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# Influence of Social Networking Sites on Interaction Patterns Among Social Sciences Students: A Study of the University of Sargodha, Sargodha City

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**Abstract**

The rapid proliferation of Social Networking Sites (SNS) has transformed interpersonal communication within higher education environments across Pakistan (Shafiq, 2021). This empirical study investigates the influence of SNS usage on the interaction patterns, academic engagement, and social behavior of social sciences students at the University of Sargodha, Sargodha City. Utilizing a quantitative survey research design, data was gathered from a stratified sample of N = 270 undergraduate and postgraduate students across multiple social science disciplines. A structured questionnaire demonstrated strong internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = 0.886$. Data were processed and analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential methods (Independent Samples t-tests and One-Way Analysis of Variance) via SPSS. Findings indicate that while SNS integration into daily life is widely perceived as essential across demographic groups ($p < 0.001$), there are no statistically significant differences between genders or academic departments regarding core behavioral outcomes—including family interaction patterns, feelings of social isolation, academic engagement, or online shopping habits. The paper concludes with actionable recommendations for promoting balanced digital engagement among university students.

**Keywords:** Social Networking Sites, Interaction Patterns, Social Sciences Students, Online Communication, University Students.

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## Introduction

### Background of the Study

Over the past two decades, Social Networking Sites (SNS)—including platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and X (formerly Twitter)—have transitioned from novel virtual communities into essential infrastructure for personal communication, scholarly collaboration, and daily identity expression. In contemporary higher education, students rely heavily on these platforms to maintain interpersonal connections, form peer study groups, and access formal and informal information channels (Mahmood et al., 2023).

While digital platforms collapse geographical barriers and facilitate rapid connectivity, they simultaneously alter real-world social dynamics. Academic literature frequently presents a duality regarding SNS integration: on one hand, digital channels empower students to broaden their social capital, exchange knowledge, and sustain distant relationships; on the other hand, excessive screen engagement is often linked to diminished face-to-face family interaction, increased feelings of phantom isolation, and continuous academic distraction (Saleem, 2014; Ullah et al., 2024).

## Statement of the Problem

Students enrolled in social science disciplines (e.g., Sociology, Psychology, Social Work, International Relations, Economics) are uniquely situated to analyze societal shifts, yet they remain equally vulnerable to the behavioral changes driven by pervasive digital connectivity. At the University of Sargodha, situated in the socio-cultural landscape of Sargodha City, Pakistan, digital adoption among university students has expanded rapidly (Shafiq, 2021). However, empirical localized evidence evaluating how SNS usage specifically reconfigures face-to-face family bonds, peer interactions, academic focus, and individual behavior remains limited. Understanding these dynamics is critical for developing supportive academic environments and student welfare policies.

## Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this research is to evaluate the positive and negative influences of SNS on the interaction patterns of social sciences students at the University of Sargodha. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. Assess student perceptions regarding the centrality of SNS in their everyday routines.
2. Evaluate variations in family interaction patterns, social tie construction, and feelings of isolation across demographic variables (e.g., gender).
3. Determine whether academic department affiliation leads to statistically significant differences in academic performance, classroom attention, time allocation, online shopping, and exposure to unvetted digital content.
4. Formulate evidence-based guidelines for balanced SNS usage in university settings.

## Methodology

### Research Design and Sampling Procedure

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional survey design to capture a snapshot of SNS usage patterns and behavioral responses among university students (Shafiq, 2021). The target population comprised undergraduate and postgraduate students enrolled across the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Sargodha.

A multi-stage random sampling technique was utilized to select N = 270 respondents from various departments (including Sociology, Psychology, Social Work, Economics, and Political Science/International Relations). Participation was voluntary, and strict standards of academic anonymity and informed consent were observed.

### Instrument and Reliability

Primary data were gathered using a structured questionnaire divided into three main sections:

- **Section A: Demographic Details** (Gender, Department, Program of Study).

- **Section B: Quantitative Measurements** on nominal scales assessing frequency of SNS use, online behaviors (e.g., shopping, interacting with strangers), and exposure patterns.
- **Section C: Likert-Scale Statements** (ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) evaluating family interaction, social tie formation, perceived isolation, class attention, and academic performance impact.

To verify the instrument's structural integrity, a pilot study was executed on a subgroup comprising 20% of the planned sample size (n = 54). Reliability testing yielded an overall Cronbach's Alpha of $\alpha = 0.886$, confirming strong internal consistency across all construct scales.

### Data Analysis Techniques

Data were coded, cleaned, and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS v26). Analysis was conducted in two phases:

1. **Descriptive Analysis:** Frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations to capture demographic distributions and baseline behavioral trends.
2. **Inferential Analysis:** Independent Samples t-tests to determine whether significant mean differences existed between male and female students, and One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to compare mean differences across academic departments.

## Results and Data Analysis

### Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1 outlines the demographic distribution of the 270 student participants across gender and academic department.

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Sample (N = 270)**

| Demographic Variable | Category | Frequency (f) | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Male | 122 | 45.2% |
| | Female | 148 | 54.8% |
| Department | Sociology | 64 | 23.7% |
| | Psychology | 58 | 21.5% |
| | Social Work | 52 | 19.3% |
| | Economics | 50 | 18.5% |
| | Political Science / IR | 46 | 17.0% |
| Total | | 270 | 100.0% |

### Gender Differences in Interaction Patterns and Perceptions

To assess whether gender plays a role in how SNS impacts student interactions and personal well-being, independent samples t-tests were calculated across three primary dimensions: family interaction quality, construction of new social ties, and feelings of digital isolation.

**Table 2: Independent Samples t-test by Gender**

| Measured Variable | Gender | Mean (M) | Std. Dev (SD) | t-value | df | p-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Family Interaction Patterns | Male | 3.62 | 0.84 | 0.742 | 268 | 0.459 |
| | Female | 3.55 | 0.76 | | | |
| Construction of Social Ties | Male | 3.88 | 0.71 | 1.104 | 268 | 0.271 |
| | Female | 3.79 | 0.65 | | | |
| Feelings of Social Isolation | Male | 2.84 | 1.02 | -0.385 | 268 | 0.701 |
| | Female | 2.89 | 1.08 | | | |

As reflected in Table 2, there were no statistically significant differences between male and female students regarding Family Interaction Patterns ($t(268) = 0.742$, $p = 0.459$), Construction of Social Ties ($t(268) = 1.104$, $p = 0.271$), or perceived Feelings of Social Isolation ($t(268) = -0.385$, $p = 0.701$). Both genders report moderate-to-high levels of social tie maintenance alongside moderate preservation of family communication, reinforcing findings in similar university student cohorts (Ullah et al., 2024).

**Inter-Departmental Comparisons (One-Way ANOVA)**

A series of One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) tests were performed to evaluate whether departmental culture or curriculum demands influenced SNS interactions, academic focus, or risk exposure.

**Table 3. One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Across Academic Departments**

| Dependent Variable | Source | Sum of Sq (SS) | df | Mean Sq (MS) | F-statistic | p-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Academic Performance Impact** | Between | 2.145 | 4 | 0.536 | 0.842 | 0.500 |
| | Within | 168.805 | 265 | 0.637 | | |
| **Class Attention & Focus** | Between | 3.012 | 4 | 0.753 | 1.018 | 0.398 |
| | Within | 195.988 | 265 | 0.740 | | |
| **Interaction w/ Unfamiliar Persons** | Between | 1.890 | 4 | 0.473 | 0.612 | 0.654 |
| | Within | 204.710 | 265 | 0.772 | | |
| **Online Shopping Habits** | Between | 2.441 | 4 | 0.610 | 0.735 | 0.569 |
| | Within | 220.019 | 265 | 0.830 | | |
| **Exposure to Unwanted Content** | Between | 4.112 | 4 | 1.028 | 1.215 | 0.304 |
| | Within | 224.288 | 265 | 0.846 | | |
| **Perception of SNS as Daily Essential** | Between | 14.850 | 4 | 3.713 | 5.244 | 0.000* |
| | Within | 187.615 | 265 | 0.708 | | |

As displayed in Table 3, inter-departmental comparisons revealed no statistically significant differences across most academic and behavioral variables ($p > 0.05$). However, a statistically significant difference emerged regarding the Perception of SNS as an Essential Part of Everyday Life ($F(4, 265) = 5.244$, $p < 0.001$). Post-hoc analyses indicated that students in departments with higher reliance on digital research and group project coordination reported higher baseline dependency on SNS for daily functioning compared to peer departments (Mahmood et al., 2023).

## Discussion

The empirical results of this study offer a nuanced understanding of digital platform adoption among social sciences students at the University of Sargodha.

Contrary to widespread popular assertions that social media universally destroys traditional family interaction or induces acute isolation, the findings show that students maintain moderate family communication ($M = 3.55$–$3.62$) alongside high social connectivity ($M = 3.79$–$3.88$). These observations align with findings by Ullah et al. (2024), who noted that university students actively leverage digital platforms to sustain existing offline social networks alongside primary family ties. The lack of statistically significant differences across genders suggests that digital networking tools have normalized across male and female student populations equally, serving as neutral channels for sustaining peer bonds.

Furthermore, the absence of departmental variation across academic disruption, unwanted content exposure, and online commerce reflects a standardized digital student culture across Pakistani higher education (Sarwar, 2023). Regardless of specific social science disciplines, university students encounter comparable digital distractions and learning tools.

However, the statistically significant variation regarding the perception of SNS as an 'everyday essential' ($p < 0.001$) underscores how digital media has evolved from an optional recreational tool into a foundational platform for student life (Mahmood et al., 2023; Shafiq, 2021). Because students view SNS as indispensable for academic coordination, news consumption, and social life, attempting to eliminate platform usage is neither practical nor effective. Instead, institutional strategies must focus on fostering digital literacy and productive time management.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

### Conclusion

This study investigated the influence of Social Networking Sites on the interaction patterns and behavior of social sciences students at the University of Sargodha. The empirical analysis demonstrates that SNS integration has a multi-faceted presence:

1. SNS platforms are universally regarded as vital for daily communication, peer network maintenance, and academic updates.
2. Male and female students display comparable patterns of family engagement, social tie maintenance, and personal isolation.
3. Departmental affiliation does not heavily dictate classroom distraction, online commercial activity, or exposure risks, but it does influence the intensity of daily platform dependency.

In summary, SNS usage serves as a double-edged sword: while it enhances continuous networking and information sharing, its pervasive nature demands conscious management to prevent subtle disruptions in academic focus and real-world interactions.

## Recommendations

1. **Promote Digital Wellness Programs:** University administration and student counseling centers should organize workshops focusing on digital balance, time-blocking, and managing academic distraction.
2. **Integrate Structured Academic Platforms:** Faculty members should channel academic group discussions through dedicated Learning Management Systems (LMS) rather than informal social media groups to reduce non-academic side discussions during study hours.
3. **Encourage Offline Co-Curricular Engagement:** Departments within the Faculty of Social Sciences should organize structured campus debates, cultural seminars, and sports activities to encourage face-to-face interaction and strengthen physical community ties.
4. **Conduct Longitudinal Future Research:** Future studies should expand sample sizes across broader geographical regions and incorporate qualitative interviews to capture nuanced psychological impacts of long-term SNS reliance.

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