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(IJMOE)www.gaexcellence.com/ijmoePATTERNS OF SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE
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Abstract:

Social media has become deeply embedded in students' everyday lives, influencing patterns of communication, information access, and digital interaction. Examining students' social media use is therefore essential to understanding how digital platforms shape behavioural tendencies and learning experiences in higher education contexts. This study aims to examine the patterns of social media usage among students at Politeknik Mersing Johor. Using a quantitative descriptive survey design, data were collected from 193 students across different academic programmes and semesters through an online questionnaire and analysed using descriptive statistics. The findings indicate that social media usage is highly prevalent among the respondents. TikTok and YouTube were the most widely used platforms, followed by Instagram and Telegram, while TikTok emerged as the most frequently used platform overall. Most students reported spending between four and six hours per day on social media, indicating that these platforms form a significant part of their daily routine. The results also show that students primarily use social media for communication, entertainment, and social interaction rather than for academic purposes. Overall, the study provides a clear institutional profile of students' digital behaviour and offers useful insights for polytechnic administrators and educators in planning communication strategies, promoting digital well-being, and integrating social media more purposefully into educational practices.

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Keyword:

Digital Social Usage, Online Interaction, Technical Education
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Introduction

Social media has become deeply embedded in students' daily lives in higher education, shaping how they communicate, access information, maintain peer connections, and participate in digital interaction (Goodyear et al., 2025; Smith & Storrs, 2023). Platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, Telegram, and Facebook are widely used for communication, entertainment, information seeking, and social interaction. As digital technologies continue to shape students' lifestyles and engagement patterns, understanding how students use these platforms has become increasingly important for educational institutions (Smith & Storrs, 2023).

In higher education, social media serves not only as a tool for informal interactions but also as a means for students to maintain peer connections, obtain information, respond to institutional messages, and sometimes engage with learning-related content (Smith & Storrs, 2023). Its growing role in student life offers various opportunities and challenges. Smith and Storrs (2023) argue that social media can support student communication, collaborative interaction, and access to learning-related materials. However, excessive or habitual social media use may contribute to distraction, dependence, media multitasking, and reduced academic concentration (Sun & Chao, 2024; Goodyear et al., 2025).

For polytechnic institutions, examining students' actual patterns of social media usage is particularly important. Polytechnic students are part of a digitally connected student population, particularly as Malaysia's polytechnic sector continues to emphasise digitalisation through initiatives such as the Poli Digital agenda (Zikri, 2023). Knowledge of the platforms they use most frequently, the time they spend online, and the variations across demographic groups can assist institutions in developing more effective communication strategies, supporting student well-being, and encouraging more purposeful educational uses of social media (Goodyear et al., 2025).

Although social media use among students has been widely discussed in higher education research, contextual evidence at the institutional level remains necessary because usage patterns may vary across educational settings, student characteristics, and disciplinary backgrounds (Al-Qaysi, 2023; Smith & Storrs, 2023). In Malaysian higher education, existing studies have examined social media use among students more broadly, but institution-specific evidence on platform preference, daily usage duration, and demographic variation in polytechnic settings remains limited (Mat Isa et al., 2022; Jafry et al., 2023). Therefore, this

study focuses on students at Politeknik Mersing Johor in order to provide an institutional profile of their social media behaviour.

Accordingly, this study aims to:

1. identify the social media platforms most commonly used by students at Politeknik Mersing Johor;
2. examine the amount of time students spend on social media each day; analyse the overall pattern of social media usage among students; and
3. describe social media usage according to respondents' demographic background, namely gender, age, programme, and semester.

This study adopts a descriptive approach to examine students' social media behavioural patterns, situating the analysis within technology acceptance perspectives, thereby linking observed usage patterns to educational implications.

Literature Review

Social Media in Higher Education

Social media has become a central feature of student life in higher education and is now widely regarded as part of the broader digital culture of contemporary learners (Goodyear et al., 2025). Its role extends beyond entertainment and interpersonal communication to include information exchange, peer interaction, identity expression, institutional communication, and, in some cases, academic engagement (Smith & Storrs, 2023). As a result, social media is increasingly recognised as an influential factor shaping students' experiences, behaviours, and engagement in higher education contexts.

The growth of social media use in educational contexts has attracted considerable scholarly attention because these platforms shape communication patterns, access to information, and forms of participation among students (Al-Qaysi et al., 2023). Recent work further indicates that higher education institutions use social platforms for communication, visibility, and student engagement. However, the educational value of these platforms depends on how they are implemented in pedagogical and institutional strategies (Kefalaki, 2024). This suggests that understanding students' social media practices is essential for institutions such as polytechnics, where evidence on students' platform preferences, usage intensity, and engagement patterns can inform communication strategies and student support initiatives.

Students' engagement with social media can be understood through technology acceptance theory, which posits that perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use are key determinants of behavioural intention and actual adoption of technologies (Davis, 1989; Dumpit & Fernandez, 2017). In the polytechnic context, the high adoption of platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram likely reflects their combination of user-friendly interfaces and social or instrumental value, which helps explain why these platforms dominate students' daily digital interactions.

Patterns of Social Media Usage Among Students

Previous studies indicate that student social media usage is influenced by factors such as convenience, accessibility, immediacy, visual appeal, and entertainment value (Al-Qaysi et al.,

2023; Goodyear et al., 2025). Platforms that are highly visual and mobile-friendly often attract greater engagement, especially among younger users who prefer fast, interactive, and personalised content (Goodyear et al., 2025). Students also tend to maintain accounts on multiple social media platforms, although their attention is typically concentrated on one or two preferred applications that dominate their daily digital routines (Astleitner & Schlick, 2025).

The amount of time students spend on social media is another major aspect of usage patterns. Previous studies have shown that many students spend several hours per day browsing content, communicating with peers, and consuming entertainment through social media platforms (Kolhar et al., 2021; Goodyear et al., 2025). Such frequent engagement indicates that social media is not a peripheral activity, but rather a routine component of everyday student life. Understanding these usage patterns is important because the frequency and duration of engagement may shape students' communication habits, attention patterns, and broader educational experiences (Sun & Chao, 2024; Al-Qaysi et al., 2023).

Social Media for Communication and Learning

Goodyear et al. (2025) show that communication, entertainment, social interaction, and information seeking are common motives for students' social media use. Through these platforms, students maintain contact with peers, participate in online communities, follow trends, and consume a wide range of multimedia content. The strong appeal of social media in student life is closely linked to its immediacy, convenience, and capacity to support continuous connection within digitally mediated environments (Al-Qaysi et al., 2023).

Social media also holds significant potential in educational contexts. In Malaysia, Al-Rahmi et al. (2018) discovered that social media usage in higher education can enhance learning outcomes by fostering collaboration, engagement, and perceived usefulness. Students often utilise these platforms to access announcements, share coursework-related information, engage in academic discussions, and connect with learning communities (Smith & Storrs, 2023). However, the educational contribution of social media depends largely on how intentionally and effectively these platforms are integrated into teaching, learning, and institutional communication (Al-Qaysi et al., 2023). Although social media can support learning when intentionally integrated into teaching and peer collaboration, students often continue to use it primarily for communication, entertainment, and social interaction rather than for formal academic purposes (Dumpit & Fernandez, 2017; Sobaih et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2024). This suggests that the educational potential of social media should not be assumed but instead examined in relation to students' actual usage behaviour.

Demographic Differences in Social Media Usage

Social media usage may vary across demographic factors such as gender, age, academic programme, and level or semester of study. Previous research suggests that demographic differences in social media use may reflect variation in communication preferences, platform choice, digital habits, and purposes of engagement (Aran-Ramspott et al., 2024; Dumford et al., 2023; Goodyear et al., 2025). Gender differences, in particular, have received considerable attention, with some studies reporting higher engagement among female students, while others indicate that usage patterns differ according to platform type and purpose of use (Aran-Ramspott et al., 2024). Aran-Ramspott et al. (2024) also argued that age and educational

background may shape social media behaviour, as students from different academic programmes or stages of study may vary in their platform preferences, intensity of use, and reasons for engagement. These differences are important because student populations are not homogeneous, and institutional strategies based on broad assumptions may overlook meaningful variation within the student body (Al-Qaysi et al., 2023). A demographic perspective, therefore, offers a more nuanced understanding of social media usage patterns in higher education (Al-Qaysi et al., 2023; Goodyear et al., 2025).

Research Methodology

This study employed a quantitative descriptive survey design to examine patterns of social media usage among students at Politeknik Mersing Johor (PMJ). The population comprised students from Semester 1 to Semester 5 across several academic programmes at PMJ during the Second Session of the 2024/2025 academic year. A total of 193 students participated in the study.

The respondents consisted of 96 male students (49.7%) and 97 female students (50.3%). They were drawn from five academic programmes, namely the Diploma in Information Technology (DIT/DDT), Diploma in Electrical and Electronic Engineering (DEE), Diploma in Electrical Engineering (DET), Diploma in Office Management and Secretary Studies (DSK), and Diploma in Business Studies (DPM). The sample was obtained using convenience sampling based on students' voluntary participation in the online survey.

Research Instrument and Data Collection

Data were collected using an online questionnaire administered through Google Forms. The instrument consisted of two main sections. The first section collected respondents' demographic information, including gender, age, programme, and semester. The second section focused on social media usage patterns, including preferred platforms, daily time spent, frequency of use, interaction with friends on social media, use during feelings of loneliness, and use of social media for learning.

A pilot study was conducted prior to data collection to assess the instrument's reliability. The questionnaire demonstrated good internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha value of .840, indicating that the items were sufficiently reliable for descriptive analysis. The questionnaire link was distributed online to students, and responses were collected electronically. Participation in the survey was voluntary, and the data obtained were used solely for research purposes.

Results

Respondent Profile

The respondent profile suggests a broadly distributed student sample. Female students represented 50.3% of the sample and male students 49.7%. Most respondents were aged 18–19 years (47.7%) or 20–21 years (43.5%). The largest programme group was DDT/DIT (45.1%), followed by DPM (19.2%), DEE (17.6%), DSK (10.9%), and DET (7.3%). Semester 2 students formed the largest semester group (36.3%), followed by Semester 4 students (32.6%).

Demographic Profile Of Respondents

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	96	49.7
	Female	97	50.3
Age	18–19 years	92	47.7
	20–21 years	84	43.5
	22 years and above	17	8.8
Programme	DDT/DIT	87	45.1
	DPM	37	19.2
	DEE	34	17.6
	DSK	21	10.9
	DET	14	7.3
Semester	Semester 1	37	19.2
	Semester 2	70	36.3
	Semester 3	10	5.2
	Semester 4	63	32.6
	Semester 5	13	6.7

Social Media Platforms Used

Table 2 shows that social media usage was highly prevalent across the sample. TikTok and YouTube were the most used platforms, each selected by 88.1% of respondents, followed closely by Instagram (86.0%) and Telegram (78.2%). Facebook, X/Twitter, and Snapchat were used by substantially smaller proportions of students. The distribution indicates a clear preference for video-based, highly visual, and mobile-friendly platforms.

Social Media Platforms Used By Respondents (Multiple Responses Allowed)

Platform	n	%
TikTok	170	88.1
YouTube	170	88.1
Instagram	166	86.0
Telegram	151	78.2
Facebook	71	36.8
X/Twitter	54	28.0
Snapchat	30	15.5

Preferred Platform And Time Spent On Social Media

When respondents were asked to select the single platform they used most frequently, TikTok was the dominant choice, accounting for 65.3% of responses. YouTube (18.1%) and Instagram (14.0%) followed at a considerable distance. This suggests that while students maintain accounts across several platforms, day-to-day attention is concentrated on a narrower set, particularly TikTok.

Most Frequently Used Social Media Platform

Platform	n	%
TikTok	126	65.3
YouTube	35	18.1
Instagram	27	14.0
Facebook	3	1.6
Telegram	1	0.5
X/Twitter	1	0.5

Social media use was also intensive in terms of time spent. Nearly half of the respondents (47.7%) reported spending 4–6 hours per day on social media, while 35.8% reported 1–3 hours per day and 16.6% reported more than 6 hours per day. The results indicate that social media is embedded in students' daily routines rather than being used occasionally or incidentally.

Average Time Spent On Social Media Per Day

Duration	n	%
1–3 hours	69	35.8
4–6 hours	92	47.7
More than 6 hours	32	16.6

Descriptive Statistics For Social Media Usage

Table 5 presents the descriptive statistics for the five-item social media usage scale. The overall mean was 3.53, which indicates a high level of usage. The highest mean was recorded for the statement “I use social media every day” ($M = 4.61$, $SD = 0.58$), followed by “I use social media for more than 3 hours a day” ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 0.92$). By contrast, “I use social media when I feel lonely” ($M = 2.67$, $SD = 1.37$) and “I use social media for learning purposes” ($M = 2.74$, $SD = 1.25$) obtained lower means. This pattern suggests that students' social media engagement is driven more by routine use, communication, and entertainment than by explicitly academic purposes.

Descriptive Statistics For The Social Media Usage Items

Item	Mean	SD
I use social media every day.	4.61	0.58
I use social media for more than 3 hours a day.	4.2	0.92
I use social media to interact with friends.	3.46	1.29
I use social media when I feel lonely.	2.67	1.37
I use social media for learning purposes.	2.74	1.25
Overall mean	3.53	-

Demographic Differences In Social Media Usage

The descriptive results indicate some variation in overall social media usage across respondents' demographic backgrounds. Female students recorded a higher mean usage score than male students, with some variation observed across academic programmes, age groups,

and semesters. Since this study used descriptive analysis, these differences are interpreted as sample-based patterns rather than evidence of statistically significant group differences.

Mean Overall Social Media Usage Score By Gender

Gender	Mean	SD
Male	3.25	0.73
Female	3.82	0.67

Table 6 shows that female students recorded a higher mean overall social media usage score than male students. Female students recorded a higher mean usage score ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 0.67$) than male students ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 0.73$).

Discussion

The findings confirm that social media occupies a central place in the everyday lives of students at Politeknik Mersing Johor. The dominance of TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram suggests that students are strongly oriented towards visually rich and algorithm-driven platforms. This pattern is consistent with broader higher education literature showing that students' platform choices are shaped by convenience, immediacy, entertainment value, and multimedia interaction (Perez et al., 2023; Zachos et al., 2018).

The time-based findings reinforce the same point. With almost half of the sample spending 4–6 hours per day on social media and another 16.6% exceeding 6 hours daily, social media is not a peripheral activity in student life. Rather, it forms part of the environment through which students maintain peer contact, consume information, and structure daily routines. Similar patterns have been reported in other university settings, where social media is closely linked to communication, social interaction, and everyday information seeking (Kolhar et al., 2021).

At the same time, the relatively low mean for social media use for learning purposes is notable. Although social media can support collaboration, content sharing, and course communication, the present findings indicate that students at Politeknik Mersing still use it primarily for non-academic purposes. This finding supports earlier work showing that the educational value of social media depends on purposeful instructional design, active facilitation, and alignment with learning goals, rather than mere student access to social platforms (Dumpit & Fernandez, 2017; Sobaih et al., 2016; Sivakumar et al., 2023).

The gender-based descriptive pattern also deserves attention. Female students recorded a higher mean overall usage score than male students. This pattern is broadly consistent with studies from other higher education contexts showing that female students may report higher levels of online social activity, viewing frequency, or engagement with peer-related content (Dumford et al., 2023; Aran-Ramspott et al., 2024). However, because the present study used descriptive analysis, this difference should be interpreted as a sample-based pattern rather than evidence of a statistically significant gender difference.

The findings confirm that social media occupies a central place in the daily lives of students at Politeknik Mersing Johor. The dominance of TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram indicates that students' platform choices are influenced by perceived usefulness and ease of use, consistent with technology acceptance theory (Davis, 1989; Dumpit & Fernandez, 2017). High

engagement levels suggest that behavioural intention translates into actual use, particularly on visually rich and algorithm-driven platforms, highlighting the integral role of social media in students' digital routines.

This study provides a detailed profile of social media preferences, engagement times, and demographic differences (gender, age, program, semester) within a Malaysian polytechnic context, addressing a gap in the literature that often focuses on broader university populations. The results point to several practical implications. First, polytechnics should integrate social media literacy and digital well-being into student development programs, treating these competencies as essential rather than peripheral. Second, institutional communication strategies should align with the platforms students use most, leveraging high-traffic platforms for structured teaching, student engagement, and promoting digital well-being. Third, academic staff may benefit from support and training to purposefully incorporate these platforms into pedagogically appropriate teaching practices, thereby bridging descriptive behavioural insights with actionable educational strategies.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the study was conducted at a single institution, namely Politeknik Mersing Johor, which limits the generalisability of the findings to other polytechnics or higher education contexts. Second, the data were collected through self-reported responses via an online questionnaire, which may be subject to response bias or differences in students' interpretations of the items. Third, the study employs a descriptive design and does not test hypotheses or examine causal relationships. Consequently, while it provides a detailed profile of students' social media usage and demographic patterns, it cannot establish underlying reasons for platform preference, engagement motivations, or academic outcomes.

Future research could therefore expand the sample to include multiple polytechnic institutions or other higher education settings and could employ qualitative or mixed method approaches to examine students' motivations, experiences, and perceptions in greater depth. Further studies may also investigate the relationship between social media usage and variables such as academic performance, digital well-being, and learning engagement.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study shows that social media plays a substantial role in the daily lives of students at Politeknik Mersing Johor. TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram emerged as the dominant platforms, with TikTok the most frequently used overall, while most students reported spending between four and six hours per day on social media. The findings also indicate that social media is used primarily for communication, entertainment, and social interaction rather than for academic purposes. In addition, the study observed descriptive variation in usage patterns across demographic groups, particularly by gender and academic programme. Overall, the study provides a clear institutional profile of students' digital behaviour and highlights the importance of aligning institutional communication, digital well-being efforts, and educational strategies with students' actual social media use patterns.

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