2 percent of the entire population, with the largest age group being 25 to 34. The data demonstrates that most social media users are students aged 18 to 24, indicating that it may not be healthy for them (Napoleon Inc., 2024). The use of social media among students has reached high levels and may affect their study and learning by diverting their attention from their academic pursuits. Evidence from research shows that if students spend more time on social media networks than on their studies, it will have adverse impact on their learning and academic performance (Mbabazi, 2018). Students who frequently visit social media for personal activities rather than academic purposes experience worsened academic performance (Okoampa-Larbi et al., 2021).

Table 1. 2023 social media users in PNG

Social Media	Number of social media users in 2023	Social media users in relation to total population in %	Social media users by gender in %		Social media users by age group	
			Male	Female	Age 18 - 24	Age 25 - 34
Facebook	1,272,000	13.6	62.2	37.8	493,900	
Instagram	86,100	0.9	55.1	44.9	40,500	
Messenger	1,211,100	13	62.6	37.4	464,400	
LinkedIn	398,000	4.3	65.3	34.7		190,000
Total	2,967,200	31.8			998,800	190,000

Data source: Napoleon Inc. (2024)

Table 1 above indicates that the largest social media users are people aged 18 to 24 years, with a total of 998,800 users. As the age range of students in PNG is between 18 to 24 years, this suggests that most social media users are students, which is not a positive sign for a developing country like PNG.

The misuse of social media can affect academic performance of students

The misuse of social media by students in PNG can contribute to poor academic performance in the following way:

- Excessive use of social may change students' behaviour and attitude. The use of social media such as Facebook in PNG has evolved from a social networking platform to a disruptive force that influences behaviour and attitudes. According to M-Saleh et al. (2017), excessive use of Facebook has negative impact on the lives of young people, affecting their personalities, studies, and consuming time that should be dedicated to academics. Despite these negative effects, Facebook boasts of approximately 3.05 billion monthly users, with projections indicating that this number will reach 3.07 billion by 2024 (Shewale, 2024). With the widespread availability of smartphones and data promotions, students now have unrestricted access not only to Facebook, but also to other social media platforms such as Pinterest, Youtube, Twitter, and Instagram. The excessive time spent by students on social media has the potential to distract them from their studies, which can result in poor academic performances.

- Some students may have access to pornographic and sexual contents that distract them from studying. Office of Censorship has revealed that up to 90 percent of teenagers in urban areas of the country have access to pornographic and sexual contents (Office of Censorship, 2023). It was found that the easy access to the internet contributes to the high rate of pornography consumption in the country and the regulations and policies in place have failed to prevent access to pornography by teenagers.
- Misuse of social media can contribute to the dropout of students. Most of the children and teenagers are often in primary and high schools and their long journey in education may be adversely affected by the misuse of social media. Some of the communication taking place on social media are often informal, unwanted, and unprofessional, which has more disadvantages than advantages and may distract students from doing their academic works. PNG may continue to see an increase in school dropouts if young people have the freedom to or their parents assist them to create social media accounts.
- Establish e-learning centers in schools. School administrations, with the support of relevant authorities, should set up e-learning centers in schools. These centers would enable students to research assignments and projects, redirecting their focus from social media to academic work, ultimately improving academic performance. These centers should also discourage students from bringing mobile phones to school, indirectly reducing distractions and social media addiction.
- Regulate social media. Social media plays a crucial role in holding leaders and public officials accountable. The National Information and Communication Technology Authority (NICTA) should consider drafting a bill to regulate social media usage. This would ensure responsible use of the platform and protect vulnerable users, such as children and adolescents, from unwarranted abuse and negative influences.
- Conduct school-based awareness and educate students about the dangers of social media platforms. Students should be encouraged to focus on their studies and avoid using social media during school hours. They should refrain from chatting with friends and relatives on social media. Students should prioritise their learning materials and studies, and avoid engaging in non-academic conversations on social media.

Strategies to minimise students' social media usage

It is important to manage social media usage to avoid constant notifications, updates and requests for irrelevant content that divert students' attention away from their studies. The suggested strategies are important for students to avoid social media distraction, addiction, and the checking of unnecessary notifications that consumes their time. Following are some measures that parents, guardians and relevant authorities can take to address the impact of social media on students' academic performance.

- There is a need for strict policies and regulations. The issue of students accessing pornographic and sexual contents should serve as a wake-up call for parents and the government to take action before the negative effects escalate and adversely impact the well-being and development of the country. The government should implement updated policies and regulations to filter, restrict, and regulate illicit content such as pornography. All schools should have counselling and rehabilitation pathways for teenagers addicted to porn, and information and awareness on the issue should be included in the national curriculum.
- Parents and guardians should uninstall inappropriate social media apps that affect students' learning. Apps that distract students, especially those related to games and social media, should be removed. Addictive apps like Facebook, WhatsApp, Bip, Instagram, Messenger, YouTube, and music players should be deleted to prevent distractions. Parents should ensure their children do not have Facebook accounts and do not have access to the internet.

Conclusion

The use of social media has become very popular all around the world, including PNG, due to the great development of technology in recent years. People from all walks of life use social media sites and many become addicted to social media usage. Some students find it hard to live without using social media in this technological era. While they have a strong desire to interact with friends and relatives on social media, it is important for social media users, especially students, to learn how to manage their time to avoid addiction, which can reduce their productivity and interactions with others. Parents, guardians, teachers and relevant authorities have to work together to find ways to reduce these negative effects of social media and help students prioritise their academic success.

References

- Agwi, U.C., and Ogwueleka, F.N. (2018). Impact of social media on students' academic performance. *International Journal of Scientific & Engineering Research*, 9 (3):1454-1462 <https://www.ijser.org/researchpaper/Impact-Of-Social-Media-On-Students-Academic-Performance.pdf> (Accessed 04 April 2024).
- Mbabazi, R. (2018). Effects of social media on students academic performance in institutions of higher learning in Makindye Division-Kampala District. A Bachelor degree thesis submitted to College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Kampala International University. https://www.academia.edu/75479295/Effects_of_social_media_on_students_academic_performance_in_institutions_of_higher_learning_in_makindye_division_kampala?uc-sb-sw=102701471 (Accessed 04 April 2024)
- M-Saleh, H., Abdul, Z.K., and Ameen, A.A. (2017). The effect of Facebook on academic performance for undergraduate students at Charmo University. *International Journal of Computers & Technology*, 16(2), 7597-7602.
- Napoleon Inc. (2024). Facebook users in Papua New Guinea 2023. https://napoleoncat.com/stats/social-media-users-in-papua_new_guinea/2023/#section-facebook (Accessed 04 April 2024)
- Office of Censorship. (2023). Research on media and sexual content: young people's perspectives. Office of Censorship, Port Moresby.
- Okoampa-Larbi, R., Adu-Kumi, J., Tettey, C., Amisah, G., and Aboagye, S. (2021). Dynamics of social media on the academic performance of students in private universities in Ghana. *International Journal of Education and Development using Information and Communication Technology (IJEDICT)*, 17 (3): 110-123 <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1334567.pdf> (Accessed 04 April 2024).
- Pye, L., Rayfield, J., and Carr, R. (2023). PNG DataCo: Bridging the communication gap. <https://www.apacoutlookmag.com/technology/png-dataco-bridging-the-communication-gap> (Accessed 02 April 2024)
- Shewale, R. (12 January 2024). Facebook statistics and trends to know in 2024. <https://www.demandsage.com/facebook-statistics/> (Accessed 02 April 2024)

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Dr Olugbenga Ige, the Program Leader of NSIRRP at PNG NRI, and Hafford Norea, Research Officer for Education Research Program, PNG NRI, for their valuable comments on the earlier version of the manuscript.

About the author

Akam Tom is a Research Officer in the National Security and International Relations Research Program (NSIRRP) at the PNG National Research Institute (PNG NRI). He holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Anthropology and Sociology from the University of Papua New Guinea and a Post Graduate Diploma in Teaching Secondary and Tertiary from the Papua New Guinea Education Institute. His research interests include education, safety and security, international relations, and the informal sector.