

Modeling Academic Performance: The Interplay of Self-regulation, Digital Distractions and Social Media Presence Among University Students

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Abstract

In the present study, an attempt has been made to investigate the relationship among self-regulation, digital distraction, social media presence and academic achievement among university students in Assam, India. A quantitative descriptive research design has been employed to collect data from 300 undergraduate and postgraduate students. A standardised questionnaire has been used to measure self-regulation, digital distraction and social media presence, while academic achievement was assessed through self-reported academic scores. The findings of the study reveal that the majority of the students demonstrated moderate levels of self-regulation, digital distraction, social media presence and academic achievement. On the other hand, Pearson product-moment correlation analysis showed that self-regulation ($r = .023$, $p = .695$) and digital distraction ($r = .101$, $p = .082$) had weak and statistically non-significant relationships with academic achievement. But social media presence showed a weak but statistically significant positive relationship with academic achievement ($r = .210$, $p < .001$). Multiple regression analysis revealed that self-regulation, digital distraction and social media presence jointly contributed significantly to academic achievement, $F(3, 296) = 4.962$, $p = .002$, accounting for 4.8% of the variance in academic achievement ($R^2 = .048$). The study highlights the necessity of promoting the responsible use of technology, digital resilience and self-regulatory skills among the students so as to increase their academic success in today's digital learning environment.

Keywords: Academic Achievement, Digital Distraction, Self-regulation, Social Media Presence, Students.

Introduction

In the educational environment of the present system, digital technologies are an inseparable part of students' lives. Smartphones, laptops, tablets and internet-based applications are now widely used for both educational and personal purposes, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. Different studies have shown that digital technologies offer educational benefits, such as flexible learning, access to information, collaborative learning opportunities and improved communication between teachers and students (1, 2). However, alongside these benefits, the excessive and uncontrolled use of digital devices has emerged as a serious challenge to students' learning and academic achievement. Digital distraction is a major issue in the modern educational context. Digital distraction refers to students' tendency to engage with digital devices for non-academic purposes during study or learning sessions (3, 4). If students become

distracted by social media notifications, online videos, gaming applications, instant messaging, or browsing unrelated websites in their study hours. Over time, these interruptions will reduce concentration and negatively affect students' ability to focus on academic activities. Researchers have found that digital distractions often lead to "cyber-slacking" or media multitasking, in which students attempt to manage academic and non-academic activities simultaneously (5). Though students believe that they can do different tasks simultaneously, different studies suggest that the human brain cannot give full focus to multiple cognitively demanding tasks simultaneously. Alternatively, attention repeatedly shifts between activities, resulting in reduced efficiency and learning outcomes. The problem of digital distraction became more noticeable during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the shift to online and home-based learning increased students' exposure

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to multiple digital devices and platforms (5). Researchers observed that the constant availability of digital technologies during online learning increased interruptions, fragmented attention and reduced students' engagement with academic activities (6). Additionally, some studies have proven that frequent interruptions from digital devices affect students' cognitive functioning and academic performance negatively. When students continuously switch between academic tasks and digital devices, their attention becomes fragmented. This disintegration increases cognitive load, reduces information-processing efficiency and weakens memory retention (7, 8). Cognitive load theory states that the human brain has limitations in processing information. Therefore, excessive distractions consume mental resources which are important for learning, perceiving and conceiving educational content. Students who deliberately engage in media multitasking often perform poorly in comprehension, critical thinking and academic assessments compared to those students who can remain focused during learning activities (6, 9). Among different forms of digital distraction, one of the most common factors that affects students' learning behaviour is social media engagement. Social networking platforms like Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp are deeply embedded in students' everyday lives. These platforms offer opportunities for communication, entertainment, emotional expression and social interaction. However, excessive use of social media can divert students' attention away from academic responsibilities and reduce study time (10). Many students are even addicted to checking notifications, messages and updates in between their study periods. Researchers have connected this behaviour with psychological factors like Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), social anxiety and the desire for social connectedness, which may create problematic situations in the coming days. FoMO is the anxiety individuals experience when they believe others may be enjoying rewarding experiences without them (11). Students experiencing FoMO often feel compelled to remain constantly connected to social media platforms to avoid missing important social interactions or updates. These practices contribute to digital distraction and decrease students' ability to concentrate on academic tasks. Social media

platforms are designed to capture users' attention through notifications, likes, comments, reels and endless scrolling. These features create emotional satisfaction and instant accomplishment, which are very encouraging in repeated engagement even when students are aware that such behaviour negatively affects their studies (9). Consequently, students may develop compulsive checking and prolonged social media use, which can certainly hamper time management, concentration and academic productivity.

Nowadays, digital distractions and social media use are widespread. It is also true that not all students are affected in the same way. Here, one key factor influencing students' ability to manage digital distractions is self-regulation. Self-regulation refers to an individual's ability to plan, monitor and control thoughts, emotions, attention and behaviours to achieve long-term goals (12, 13). In educational settings, self-regulated students can set academic goals, organise study schedules, manage distractions, monitor their learning progress and systematically evaluate their own performance. Researchers have identified self-regulation as a protective factor against the negative effects of digital distraction. Students with strong self-regulation skills are better able to resist immediate digital temptations and maintain focus on academic tasks (14). Self-regulation helps maintain attention, control emotional impulses and prioritise academic responsibilities over short-term entertainment. Self-regulated learners actively engage in planning, self-monitoring and self-reflection, which improve academic achievement (13).

This study integrates self-regulated learning theory, cognitive load theory, uses and gratifications theory and fear of missing out (FoMO) to examine the interactions of self-regulation, digital distraction, social media presence and academic performance in technology-saturated environments.

Objectives of this Study

- a) To examine the level of self-regulation, digital distractions, social media presence and academic achievement.
- b) To assess the relationship between self-regulation and academic achievement.
- c) To assess the relationship between digital distractions and academic achievement.

- d) To assess the relationship between social media presence and academic achievement.
- e) To find out the joint contribution of self-regulation, digital distractions, social media presence on academic achievement.

Hypothesis

- a) There is no significant relationship between self-regulation and academic achievement.
- b) There is no significant relationship between digital distraction and academic achievement.
- c) There is no significant relationship between social media presence and academic achievement.
- d) There is no joint contribution of self-regulation, digital distractions, social media presence on academic achievement.

Methodology

Research Design

A quantitative and descriptive-correlational research design has been adopted to examine the relationships among self-regulation, digital distraction, social media presence and academic achievement among university students. To collect data from the participants at a single point of time cross-sectional survey approach was adopted. This research design was felt appropriate for the present study as it facilitates the measurement of relationship among variables and their existing conditions. The descriptive component of the study has been applied to determine the levels of self-regulation, digital distraction, social media presence and academic achievement among undergraduate and postgraduate students. Correlational component has been applied to find out the relationships between self-regulation and academic achievement, digital distraction and academic achievement and social media presence and academic achievement. Furthermore, the predictive component of the design aimed to assess the joint contribution of self-regulation, digital distraction and social media presence toward academic achievement through multiple regression analysis.

Participants

The target population for the study are undergraduate and postgraduate students who are enrolled in higher educational institutions of Assam, India. The present study was conducted in the state of Assam, located in the northeastern region of India (approximate GPS coordinates

between 24°08' N and 28°02' N, 89°42' E and 96°00' E). The state is characterized by diverse geographical, cultural and socio-economic conditions, making it an important setting for the present study. A total of 300 students (N = 300) participated in the study. Participants were selected through voluntary response using an online survey method. Data were collected using standardised questionnaires via Google Forms. The online mode of data collection enabled the researcher to reach students from different institutions and academic disciplines efficiently. Students were informed about the objectives and purpose of the study prior to the collection of data from them. The sample consisted of students representing diverse academic backgrounds and levels of study, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the relationships among self-regulation, digital distraction, social media presence and academic achievement in the higher education context of Assam.

Measures

Aimed at evaluating self-regulation, digital distraction, social media presence and academic success data were collected using a structured questionnaire. Standardized and validated instruments were adapted to the Indian context to ensure the reliability and validity of the measurements.

Digital Distraction: The Digital Distraction Scale was used in the present study (15). The scale contains 16 items measured on a 5-point Likert scale. It examines different dimensions of distraction attributable to smartphone usage. The scales include items related to frequent checking of smartphones, engagement with online notifications and shifting attention from academic work to digital media.

Self-regulation: The Self-Regulation Scale was employed to assess the self-regulation capacity of the students (16). The scale consists of 12 items on a 4-point scale. It includes components such as goal setting, monitoring of learning progress, persistence in task completion and regulation of impulses and distractions.

Social Media Presence: The Social Media Presence Scale was used in this study (17). The scale has been used to assess the engagement and social media presence of the students which encompasses the frequency of their usage, interaction with the online networks, sharing of

the contents and the time spent on different social media activities.

Academic Performance: Academic performance was assessed using students' self-reported Grade Point Average (GPA) from their most recent academic examinations.

Statistical Techniques Used: Both descriptive and inferential statistics were analyzed for the present study. The data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 27.0 (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA).

Results

Objective-wise analysis and interpretation of the data are presented below:

Objective a): To examine the level of self-regulation, digital distractions, social media presence and academic achievement.

Self-regulation scores (N=300) revealed moderate levels with significant individual variability, highlighting the various metacognitive abilities among students. A significant majority (81.67%) demonstrated average self-regulation, reflecting fundamental competencies in planning, monitoring and managing learning behaviors. While smaller groups exhibited elevated (6.67%) or very high (7.33%) levels, signifying superior self-discipline and goal-oriented skills, just 4.33% displayed low levels, with none falling within the extremely low range.

Digital distraction metrics revealed moderate and relatively consistent exposure to disruptions, including notifications, multitasking and social media, during educational or academic activities. 68% perceived their distraction levels as average, while 11% reported high and 3% reported very high levels of distraction, which could negatively

impact attention and time management. Conversely, 18% exhibited a greater degree of digital control, including 15% low and 13% very low levels.

The social media presence exhibited a moderate level of engagement, which indicates its regular integration into students' everyday routines without excessive participation. 75.33% of students were classified as having average engagement, whereas 12.67% shown low engagement and 12% indicated high engagement.

Academic performance remained consistent among students. A significant majority (72.67%) exhibited average academic performance, which indicated excellent academic achievements. Moreover, 16% of students had high achievement, which reflects effective learning practices and academic proficiency. Nonetheless, 11.33% of students were identified as low performers, which suggests a potential need for academic assistance and intervention.

Objective b): To assess the relationship between self-regulation and academic achievement.

Objective c): To assess the relationship between digital distractions and academic achievement.

Objective d): To assess the relationship between social media presence and academic achievement.

The correlation coefficients and corresponding significance values are presented in Table 1. The analysis aimed to determine the direction, strength and statistical significance of the associations between the study variables among the participants (N = 300).

Table 1: Bivariate Correlations Among Study Variables (N = 300)

Variable	Self-Regulation	Digital Distraction	Social Media Presence	Academic Achievement
Self-Regulation	1	—	—	.023 (p = .695)
Digital Distraction	—	1	—	.101 (p = .082)
Social Media Presence	—	—	1	.210** (p < .001)
Academic Achievement	.023 (p = .695)	.101 (p = .082)	.210** (p < .001)	1

Note: n = sample size, **p= significance level.

Pearson product-moment correlations examined relationships among self-regulation, digital distraction, social media presence and academic performance (N = 300). Self-regulation and academic performance demonstrated a very weak, non-significant positive correlation ($r = .023$, $p =$

.695). Digital distraction and academic performance exhibited a weak, non-significant positive correlation ($r = .101$, $p = .082$), which indicated no significant relationship between the two variables at the 95% level of confidence.

Conversely, social media presence revealed a weak but statistically significant positive correlation with academic performance ($r = .210$, $p < .001$). Hence, the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant relationship between social media presence and academic achievement was rejected. Thus, only social media presence emerged as a significant correlate of academic achievement in the present study.

Objective e): To find out the joint contribution of self-regulation, digital distractions, social media presence on academic achievement

To examine the joint contribution of self-regulation, digital distraction and social media presence to academic achievement, a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted. The model summary and analysis of variance (ANOVA) results are presented in Tables 2 and 3, respectively. The regression analysis was performed to determine the extent to which the predictor variables collectively explain variations in students' academic achievement and to assess the overall significance of the regression model.

Table 2: Multicollinearity Diagnostics

Predictor	Tolerance	VIF
Self-Regulation	.969	1.032
Digital Distraction	.822	1.216
Social Media Presence	.800	1.251

Note: VIF = Variance Inflation Factor.

Multicollinearity diagnostics were conducted to examine the independence of the predictors included in the regression model. Tolerance values ranged from .800 to .969, while variance inflation factor (VIF) values ranged from 1.032 to 1.251. As all tolerance values were substantially above .10 and all VIF values were well below the commonly

accepted threshold of 5, the results indicated that multicollinearity was not a concern. Therefore, self-regulation, digital distraction and social media presence were sufficiently distinct to be included simultaneously as predictors of academic achievement.

Table 3: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.219	.048	.038	1.20230

Note: R = Multiple Correlation Coefficient, R^2 = Coefficient of Determination, Adjusted R^2 = Adjusted Coefficient of Determination. Predictors: (Constant), Digital Distraction, Self-regulation and Social Media Presence.

Table 4: ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	21.520	3	7.173	4.962	.002
	Residual	427.877	296	1.446		
	Total	449.396	299			

Note: Dependent Variable: Academic Performance, Predictors: (Constant), Digital distraction, Self-regulation, Social Media Presence. ANOVA = Analysis of Variance; df = Degrees of Freedom; F = F-statistic.

A multiple regression analysis was performed to assess the combined predictive impact of digital distraction, self-regulation and social media presence on academic achievement ($N = 300$) as shown in Table 4. The model was statistically significant, $F(3, 296) = 4.962$, $p = .002$, with a multiple correlation coefficient of $R = .219$. The predictors accounted for 4.8% of the variance in academic performance ($R^2 = .048$, adjusted $R^2 = .038$), which suggests a low effect size, with a standard error of the estimate of 1.202. This

modest explanatory power suggests that these digital and behavioral elements contribute jointly but marginally.

The null hypothesis stating that self-regulation, digital distraction and social media presence do not jointly contribute significantly to academic achievement is rejected. The regression model was statistically significant $F(3, 296) = 4.962$, $p < .01$, indicating that these variables jointly contribute to the prediction of academic achievement. However, their contribution is relatively modest, accounting

for only 4.8% of the total variance in academic achievement.

Discussion

From the present study, the relationship between self-control, digital distractions, use of social media and academic performance among university students in Assam. The findings have given useful facts regarding how students manage their studies in a technology-infused teaching-learning environment and also how their behaviour and mental habits affect their academic success.

From the descriptive findings, it is also revealed that 81.67% of students demonstrated moderate levels of self-regulation. It indicates that they take control of basic capacities for planning, monitoring and controlling their learning behaviour. This finding aligns with the theoretical assumptions of Self-Regulated Learning (SRL). Many researchers identified self-regulation as a key factor in successful academic functioning (13, 18). It suggests active management of learners towards their cognitive and motivational processes to achieve academic goals. The predominance of average self-regulation among students suggests that although learners possess foundational regulatory skills, many may not have developed advanced strategies which are necessary to effectively manage the growing digital demands of contemporary academic life. Only 4.33% of students exhibited high self-regulatory capacities. This calls attention to the need for institutional interventions to strengthen these competencies.

The findings further imply that digital distraction was moderately prevalent, with a considerable proportion of students reporting frequent interruptions from notifications, multitasking and non-academic digital engagement during study sessions. This supports previous studies, which reported that frequent digital interruptions reduce concentration and classroom engagement (5, 6). Also found that students often switch between academic work and social media, leading to fragmented attention and reduced learning efficiency (19). The findings are consistent with Cognitive Load Theory (20). This theory explains that excessive external stimuli can overload working memory and hinder meaningful learning. Although digital distraction was common, its relationship with academic achievement was found to be weak and statistically non-significant.

This suggests that not every form of digital distraction directly harm academic outcomes, or that students may have developed adaptive coping mechanisms to manage occasional interruptions. Furthermore, media multitasking increases cognitive load and negatively affects comprehension and retention (7, 8)

Again, self-regulation showed a very weak and non-significant positive relationship with academic achievement, contrary to some previous studies that have identified self-regulation as a strong predictor of academic success (21). Strong self-regulation helps students to manage technology use effectively and supports academic success. Such differences in findings may reveal that academic achievement is influenced by multiple situational factors beyond individual self-regulatory ability. These factors may include instructional quality, assessment systems, socio-economic conditions and emotional wellbeing. It is furthermore feasible that in real learning situations, self-reported measures of self-regulation may not fully capture students' actual behavioural practices.

Similarly, digital distraction did not show a strong negative effect on academic achievement, although the relationship was moderately positive. But previous studies reported that media multitasking and excessive digital engagement negatively affect academic outcomes (22, 23). Digital tools provide flexible access to learning materials, communication and academic resources (1, 2). This may seem surprising, but it suggests that using digital devices does not always have a harmful effect. No doubt, digital tools can sometimes distract students, but it also helps them to access required study materials, communicate and find information effortlessly. So, it can be concluded that the impact of digital distraction may depend more on how students use technology rather than simply how often they are interrupted by it.

One of the important findings of this study is that social media use appeared as a weak but significant positive connection with academic achievement. This refers to the fact that students who are more active on social media may also perform better academically. This may happen because social media can help students to connect with others, share information, work together on academic tasks and access support from learning communities. This interpretation is also partially

supported by studies that revealed social media can enhance communication and collaborative learning when used purposefully (24). This finding can also be explained using the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which suggests that people use media to meet specific needs such as social interaction, gaining knowledge and emotional support (25). In this way, social media may not be regarded as a distraction but can also be a useful academic tool when it is used purposefully and productively. But this finding contrasts with studies that have associated social media use with poorer academic performance (26, 27).

From the regression analysis, it is found that self-regulation, digital distraction, as well as social media presence jointly contributed significantly to academic achievement, although their combined explanatory power was relatively small (4.8%). This indicates that while these variables influence academic performance, they account for only a limited portion of the overall variance. Academic achievement is inherently multidimensional and likely shaped by numerous additional factors such as motivation, family support, institutional resources, learning strategies and mental health conditions. This observation coincided with some studies that highlighted the importance of environmental and institutional factors such as classroom climate, academic support and learning resources (28, 29)

The findings have significant implications for universities, teachers, students and other educational stakeholders. Educational institutions should promote programs and strategies that support students' self-regulation skills and help them to manage digital distractions effectively. Teachers can also help students use social media in a productive manner for communication, collaboration and access to academic resources rather than having it become a distraction.

However, there are some limitations in the study. The relatively small sample size may limit generalizability of the findings to a wider population of university students. Therefore, future studies should include larger and varied samples in different educational contexts. Further research could also look at other variables that impact academic performance and employ longitudinal designs to gain a better understanding of these relationships.

Conclusion

The present study investigated the relationship between self-regulation, digital distraction, social media presence and academic achievement among the university students of Assam. Results showed moderate amounts of digital engagement and distraction and basic self-regulation skills were shown by students. Effects of self-regulation and digital distraction on academic performance were small and social media presence was positively associated with academic achievement. The findings indicate that the academic impact of digital technology is highly contingent upon how, why and to what extent it is used.

The study improves the understanding of the digital behaviour of university students in the setting of Assam and highlights the potential educational benefits of purposeful social media use. Therefore, higher education institutions should encourage technological literacy, self-regulation, responsible technology use and digital resilience instead of only restricting digital access. The findings should be interpreted considering the limitations of the cross-sectional design, self-reported data and specific student population studied, which may limit generalizability and causal interpretation. Future studies can consider academic motivation, engagement, self-efficacy, study habits and online literacy, using longitudinal and mixed methods. To summarize, the study highlights the need for a balanced and positive approach to digital technology that maximizes its educational benefits while minimizing potential distractions.

Abbreviations

FoMO: Fear of Missing Out.

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Author Contributions

All the authors contributed equally to the research, designed the study, analyzed data and approved the final manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available upon reasonable request.

Declaration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Assistance

No generative AI has been used while preparing the manuscript or any of the figures. The authors take full responsibility for the content's originality, interpretation and accuracy.

Ethics Approval

The study involved undergraduate and postgraduate students and the participation was entirely voluntary. Informed consent was obtained from all the participants. Participants were assured of confidentiality; anonymity and their responses were solely used for academic and research purposes. This study adhered to the ethical principles outlined by the American Psychological Association.

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