

# Between Likes and Learning: The Role of Social Media in the Lives of Higher Secondary Students in Jowai Town

**Dafinia Passah**

Assistant Professor, Department of Education, North East Adventist University, Meghalaya.

## ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the impact of social media on higher secondary school students in Jowai Town, Meghalaya. With the growing integration of social media in the lives of students, the study aims to explore both its positive and negative implications—particularly focusing on academic performance, psychological development, and digital safety. The research adopts a descriptive methodology and collects primary data through questionnaires distributed to students from Classes XI and XII across several schools in Jowai. It finds that while social media enhances learning and communication, excessive and unregulated use can adversely affect mental health, concentration, and interpersonal relationships. The study concludes with educational implications and suggestions for policy interventions to promote safe and constructive usage.

**Keywords:** Social media, academic performance, psychological impact, Jowai Town, Meghalaya, adolescent behaviour.

## 1. Introduction

Education today is no longer confined to books, blackboards, and classrooms. In a world driven by digital connectivity, social media has emerged as a powerful influence shaping how students learn, communicate, and express themselves. This transformation is particularly visible among adolescents who are in a formative stage of their cognitive and emotional development. In this context, higher secondary students in places like Jowai Town, Meghalaya, are increasingly exposed to social networking platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube.

This paper aims to explore how these platforms are influencing the students' academic habits, social behavior, and psychological well-being. Social media, by definition, is a group of internet-based applications built on the foundations of Web 2.0, which enables the creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). It encompasses social networking sites, blogs, content communities, collaborative projects, and virtual worlds.

While these platforms allow students to exchange ideas, build peer relationships, and collaborate on educational tasks, they also serve as distractions and breeding grounds for problematic behaviors like cyberbullying, social comparison, addiction, and reduced academic performance. In small urban towns like Jowai, where digital literacy is still evolving, the situation becomes more complex. Students here often access social media without adequate guidance or awareness about online risks.

This paper investigates these dynamics by looking into how students in Classes XI and XII in Jowai Town use social media and the consequences of such usage. The study draws upon primary data to understand their online behavior, self-perception, and safety awareness. It attempts to bridge the gap between the opportunities and threats posed by social media in the academic and emotional life of teenagers in a semi-urban context.

## **2. Objectives of the Study**

This paper was undertaken with two main objectives:

1. To examine the extent and patterns of social media usage among higher secondary school students in Jowai Town.
2. To assess the students' awareness and practices regarding social media safety, and how their usage affects their academic performance, emotional well-being, and social relationships.

## **3. Methodology**

This paper employs a descriptive research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative techniques to gain a comprehensive understanding of the issue. The target population consisted of students from Classes XI and XII studying across thirteen higher secondary schools in Jowai Town. A sample of 478 students was selected using a purposive sampling method to ensure representation across genders and school types (government and private).

Data was collected using a structured questionnaire containing 36 close-ended items that assessed students' online behavior, academic use of social media, emotional responses, and digital safety practices. Respondents answered using a simple Yes/No format to statements like “I use social media for group study,” or “I have accepted friend requests from strangers.” The data was then analysed using percentage calculations to identify prevailing trends, behaviors, and risks. This approach enabled a clearer view of both the common patterns and critical deviations in student experiences.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

The findings of this paper reveal a complex and often contradictory relationship between students and social media platforms. A significant 75% of respondents admitted to uploading personal content like photos and videos online, highlighting the emphasis on digital visibility and self-image curation. Additionally, 60% frequently viewed media shared by others, suggesting a strong tendency toward passive consumption of online content alongside active participation.

On a positive note, 65% of students reported using social media for academic purposes, such as clearing doubts, accessing study materials, or group discussions. However, only 33% indicated that social media truly made them happy, suggesting that the platforms may serve more as a habit than a source of emotional satisfaction.

Despite high levels of engagement, many students demonstrated a desire for real-world interactions. 55% expressed a preference for in-person conversations over online chats. This reflects a retained value for physical social bonds amidst growing digital dependence. However, this was overshadowed by risky behaviors—91% of respondents confessed to accepting friend requests from strangers, and 65% admitted to meeting online contacts without informing their parents.

While 82% claimed to use privacy settings, and 78% said they were cautious about what they posted, only 29% reported negative or inappropriate content, and 27% involved parents when dealing with online

issues. These figures point to a worrying communication gap and a lack of awareness about online safety. Most students preferred to manage online threats silently, without adult intervention, thereby increasing their vulnerability.

Moreover, 56% of students checked their phones just before bedtime, indicating screen overexposure and disrupted sleep cycles, which can have cascading effects on health and academic focus. Interestingly, a notable 35% of the sample had never used social media at all—this could either indicate limited access or parental control, hinting at a socio-economic divide in digital exposure.

This paper also uncovers issues surrounding emotional dependency and validation. Many students admitted to feeling disappointed if their posts received fewer "likes" than those of peers. As research by Mysko (2021) suggests, this type of online comparison can lead to low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression.

Another concern lies in students' reluctance to involve parents or teachers when facing cyberbullying or online harassment. Such silence stems either from fear, embarrassment, or lack of trust, and points to a breakdown in student-adult communication regarding digital life.

Ultimately, this paper demonstrates that while social media offers several academic and communicative benefits, its improper use leads to risky behavior, emotional strain, and poor safety practices. The findings suggest an urgent need to strike a balance between use and regulation, awareness and access, independence and guidance.

## **5. Educational Implications**

This paper emphasises that integrating digital literacy into the higher secondary curriculum is no longer optional—it is a necessity. Students must be taught the ethical dimensions of social media use, including privacy management, cyberbullying awareness, emotional regulation, and information authenticity. Schools should conduct awareness campaigns and workshops on cyber safety, and include trained digital counsellors to guide students in navigating online spaces safely.

Teachers should be equipped to monitor students' online behaviour without invading privacy, and to embed social media in classroom learning in a structured and moderated way. Parents must also be engaged through orientation programs and encouraged to have open conversations with their children about online experiences and challenges.

At the policy level, educational institutions must advocate for age-appropriate digital education policies and collaborate with local stakeholders to promote safe online environments. These measures, collectively, can help students utilise social media as a tool for growth rather than a source of harm.

## **6. Conclusion**

This paper concludes that social media plays a significant, dual-faceted role in the lives of higher secondary students in Jowai Town. While it offers platforms for collaboration, creativity, and learning, unregulated and excessive use can jeopardize students' academic focus, mental health, and online safety. To ensure a healthier balance, this paper recommends empowering students through digital education, fostering parental involvement, and encouraging institutional accountability. Such a holistic approach will help build a generation of young people who are not only digitally competent but also emotionally resilient and socially responsible.

## 7. References

1. Abrenica, A., & Vargas, M. (2021). *Study on the effects of Social Media on Academic Performance of Don Ramon E. Costales Memorial National High School Student*. Shodhganga. <http://hdl.handle.net/10603/426720>
2. Alloway, T., & Alloway, R. (2012). *The Impact of Engagement with Social Networking Sites on Cognitive Skills*. Shodhganga.
3. Khan, S. (2012). *Impact of Social Networking Websites on Students*. Shodhganga.
4. Mysko, C. (2021). *Body Image and Social Media*. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*. Parihar, P. (2011). *Social Media Usage in Higher Education Institutions*. Shodhganga.
5. Phong, T., & Tu, N. (2013). *The Impact of Social Online Networking on Students' Study*. Shodhganga.
6. Rahman, S. A. (2023). *What is Social Media? Exploring Meaning, Types, Characteristics, and Disadvantages*. Simplilearn. <http://www.simplilearn.com>
7. Rithika, M., & Selvaraj, S. (2013). *Impact of Social Media on Students' Academic Performance*. Shodhganga.
8. Shanah, A., & Al-Tarawneh, H. (2015). *The Influence of Social Networks on High School Student Performance*. Shodhganga.
9. Zaidieh, A. (2012). *The Use of Social Networking in Education: Challenges and Opportunities*. Shodhganga.