

**THE INFLUENCE OF SOCAL MEDIA USAGE ON ACADEMIC AND
SOCIAL BEHAVIOR OF FIRST YEAR HARAMAYA UNIVERSITY
STUDENTS**

MA THESIS

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my dearest mother.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

The author was born on September 3, 1989, in Haramaya Town, East Hararghe Zone, Oromia Regional State. He attended primary education at Haramaya Primary School (grades 18) from 2002 to 2009 and then joined Haramaya Secondary School for his secondary and preparatory education (20102014). After passing the Entrance Exam successfully, he joined Mekelle University, completed a BA degree in Economics in the regular program, and graduated in 2017. In 2019, he joined the Postgraduate Program Directorate of Haramaya University to pursue his postgraduate study in Social Psychology.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ICT: Information Communication Technology

IT: Information Technology

SNS: Social Networking Sites

UGT: Uses and Gratification Theory

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The Influence of Using Social Media on The Behavior of Haramaya University first Year students

Abdulbari Ahmed Usmail

ABSTRACT

This study employed Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) to assess the influence of social media on the academic and social behaviors of first-year students at Haramaya University, Ethiopia. An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was utilized, collecting data from 337 students via surveys, and following up with in-depth interviews and observations with a subset of 15 participants. The study first mapped prevalent usage patterns, finding dominant engagement with Telegram (85%) and TikTok (72%), with an average of 3.2 hours of daily use. Quantitative analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between time spent on social media and increased academic procrastination. Furthermore, regression analysis indicated that higher social networking use predicted lower participation in campus clubs and activities, suggesting a displacement of offline social engagement. Qualitative findings, analyzed through the SCT lens, explained these patterns. Students described learning procrastination habits through observation and reinforcement in online peer groups. Social comparison on visual platforms was tied to anxiety and reduced self-esteem, fueled by upward comparisons to idealized peers. Critically, data revealed an efficacy-expectation gap: students reported low self-efficacy for controlling their use despite holding high positive outcome expectations about staying connected, leading to compulsive checking and sleep disruption. The study concludes that social media acts as a powerful environment for observational learning, where both adaptive and maladaptive behaviors are acquired. Its influence is significantly moderated by students perceived self-regulatory efficacy. Recommendations are theory-driven and actionable: 1) The university should integrate SCT-based digital literacy modules into orientation programs to build self-regulation skills; 2) Counseling services should offer workshops focused on strengthening students' self-efficacy for managing technology use; and 3) Students should be encouraged to form peer accountability groups to foster a supportive environment for behavioral change.

Keywords: social media, academic performance, mental health, behavior change, digital literacy.

1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter gives background information about the study. It also points out the background of the study, statement of the problem, and basic research questions, and objectives, significance of the study, delimitation of the study and definition of key terms.

1.1 Background of the Study

Understanding the impact of social media requires a framework that explains how environmental factors shape human behavior. Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) provides this lens, positing that individuals learn behaviors through the reciprocal interaction of personal, environmental, and behavioral factors (Bandura, 2018). Within this model, social media constitutes a pervasive environmental influence where users observe and adopt modeled behaviors a process known as observational learning. These learned behaviors are subsequently regulated by an individual's self-efficacy, or belief in their capability to perform a behavior, and their outcome expectations, or beliefs about the consequences of that behavior (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020).

For first-year university students, a population in a critical transition phase, social media presents a powerful context for behavioral adaptation. These digital platforms facilitate constant observational learning of both academic conducts, such as study habits, and social interaction styles (Vogel et al., 2014). The feedback mechanisms inherent to these platforms (e.g., likes, shares) act as potent sources of vicarious reinforcement, shaping which behaviors students perceive as rewarding or normative (Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012). However, the engaging design of these platforms can challenge students' self-regulatory capacity, potentially leading to difficulties in managing use despite negative outcomes a core tenet of SCT applied to technology (Turel, 2020).

In Ethiopia, the rapid expansion of internet access has made social media integral to university student life. While emerging research documents high usage rates and correlates them with broad academic and psychosocial outcomes, it remains largely descriptive and atheoretical (Asrese & Mekonnen, 2021; Alemu et al., 2023). A significant gap exists in applying a coherent psychological framework like SCT to investigate the specific behavioral mechanisms the learning and regulatory processes through which social media influences the discrete academic and social behaviors of students in this specific cultural setting (Tsegaye & Muluye, 2022).

Therefore, this study is situated at Haramaya University. Grounded in Social Cognitive Theory, it seeks to move beyond asking if social media affects students to investigating how it functions as a behavioral environment. The study aims to uncover how observational learning, reinforcement, and students' self-regulatory beliefs interact to shape the academic and social conduct of first-year students, addressing a clear theoretical and contextual gap in the literature.

1.2 Statements of the Problem

The pervasive use of social media by first-year students at Haramaya University is an established reality. However, this widespread adoption exists alongside a critical gap in scholarly understanding. While research within the Ethiopian context has begun to document usage frequencies and correlate them with general outcomes, such as aggregate academic performance or self-reported anxiety, these studies remain predominantly descriptive and lack a unifying theoretical framework (Asrese & Mekonnen, 2021; Alemu et al., 2023). This creates a significant theoretical and explanatory deficit: the existing literature fails to employ a coherent psychological lens to analyze the precise behavioral mechanisms such as attentional control, procrastination, or social skill application through which social media influences student conduct (Tsegaye & Muluye, 2022). Consequently, we understand that social media is used and that it correlates with certain outcomes, but not how it shapes specific, observable behaviors as explained by theories like Social Cognitive Theory.

This lack of a theory-driven understanding directly impedes the development of effective institutional interventions. For example, a correlation between social media use and lower grades does not reveal whether the root cause is modeled procrastination observed in peer networks, fragmented attention from notification-driven task-switching, or a simple displacement of study time (Turel, 2020). Without identifying these specific behavioral and cognitive channels, university administrators and support services are left to rely on generic warnings rather than designing targeted programs. Effective interventions must address underlying processes, such as strengthening self-regulatory efficacy or fostering critical evaluation of online behavioral models, as prescribed by SCT (Bandura, 2018; LaRose, 2015).

Therefore, this study addresses the core problem of an explanatory deficit. It posits that social media's influence is not merely a function of time spent online but is driven by the learning, reinforcement, and self-regulatory cycles it activates within the individual. By applying Social Cognitive Theory as its analytical framework, this research seeks to move beyond describing correlations to explaining causation. It will investigate the specific behavioral patterns in academic and social domains and the psychosocial factors (e.g., self-efficacy, outcome expectations) that moderate them. This theory-based approach is essential to generate actionable, context-specific knowledge for promoting adaptive behavior and digital self-regulation among students at Haramaya University.

1.3 Research Questions

This study was designed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the prevalent patterns of social media usage (platforms, duration, purposes) among first-year students at Haramaya University?
2. What is the relationship between social media usage patterns and students' academic behaviours (e.g., procrastination, study habits) and social behaviours (e.g., peer interaction, campus engagement)?
3. How do Social Cognitive Theory constructs specifically observational learning, outcome expectations, and self-regulatory efficacy explain students' engagement with social media and its subsequent influence on their behaviours?
4. How do students perceive the impact of social media on their academic performance and psychological well-being?

1.3. Objectives of the Study

1.4.1. General Objective

The general objective of this study was to assess the influence of social media usage on the academic and social behaviours of first-year students at Haramaya University by applying the explanatory framework of Social Cognitive Theory.

1.4.2. Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. To map the prevalent social media usage patterns (preferred platforms, frequency, duration, and primary activities) among first-year students at Haramaya University.
2. To analyses the relationship between social media usage patterns and specific measures of academic behaviours (e.g., procrastination, study engagement) and social behaviour (e.g., online vs. offline socializing, campus involvement).
3. To explore the role of Social Cognitive Theory constructs specifically observational learning, outcome expectations, and self-regulatory efficacy in shaping students' social media engagement and its behavioural outcomes.
4. To examine students' perceptions of the impact of social media on their academic performance and psychological well-being.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study holds significant value for theoretical advancement, practical application, and policy development, all derived from its Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) framework.

Theoretical Significance: The research provides a critical test of SCT in an under-explored context. By applying its core constructs observational learning, self-efficacy, and outcome expectations to the digital behaviors of Ethiopian university students, the study will evaluate the theory's cross-cultural applicability in explaining technology-mediated behavior (Bandura, 2018; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). This contributes to refining psychological models of how behavioral environments shape action in the digital age.

Practical Significance for Haramaya University: The findings offer direct, actionable insights for the university's administration and student support services. By moving beyond correlational data to identify specific behavioral mechanisms (e.g., modeled procrastination, low regulatory self-efficacy), the study enables the design of targeted interventions. This evidence can inform the creation of first-year orientation modules focused on building digital self-regulation skills and peer-mentoring programs that model productive usage, thereby promoting better academic and social adaptation (Turel, 2020; LaRose, 2015).

Policy and Strategic Significance: At a national level, the study provides an evidence-based foundation for policymakers and educational planners. As internet access expands, understanding

the psychosocial and behavioral impact of social media is crucial for developing effective public health and educational strategies (Alemu et al., 2023). This research can guide the creation of national digital wellness frameworks and inform the integration of media literacy and self-regulation training into higher education curricula, supporting broader societal goals for student well-being and academic success.

1.6 Scope of the Study

Grounded in Social Cognitive Theory, this study investigates how social media platforms function as a powerful environmental influence on the behavioral adaptation of first-year university students. It posits that through processes of observational learning and vicarious reinforcement, social media shapes specific academic and social conduct, while students' self-efficacy and outcome expectations critically moderate this influence. By identifying these psychosocial mechanisms, the research moves beyond descriptive correlation to provide an explanatory framework that can inform the development of targeted, theory-based interventions aimed at fostering digital self-regulation and promoting adaptive student outcomes.

1.7. Limitations of the Study

This study acknowledges several methodological and contextual limitations inherent in its design. First, the cross-sectional design captures data at a single point in time, which precludes the ability to establish causal relationships or to observe how the interplay between social media use, cognitive factors, and behavior unfolds longitudinally (Diemer et al., 2020). Second, concerning sample and generalizability, while stratified random sampling was employed, the focus on first-year students from a single, rural Ethiopian university means findings may not be generalizable to upper-year students, other institutions, or different cultural settings with varying digital infrastructures and norms. Third, the reliance on self-reported data (survey and interview responses) introduces the potential for social desirability bias, inaccuracies in recall, and common method variance, which could affect the strength of the observed relationships (Rosenman et al., 2011). A related limitation is the indirect measurement of actual behavior; the study measures reported or perceived behaviors rather than employing direct, objective behavioral tracking. Finally, while the study is grounded in Social Cognitive Theory, it does not control for all possible

external variables (e.g., specific family dynamics, pre-existing mental health conditions, or economic stressors) that may also influence social media habits and student behavior.

1.8. Definitions of Key Terms

Social media refers to websites or apps allowing users to create and share content. In this study, it includes platforms like Telegram, TikTok, and YouTube.

Behavior means actions linked to academic or social activities. Examples include study habits or social interactions.

Academic performance measures how well students meet educational goals, like grades or task completion.

Mental health covers emotional and psychological well-being, including anxiety or self-esteem.

Time management involves organizing daily activities to balance academics and leisure.

Risks mean potential harms from social media, like addiction or misinformation.

Wellbeing includes physical, emotional, and social health.

Ethical considerations protect rights, like privacy and consent.

1.9. Organization of the Study

This thesis is organized into five chapters to present the research in a logical and coherent sequence. Chapter One introduces the study, establishing its foundation by presenting the theoretical background grounded in Social Cognitive Theory, clearly stating the research problem, and defining the specific objectives and questions. Chapter Two provides a critical review of the related literature, synthesizing existing knowledge on social media, student behavior, and the application of SCT to identify the precise gap this research addresses. Chapter Three details the explanatory sequential mixed-methods research design and methodology, thoroughly describing the study population, sampling procedures, data collection instruments, and analytical techniques aligned with each objective. Chapter Four presents the integrated results and discussion, where empirical findings are organized by the study's objectives and interpreted through the lens of SCT and the wider literature.

2.REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In this chapter, an extensive examination of relevant literature is presented, offering a comprehensive overview essential to the study's context. Through a meticulous review of relevant sources, this chapter provides a solid foundation for the subsequent analysis and findings of the study.

2.1 Social Media as a Context for Behavioral Learning and Regulation

A substantial body of research has examined the relationship between social media use and various student outcomes. While findings on direction and magnitude vary, a consistent theme is the dual role of these platforms as sources of both opportunity and disruption. From the perspective of Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), this duality can be understood by analyzing the specific behaviors being modeled and reinforced within the digital environment. For instance, platforms can facilitate observational learning of collaborative academic strategies through group chats and resource sharing, potentially enhancing educational engagement (Junco, 2012). Concurrently, the same environments model and provide immediate reinforcement for frequent task-switching and fragmented attention, which can undermine sustained academic focus (Rosen et al., 2013). This behavioral perspective moves beyond simply correlating time spent online with grades, to investigating the specific actions students learn and perform. In African contexts, studies note this duality, where platforms like WhatsApp are used for academic coordination but also intrude upon lecture focus (Nguyen et al., 2020), demonstrating how local patterns of use create distinct behavioral landscapes.

The impact on social behavior is similarly shaped by learning processes. While social media can maintain connections and provide social capital, particularly during transitions to university (Ellison et al., 2007), SCT would predict risks related to vicarious reinforcement and social comparison. Passive consumption of peers' curated lives can foster upward social comparisons, a process linked to negative self-evaluation and behaviors like social withdrawal (Vogel et al., 2014). When online interaction is consistently more immediately rewarding or less anxious than face-to-face engagement, it can lead to a displacement of offline social skill practice (Shakya & Christakis, 2017). Therefore, the net social influence depends on which interactive behaviors are

modeled, how they are reinforced, and the individual's self-efficacy for navigating different social contexts.

A critical factor moderating these influences is self-regulation. SCT emphasizes that individuals can exert agency over their environment, but this depends on their self-regulatory efficacy. Research applying SCT to technology use finds that low perceived self-control over digital distractions is a key predictor of compulsive use and its negative outcomes (LaRose et al., 2001; Turel, 2020). This cognitive factor helps explain why students may continue extensive social media use despite awareness of its detrimental effects, highlighting that behavior is not determined by the environment alone but by the person-environment interaction.

The Ethiopian context adds a crucial layer to this analysis. While studies confirm high social media adoption and note correlations with academic and social outcomes (Asrese & Mekonnen, 2021; Abebe et al., 2021), they rarely employ a behavioral theory like SCT to explain the mechanisms. Furthermore, the rural university setting, with potential infrastructure constraints and unique socio-cultural norms, may alter the availability of models, the nature of reinforcements, and the development of self-efficacy (Alemu et al., 2023; Tsegaye & Muluye, 2022). This creates a significant gap: a lack of understanding of how social media functions as a behavioral learning environment for students in this specific context, which the present study aims to address.

2.2 Social Media as an Environment for Observational Learning and Self-Regulation

Research consistently frames social media as a dual-purpose environment for students, a dynamic that can be effectively analyzed through Social Cognitive Theory (SCT). This duality is evident in academic behaviors, where platforms serve as sources of both observational learning for productive strategies and environmental distraction. Students observe and model collaborative learning and resource-sharing in online groups, which can enhance academic engagement (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016). Conversely, the same platforms provide constant models of interruption and present immediate reinforcements (notifications, messages) that compete with academic tasks, fostering multitasking and fragmented attention linked to reduced learning efficiency (Junco, 2012). The net academic impact hinges on which behaviors are attended to and reinforced, moderated by the student's self-regulatory capacity to manage these environmental demands (Turel, 2020).

Similarly, social media shapes interpersonal behaviors through modeled interaction and comparative feedback. While it can facilitate social capital and connection, particularly for students adapting to new environments (Ellison et al., 2014), the pervasive exposure to curated peer content often fuels upward social comparison. This process, central to understanding behavior from an SCT perspective, involves evaluating oneself against perceived superior others, frequently leading to negative self-evaluation and associated social behaviors like withdrawal (Vogel et al., 2014). The platform's design, offering quantifiable social reinforcement through likes and shares, powerfully shapes what constitutes desirable social performance, potentially at the expense of deeper, offline social skill development (Shakya & Christakis, 2017).

A critical factor explaining individual differences in navigating this dual environment is self-efficacy for self-regulation. SCT posits that behavior is not determined by the environment alone but by an individual's beliefs in their capability to exercise control over their attention and actions. Studies find that low self-efficacy for regulating digital media use is a strong predictor of compulsive use patterns and negative outcomes, as individuals doubt their ability to manage environmental triggers (LaRose, 2015). This cognitive component is essential for understanding why students may persist in heavy social media use despite awareness of its costs, highlighting the person-environment interaction central to SCT (Bandura, 2018).

Much of the existing research in the Ethiopian context, while noting usage patterns and correlations with outcomes like grades or loneliness (Asrese & Mekonnen, 2021), lacks this theoretical integration. It seldom frames findings within a behavioral learning framework like SCT to explain how observed correlations manifest through specific mechanisms like modeled procrastination or reinforced social comparison. This study addresses this gap by applying SCT to investigate these psychosocial processes among first-year students at Haramaya University, thereby moving from description to a mechanistic, theory-based explanation of behavioral influence.

2.3 The Adaptive Potential of Social Media: A Social Cognitive Perspective

From the standpoint of Social Cognitive Theory, the advantages of social media for students can be understood as stemming from the platform's capacity to provide effective models, deliver reinforcing outcomes, and enhance self-regulatory capabilities within specific domains. Academically, social media facilitates observational learning by exposing students to a wide array of educational models, from expert tutorials on YouTube to peer-led study strategies in Telegram groups (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016). This access to distributed knowledge can strengthen outcome expectations regarding the utility of digital tools for learning. Furthermore, collaborative platforms enable vicarious and direct reinforcement of productive academic behaviors; positive feedback on shared work in group chats reinforces help-seeking and knowledge-sharing, building collective efficacy for academic tasks (Zheng et al., 2021).

The theory also elucidates social and developmental benefits. Online networks can bolster social self-efficacy, particularly for students transitioning to university, by providing models for social integration and a low-risk environment to practice interpersonal interactions (Ellison et al., 2014). This can fulfill outcome expectations related to belonging and support. For professional development, platforms like LinkedIn offer models of career paths and professional conduct, enabling observational learning about industry norms. Successfully navigating these networks can enhance career-related self-efficacy, strengthening students' beliefs in their ability to achieve professional goals (Smith, 2019).

Critically, SCT highlights how social media can, under certain conditions, support the development of self-regulatory skills. The process of curating academic feeds, managing digital collaboration, and participating in online communities requires and can practice self-regulation. When students successfully use these tools to achieve goals, it reinforces their self-efficacy for digital self-management (LaRose, 2015). In contexts like Ethiopia, where resources may be limited, social media's role in providing accessible educational models and peer support networks can be particularly impactful, potentially narrowing information gaps and fostering collaborative academic communities (Tsegaye & Muluye, 2022). Thus, the advantages are not inherent to the technology but arise from its use in ways that effectively engage key SCT processes: learning from competent models, experiencing positive reinforcements, and building domain-specific self-efficacy.

2.4 Disadvantages of Social Media: A Failure in Self-Regulation and Maladaptive Learning

Social Cognitive Theory provides a robust framework for understanding the documented disadvantages of social media, framing them as consequences of maladaptive observational learning, reinforced disruptive habits, and eroded self-regulatory efficacy. A primary academic risk is the observational learning of procrastination. Students are frequently exposed to peer models in digital spaces who normalize delaying academic work, while the platform's design delivers immediate positive reinforcement (e.g., social interaction, entertainment) for task-avoidance. This shapes outcome expectations that prioritize short-term digital gratification over long-term academic goals, leading to self-regulatory failure where intended study time is displaced (Turel, 2020; Meier et al., 2016). The behavior of frequently checking devices during lectures or study sessions is thus a learned and reinforced response to environmental cues, not merely poor time management.

The mental health risks associated with social media are deeply tied to upward social comparison and its impact on self-evaluative standards. Constant exposure to curated, idealized portrayals of peers' lives provide a skewed set of models for social and personal success. Engaging in frequent upward comparisons negatively influences self-efficacy beliefs and personal outcome expectations, fostering feelings of inadequacy, anxiety, and diminished self-esteem (Vogel et al., 2014). Furthermore, the fear of missing out (FoMO) can be understood as a potent negative outcome expectation the anticipated social cost of disconnection which drives compulsive checking and disrupts sleep. Poor sleep, in turn, further depletes the cognitive resources necessary for effective self-regulation (Levenson et al., 2016), creating a negative feedback cycle that impairs both academic focus and emotional well-being.

Socially, heavy social media engagement can lead to a displacement of offline social skill practice. From an SCT perspective, if online interaction is more easily initiated and consistently reinforced (with likes, quick replies) than face-to-face interaction, the latter behavior is not practiced and may fail to develop. This can result in a form of behavioral atrophy, where students feel more efficacious in online communication but experience anxiety or reduced skill in complex, in-person

social settings, potentially leading to increased loneliness even within a hyper-connected digital environment (Shakya & Christakis, 2017).

In the specific context of this study, these SCT-driven risks may be exacerbated for first-year students at Haramaya University. The transition to university represents a period of heightened vulnerability where new behavioral models are sought, and self-regulatory demands peak. Without strong pre-existing self-efficacy for managing digital distractions, students are particularly susceptible to the reinforced cycles of procrastination and social comparison prevalent on the platforms they use most frequently, such as Telegram and TikTok. This theoretical understanding moves the analysis beyond listing harms to explaining the cognitive and behavioral mechanisms through which they occur.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) as its primary and unifying theoretical framework. SCT provides a comprehensive model for understanding how human behavior is acquired and regulated through the triadic reciprocal interaction between personal factors, environmental influences, and behavioral patterns (Bandura, 1986, 2018). This framework is particularly apt for analyzing the influence of social media, which constitutes a pervasive environmental factor in students' lives. SCT moves beyond simplistic cause-effect models by emphasizing cognitive processes such as observational learning, outcome expectations, and self-efficacy that mediate the relationship between the digital environment and student behavior.

The theory's core constructs directly inform this investigation. Observational Learning posits that individuals can learn new behaviors by watching others, a process facilitated by social media platforms where students are exposed to myriad models of academic and social conduct (Bandura, 2018). Vicarious Reinforcement suggests that seeing others rewarded or punished for specific behaviors (e.g., receiving likes for a particular post) influences the observer's likelihood of adopting those behaviors. Self-Efficacy, a central motivational construct, refers to an individual's belief in their capability to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments (Bandura, 1997). In this context, it pertains to a student's confidence in their ability to self-regulate their social media use to achieve academic and social goals. Outcome Expectations

are the anticipated consequences of a behavior; students develop expectations about what social media use will yield (e.g., connection, distraction, information), which guide their engagement. Finally, Self-Regulation involves the processes through which individuals monitor, judge, and adjust their own behavior. Social media presents unique challenges to self-regulation due to its engineered persuasive design (Turel & Serenko, 2012).

SCT will be applied to interpret how the environmental affordances and modeled behaviors on platforms like Telegram and TikTok shape specific academic behaviors (e.g., procrastination, study habits) and social behaviors (e.g., peer interaction styles, campus engagement). It will guide the analysis of how students' self-efficacy and outcome expectations moderate these influences. This framework was therefore instrumental in shaping the research objectives, the design of data collection instruments to measure key SCT variables, and will provide the lens for analyzing and discussing all findings, ensuring a coherent, theory-driven explanation of social media's behavioral impact.

3.RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This section incorporates, a description of the study area, the research design, the source of data, population, sample size and sampling techniques, data collection instruments, data collection procedure methods of data analysis, and ethical considerations.

3.1 Study Area

This study was conducted at Haramaya University, a public higher education institution located in the East Hararghe Zone of the Oromia Region, Ethiopia. The university's context is particularly relevant to the research aims. As a major academic hub in a predominantly rural area, it presents a unique setting where rapid digital adoption intersects with traditional student life and potentially variable digital infrastructure. The relative geographical distance from major urban centers like Addis Ababa may influence how students use social media to bridge connections with family, maintain peer networks, and access information, thereby creating a distinctive behavioral environment. This setting provides a valuable context to examine how social media functions as an environmental factor within the Social Cognitive Theory framework, potentially shaping learning models and social reinforcements differently than in urban university settings. Focusing on the main campus ensures that the observed dynamics pertain to a shared residential and academic environment where first-year students undergo a common transition, making it an ideal site to investigate the initial influence of social media on academic and social behavior.

3.2 Research Design

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This two-phase approach was selected to first quantify patterns of social media use and their statistical associations with academic and social behaviors, and then to use qualitative data to explain the underlying cognitive and experiential mechanisms from Social Cognitive Theory (SCT).

In the initial quantitative phase, a cross-sectional survey was administered to a stratified random sample of first-year students. This phase was designed to address Research Questions 1, 2, and 3, providing descriptive statistics on usage patterns (e.g., platforms, duration) and inferential analyses (correlation and regression) to examine relationships between social media use and scores on

validated behavioral scales measuring academic engagement and social interaction. This phase establishes the "what" of the behavioral landscape.

The subsequent qualitative phase involved in-depth, semi-structured interviews and structured observations with a purposively selected subset of survey respondents. This phase was designed to address Research Question 4 and to elaborate on the quantitative findings. Interviews probed the SCT constructs central to the study such as sources of observational learning, experiences of vicarious reinforcement, self-efficacy beliefs, and outcome expectations—to explain why the observed quantitative relationships might exist. Observations in common areas provided contextual data on actual behaviors. This phase provides the "why" and "how," offering a mechanism-based explanation grounded in SCT.

This design is logically aligned with the study's theoretical framework. It allows for the systematic testing of associations predicted by SCT while providing the depth of understanding needed to interpret these associations through the theory's core cognitive and environmental processes. The integration of data occurs at the interpretation stage, where qualitative themes are used to explain and give meaning to the quantitative statistical results.

3.3 Population of the Study

Population: The target population for this study consisted of all first-year undergraduate students officially enrolled at Haramaya University, Main Campus, during the 2022/23 academic year. This group was selected because the transition to university represents a critical period for behavioral adaptation, where students are forming new routines and are highly susceptible to environmental influences, making them an ideal cohort for examining the early impact of social media on academic and social behaviors.

Sample Size Determination: The sample size was calculated using Cochran's sample size formula for a finite population. With an estimated population size (N) of 2,150 first-year students, a 95% confidence level ($Z = 1.96$), a 5% margin of error (e), and a conservative estimated proportion (p) of 0.5 to ensure maximum variability, the initial sample size was calculated to be approximately 327. To account for potential non-response, the target sample size was set at 350.

Sampling Technique: A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure the sample was representative of the first-year student body across its primary academic divisions. The population was first stratified by the university's five major colleges (e.g., College of Health Sciences, College of Social Sciences and Humanities). Subsequently, using official enrollment lists obtained from the university registrar, a proportional number of students were randomly selected from each stratum using a computer-generated random number sequence. This method guarantees that students from all major fields of study have a known, non-zero chance of being selected, enhancing the generalizability of findings within the defined population and avoiding the selection bias inherent in purposive sampling methods.

3.4 Source of Data

The study relied on both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data was collected directly from first-year students through three main instruments: a structured quantitative survey measuring usage patterns, behaviors, and social cognitive variables; in-depth qualitative interviews exploring the experiential and cognitive mechanisms behind usage; and structured observations in campus common areas to contextualize self-reported behaviors. Secondary data was derived from an extensive review of existing scholarly literature, which served to establish the theoretical foundation for the study and to provide a framework for analyzing and discussing the primary findings within the broader academic conversation. This combination of primary and secondary sources ensured the research was both empirically grounded in the specific context and rigorously connected to established theory and prior knowledge.

3.5 Sample Size, Sample, and Sampling Method

A stratified random sampling technique was employed to select participants for the quantitative phase of this study. The sampling frame consisted of the official list of all first-year undergraduate students enrolled at Haramaya University's Main Campus for the 2022/23 academic year ($N \approx 2,150$). To ensure proportional representation across the university's major academic divisions, the population was first stratified by college (e.g., College of Health Sciences, College of Agriculture). Subsequently, using a computer-generated random number sequence, a proportional number of students were systematically selected from each stratum. This probability sampling method was chosen to enhance the representativeness of the sample and the generalizability of the

quantitative findings within the defined population, which is essential for the correlational and descriptive analyses.

The sample size for the survey was determined using Cochran's formula for a finite population. With a 95% confidence level ($Z = 1.96$), a 5% margin of error, and a conservative estimated proportion of 0.5 to maximize variability, the calculated minimum sample size was 327. To account for potential non-response, 350 questionnaires were distributed. For the subsequent qualitative phase, a purposive sampling strategy was used to select 12-15 interview participants from the survey respondents. This selection was based on maximum variation criteria (e.g., high/low social media use, different colleges) to capture a wide range of experiences and perspectives for in-depth exploration of the Social Cognitive Theory constructs, aligning with the explanatory purpose of the qualitative phase.

3.6 Method of Data Collection

Data were collected through a multi-instrument approach designed to align with the study's explanatory sequential mixed-methods design and its grounding in Social Cognitive Theory. The primary quantitative instrument was a structured questionnaire, which included demographic items, a social media use inventory, and validated scales measuring academic behavior, social behavior, and the key SCT constructs of self-efficacy and outcome expectations related to social media regulation. For the qualitative phase, a semi-structured interview guide was developed to explore in depth the participants' experiences of observational learning, reinforcement, and self-regulatory challenges, providing mechanistic explanations for the quantitative patterns. Additionally, a structured observation protocol was used in campus common areas to gather contextual behavioral data. The procedure involved administering the survey to a stratified random sample, followed by purposively selecting a subset of respondents for in-depth interviews, while observations were conducted at scheduled intervals to triangulate the self-reported data. This integrated process ensured the collection of robust quantitative data to establish associations and rich qualitative data to explain the underlying cognitive and behavioral processes..

3.7 Methods of Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the explanatory sequential design, employing distinct techniques for the quantitative and qualitative phases, followed by an integrated interpretation.

Quantitative Data Analysis: Survey data were analyzed using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations) summarized social media usage patterns, addressing Research Objective 1. To address Objectives 2 and 3, inferential statistics were employed. Pearson correlation coefficients examined bivariate relationships between key variables (e.g., social media time and academic procrastination scores). Multiple linear regression analysis was used to test the predictive relationship between social media use and behavioral outcomes while controlling for relevant demographic variables. Finally, descriptive statistics and reliability analysis (Cronbach's alpha) were computed for the SCT-based scales (self-efficacy, outcome expectations) to address Objective 4.

Qualitative Data Analysis: Interview transcripts and observation notes were analyzed using thematic analysis following the six-phase framework outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The process involved familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Coding was both deductive, informed by the SCT constructs (e.g., codes for "observed models," "low self-efficacy statements"), and inductive, allowing themes to emerge directly from the participants' narratives. This analysis provided an in-depth understanding of the cognitive and experiential processes behind social media use, directly elucidating the findings from the quantitative phase.

Integration of Methods: The two data strands were integrated at the interpretation stage in accordance with the explanatory design. The qualitative findings were used to explain, elaborate, and provide contextual meaning to the quantitative results. For instance, statistical correlations between usage time and procrastination were interpreted and enriched by qualitative themes detailing how procrastination is modeled and reinforced in online peer networks. This integration provided a comprehensive, theory-grounded explanation that addressed both the "what" (quantitative patterns) and the "why/how" (qualitative mechanisms) of social media's influence.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to stringent ethical protocols to ensure the welfare, rights, and dignity of all participants. Prior to data collection, formal approval was obtained from the Haramaya University Research Ethics Committee. The principle of informed consent was fundamental; all participants received a clear explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks (e.g., mild discomfort when discussing personal habits), and benefits. They were assured that participation was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without penalty. To protect confidentiality, all data were anonymized at the point of collection—no personally identifiable information was linked to survey responses or interview transcripts. Digital data were stored on password-protected devices, and physical materials were kept in a locked cabinet, accessible only to the research team. During interviews, private settings were used to prevent eavesdropping. The researchers maintained cultural sensitivity throughout the process, and information for accessing university counseling services was provided to all participants as a supportive resource. These comprehensive measures were implemented to build trust, minimize any potential harm, and uphold the integrity of the research process.

4.RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the empirical findings of the study. Employing an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, it integrates quantitative survey data with qualitative insights from interviews and observations to provide a comprehensive analysis. The presentation is structured according to the study's specific research objectives, ensuring a clear and logical progression from descriptive patterns to explanatory mechanisms. All findings are subsequently interpreted through the unifying theoretical lens of Social Cognitive Theory, which facilitates an understanding of the behavioral and cognitive processes linking social media engagement to academic and social outcomes. This integrated approach moves beyond simple description to offer a nuanced, theory-driven explanation of how social media influences the behavioral dynamics of first-year students at Haramaya University.

4.1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

The study surveyed 337 first-year undergraduate students from Haramaya University. The demographic characteristics of the sample are summarized in Table 1. The gender distribution was nearly equivalent, with slightly more male (51.9%) than female (48.1%) participants. The vast majority of respondents (92%) were between the ages of 18 and 20, which is representative of the typical age cohort entering university in Ethiopia.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N=337)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	175	51.9
	Female	162	48.1
Age Group	18-20 years	310	92.0
	21-23 years	27	8.0

4.1.1 Platform Preferences and Usage Duration

Data on platform preferences revealed a clear hierarchy among the students. As summarized in Table 2, Telegram was the most dominant platform, used regularly by 87% of respondents. This was followed by TikTok (71%) and YouTube (66%). Platforms like Facebook (45%) and Instagram (40%) showed relatively lower engagement. The mean daily time spent on all social media platforms combined was 3.4 hours ($SD = 1.7$), with 68% of students reporting use of three or more hours daily.

Platform	% of Regular Users	Primary Stated Purpose
Telegram	87%	Academic communication, course groups, file sharing
TikTok	71%	Entertainment, short-form videos
YouTube	66%	Educational tutorials, Entertainment
Facebook	45%	Social connection with family/friends, news
Instagram	40%	Social connection, visual content

Figure 1 Primary Social Media Platforms and Stated Purposes (N=337)

4.1.2 Qualitative Elaboration on Usage Patterns

Interview data provided essential context for these patterns, framing them within the Social Cognitive Theory concept of the environment. Students universally described Telegram as an indispensable and non-optional part of academic life. *"You are practically absent from class if you are not in the Telegram group. All announcements, notes, and discussions happen there. It's not a choice,"* explained a participant (P11). This highlights the platform's role as a primary, structured environment for observational learning of academic routines and peer norms.

The use of platforms like YouTube and TikTok illustrated the fluid and often conflicted nature of engagement. Students acknowledged the utility of YouTube for learning but also its design-driven pitfalls. *"I go to YouTube to understand a difficult concept from a lecture, which helps. But then*

the 'next video' is something funny or interesting, and I end up wasting an hour. It's a trap I know but keep falling into," shared another student (P19). This narrative reveals how the same environmental feature (recommended content) can simultaneously provide models for learning and powerful reinforcements for distraction and prolonged use, challenging self-regulation.

This figure illustrates the relative engagement of male and female students across the most popular social media platforms used at Haramaya University.

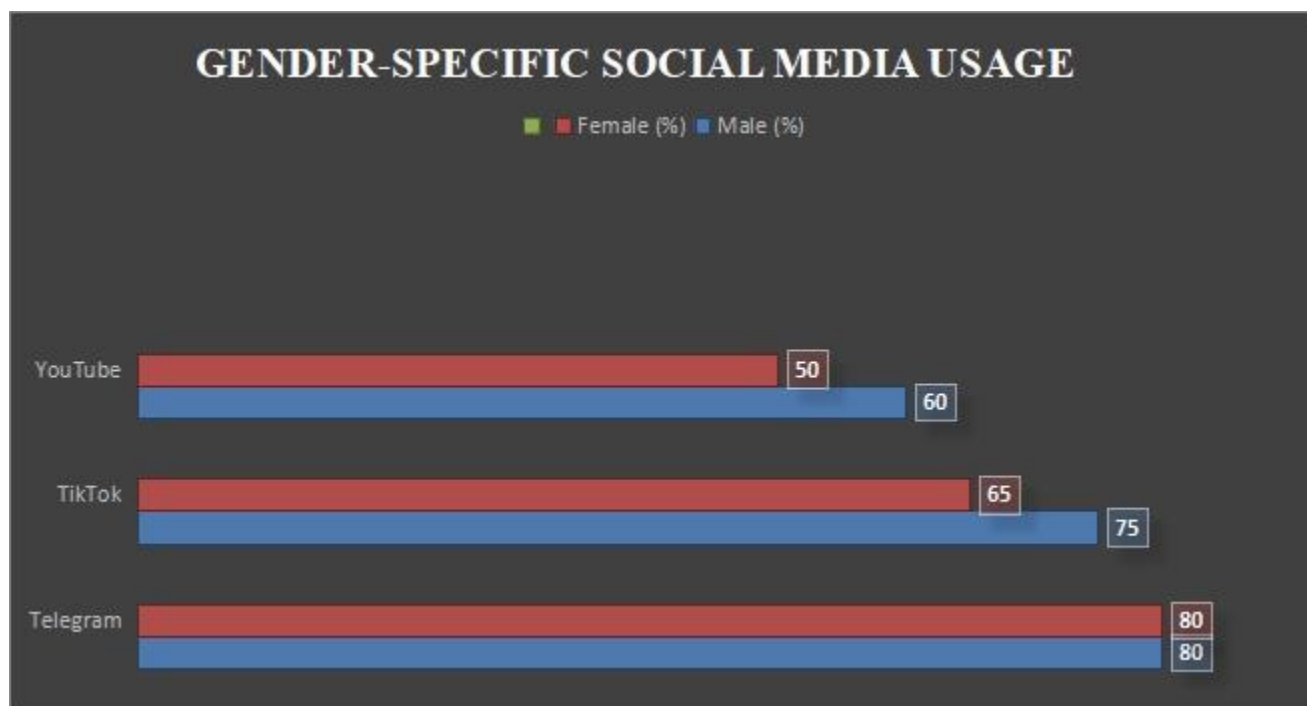


Figure 2 Gender Distribution of Social Media Usage Among Students

4.1.3 Patterns of Engagement: Duration, Timing, and Content

Beyond platform choice, the study examined the patterns of engagement, including duration, timing, and content preferences.

Quantitative Findings on Engagement Patterns

As previously indicated, the mean daily use was 3.4 hours. Engagement was not evenly distributed. Data revealed that 60% of students reported most of their social media use occurred in the evening

and late at night. Furthermore, smartphone access was nearly universal, with 94% identifying it as their primary device for social media, enabling constant connectivity.

A breakdown of primary content engagement showed a leaning toward entertainment, though with a significant academic component. When asked to identify their primary activity, 65% of students selected "Entertainment (videos, memes, social updates)," while 28% selected "Accessing educational or informational content." A further 7% cited "Social communication" as their main focus.

Qualitative Insights: The Cycle of Late-Night Use and Fragmented Attention

Interview themes illuminated the cognitive and behavioural dynamics behind these patterns. The prevalence of late-night use was often described as a failure of self-regulation at a time of diminished willpower. *"After dinner, I tell myself I'll just check messages for 10 minutes. Before I know it, it's past midnight. I'm tired but just keep scrolling,"* described a participant (P05). This pattern directly impacted outcome expectations related to academic readiness, as another noted: *"I always feel tired in my morning classes. I know it's because I'm on my phone too late, but I can't seem to stop the cycle."*

The smartphone's role was pivotal. Students described a environment of constant interruption and task-switching. *"My phone is always with me. Even when I'm trying to read, a notification pops up from our class group, and I have to check it. I forget what I was reading,"* explained a student (P17). This behaviour reflects how the environmental cue (the notification) triggers a learned, reinforced response (checking the phone), fracturing sustained attention.

The choice between entertainment and educational content was not always a conscious one. The algorithmic design of platforms was frequently mentioned as an environmental factor that dictated engagement. *"I might open YouTube to watch a tutorial, but then the sidebar suggests other fascinating things. I end up on a completely different topic. The app decides what I watch more than I do,"* stated a respondent (P09). This highlights a key SCT principle: the environment (the algorithm's curated feed) powerfully influences which models a student is exposed to and what behaviours are subsequently reinforced through engagement.

This figure illustrates the distribution of daily social media usage among respondents.

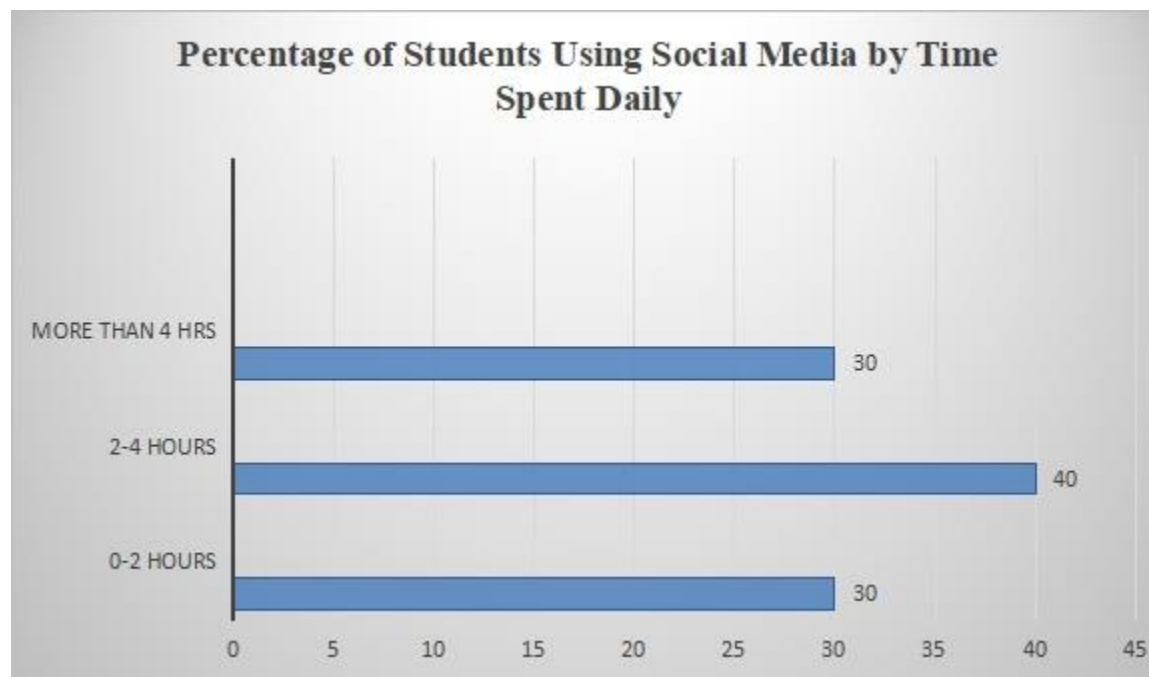


Figure 3 Frequency of Social Media Use Among Students

Access methods matter. Smartphones are the main device (85%), enabling constant connectivity. Portable access increases habitual checking, as seen in other studies (Rosen et al., 2013). Reliance on phones may explain why 55% check social media before academic tasks. Easy access fosters frequent interruptions, fracturing attention spans. Despite this, 65% rely on family or friends for support managing use, suggesting peer networks help mitigate overuse.

4.2 Engagement and Impact of Social Media Use: An Analysis Guided by Study Objectives

The following section presents the integrated quantitative and qualitative findings, organized according to the study's specific objectives to provide a structured, theory-informed analysis of social media's influence.

4.2.1 Social Media Usage Patterns Among First-Year Students

First-year students at Haramaya University demonstrated near-ubiquitous and intensive engagement with social media. The dominant platforms were Telegram (87% regular use), TikTok

(71%), and YouTube (66%), with Facebook (45%) and Instagram (40%) showing moderate engagement. Students spent an average of 3.4 hours (SD = 1.7) daily on these platforms, with 68% reporting three or more hours of daily use. Smartphone access was the primary method (94%), enabling constant connectivity. This pattern establishes social media as a pervasive and influential environmental factor in the students' daily ecosystem, consistent with global trends of digital immersion among university populations (Twenge & Campbell, 2018).

4.2.2 Relationship Between Usage Patterns and Academic/Social Behaviours

clear, dose-response relationship was observed between the duration of social media use and negative academic perceptions. As detailed in Table 5, only 20% of light users (0-2 hours/day) reported a negative academic impact, a figure that rose to 50% for moderate users (2-4 hours) and 80% for heavy users (4+ hours). Self-reported behaviors provided mechanistic insight: 55% of students frequently prioritized social media by checking it before academic tasks (Table 7), and 60% admitted to often staying online longer than initially intended (Table 6). This pattern indicates that prolonged use is strongly associated with academic time displacement and procrastination, aligning with research linking unregulated social media engagement to fragmented study time and lower performance (Junco, 2012). Furthermore, qualitative data revealed that for many, social media use directly competed with offline social activities, with 65% primarily using platforms for social versus academic purposes (see Figure 4).

Table 1 Time Spent on social media and Perceived Academic Impact

Time Spent on social media (hours/day)	Percentage Reporting Negative Academic Impact
0-2	20%
2-4	50%
4+	80%

Source: Primary Survey Data (2024)

Table 2 Self-Reported Inability to Regulate Use Session Length

Response	Percentage of Students
Stay longer than intended	60%
Stick to intended time	40%

Source: Primary Survey Data (2024)

Table 3 Prioritization of social media Over Academic Tasks

Behaviour	Percentage of Students
Check social media before work	55%
Attend to academic tasks first	45%
<i>Source: Primary Survey Data (2024)</i>	

4.2.3 The Role of SCT Constructs: Self-Regulation and Social Comparison

The data revealed critical psychosocial mechanisms aligned with Social Cognitive Theory. The high prevalence of extended, unintended use (60%) and task prioritization (55%) points to widespread deficits in self-regulatory efficacy. Students often recognized the negative outcomes but reported low confidence in their ability to control their use, a core tenet of SCT explaining the gap between intention and action (LaRose, 2015). This lack of internal control was often compensated for by external support; 65% relied on family or friends to help manage their use, while only 20% used digital tools, and 15% had no support—highlighting a reliance on social rather than technical regulation.

Mental health impacts were strongly linked to observational learning and social comparison processes. Among students who frequently compared themselves to others online, 70% reported anxiety or depressive symptoms, and 60% noted lower self-esteem. This reflects the SCT principle that upward comparison with idealized online models can negatively alter self-evaluation and emotional state (Vogel et al., 2014). Interview data enriched this finding, with students describing

the passive consumption of peers' curated successes as a source of constant pressure and negative self-appraisal. Feelings of loneliness when offline (reported by 40%) further suggest that for some, social media interactions may displace the development of richer offline social connections and the associated building of social self-efficacy (Shabahang, Aruguete & McCutcheon, 2023).

4.2.4 Perceived Dual Impact on Academic Performance and Psychological Well-being

Student perceptions crystallized the dual-edged nature of social media, as summarized in Table 8. While 30% reported positive academic impacts—primarily through accessing educational content on platforms like YouTube—a larger proportion (50%) perceived an overall negative impact on their academic performance. This 50/30 split underscores the tension between social media as a potential tool for observational learning and as a pervasive source of distraction. The high prevalence of sleep disruption (60%) due to late-night use identifies a critical behavioral pathway; poor sleep hygiene impairs cognitive function, academic readiness, and emotional regulation, creating a negative feedback loop (Exelmans & Van den Bulck, 2017). Ultimately, the net influence on a student's well-being and academic trajectory appears heavily contingent on their ability to navigate this duality through effective self-regulation, a skill many reported lacking.

Table 4 Overall Perceived Impact of Social Media on Academic Performance

Perceived Impact of social media	Percentage of Students
Negative impact	50%
Positive impact	30%
No impact	20%

Source: Primary Survey Data (2024)

4.3 Social Media and Mental Health: Exploring Psychosocial Pathways and Outcomes

This section details the study's findings on the relationship between social media use and mental health, analysed through the specific objectives and the theoretical lens of Social Cognitive Theory

(SCT). The data reveal a complex interplay where online behaviours and cognitive processes significantly impact psychological well-being.

4.3.1 Social Comparison as a Primary Psychosocial Pathway

A central finding is the strong link between frequent social comparison on social media and adverse mental health outcomes. As quantified in Table 9, a clear gradient exists: students who rarely compared themselves reported low levels of anxiety (15%) and low self-esteem (10%), while those who compared themselves frequently reported dramatically higher rates—70% for anxiety/depression and 60% for low self-esteem. This pattern is a direct manifestation of upward social comparison, a key SCT process where individuals evaluate themselves against perceived superior others (Vogel et al., 2014). Qualitative interview data elucidated this mechanism; students described passive scrolling through feeds filled with peers curated academic successes, social events, and lifestyle highlights, which fostered feelings of inadequacy and negative self-evaluation. This passive, comparison-driven engagement aligns with research linking such use to diminished self-worth (Frison & Eggermont, 2016).

Table 5 Frequency of Social Comparison and Associated Mental Health Impacts

Frequency of Comparisons	Anxiety/Depression (%)	Low Self-Esteem (%)
Rarely	15%	10%
Sometimes	40%	35%
Frequently	70%	60%

Source: Primary Survey Data (2024)

4.3.2 Emotional Dependence, Loneliness, and the Displacement of Offline Efficacy

The data further indicate an emotional dependence on social media that paradoxically coexists with feelings of loneliness. A significant portion of students reported feeling lonely (40%) or

anxious (35%) when disconnected from social media. This suggests that for some, online interaction may displace the development of offline social self-efficacy—the confidence in forming and maintaining in-person relationships. SCT posits that if a behavior (online engagement) is more easily initiated and immediately reinforced than another (offline socializing), the latter may not be practiced or mastered (Bandura, 2018). As one interviewee stated, *“I feel empty without checking my messages. It’s like I need to know I’m connected, even if I’m just sitting alone.”* This reliance on digital validation can undermine the building of deeper, more stable sources of social support and personal competence, exacerbating feelings of isolation (Shabahang, Aruguete & McCutcheon, 2023).

4.3.3 Sleep Disruption: A Critical Behavioral Pathway to Compounded Harm

A critical behavioural pathway linking social media use to deteriorated mental health is sleep disruption, reported by 60% of students. Late-night use, often involving prolonged scrolling, directly interferes with sleep quality and duration. This is not merely a time-management issue but a failure of self-regulatory efficacy at a time of diminished cognitive control. Poor sleep, in turn, has well-established negative effects on emotional regulation, stress resilience, and cognitive function (Exelmans & Van den Bulck, 2017). This creates a pernicious feedback loop: social media use contributes to anxiety and poor self-esteem, which can disrupt sleep, and sleep deprivation then lowers the capacity for emotional self-regulation and increases vulnerability to further negative social comparison the following day.

4.3.4 Support Systems and the Gap in Structured Intervention

In managing these mental health challenges, students primarily relied on informal support networks, with 65% seeking help from family or friends. Only 20% accessed professional help, underscoring a significant gap in formal mental health service utilization, a documented challenge in Ethiopian higher education contexts (Hailemariam et al., 2019). The heavy reliance on informal support, while valuable, points to a lack of structured, institutional strategies to build students' self-regulatory and coping efficacy specific to digital challenges. The limited use of technical tools (e.g., app limiters) further highlights an underdeveloped skillset for proactive self-regulation.

4.3.5 Synthesis: The Interconnected Nature of Impact

In summary, the impact of social media on mental health is not isolated but interconnected with academic and social functioning. The frequent observational learning involved in social comparison erodes self-esteem. The reinforcement of constant connection can foster emotional dependence that undermines offline social efficacy. The failure in self-regulation, particularly around sleep, establishes a physiological pathway that compounds psychological distress. These SCT-driven processes collectively illustrate how social media functions as a behavioral environment that can actively shape mental health outcomes, for a significant number of students, in negative ways. This integrated understanding moves beyond simple correlation to identify specific, targetable mechanisms for intervention.

4.4 Perceived Impact of Social Media on Academic Performance and Well-being: A Triangulated View

This section synthesizes key findings to address the study's fourth specific objective, presenting students' perceptions of social media's dual impact, the behavioural pathways involved, and the mediating role of support systems.

4.4.1 The Duality of Perceived Academic Impact

Student perceptions on academic impact were markedly divided, reflecting the dual environmental role of social media. As summarized in Table 10, half of the students (50%) perceived an overall negative impact on their academic performance, while 30% perceived a positive impact, and 20% reported no significant effect. This division is directly linked to usage patterns and personal agency. Those reporting positive impacts frequently cited the use of YouTube and Telegram for accessing tutorials, notes, and collaborative learning a form of observational learning from digital models that can enhance academic self-efficacy when targeted and intentional (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016). Conversely, the 50% reporting negative impacts described a loss of control, where the same platforms served as sources of distraction and procrastination, undermining their academic goals.

Table 6 Overall Perceived Impact of social media on Academic Performance

Perceived Impact	Percentage of Students
Negative impact	50%
Positive impact	30%
No impact / Neutral	20%
Source: Primary Survey Data (2024)	

4.4.2 Behavioural Pathways: From Distraction to Compounded Strain

The data delineates clear behavioural pathways linking social media use to negative outcomes. The core issue is a failure in self-regulatory efficacy, evidenced by 60% of students staying online longer than intended and 55% prioritizing social media checks over academic tasks (see Figure 8 for illustration). This poor self-regulation manifests in two critical, interconnected ways:

Academic Time Displacement and Fragmented Attention: Unregulated use leads to significant time being diverted from studies. The constant task-switching between academic work and social media notifications fragments attention, reducing the depth and quality of learning (Rosen et al., 2013). This aligns with the SCT concept of competing behavioral models and reinforcements.

Sleep Disruption and Its Cascading Effects: A major pathway to worsened well-being is through sleep, with 60% linking late-night use to poor sleep quality. Sleep loss impairs cognitive functions essential for academics (memory, focus) and erodes emotional regulation, increasing vulnerability to stress, anxiety, and negative social comparison (Exelmans & Van den Bulck, 2017). This creates a vicious cycle where social media use impairs sleep, and fatigue then further diminishes self-regulatory capacity the following day.

4.4.3 The Critical Role of Support Systems in Moderating Impact

The study found that students' reliance on support systems to manage their social media use was a key moderating factor, as detailed in Table 11. The majority (65%) depended on informal support from family and friends, such as reminders or shared activities. This external scaffolding can

temporarily bolster self-regulatory efficacy by providing accountability and alternative behavioral models (Uhls et al., 2014).

However, the data reveals significant gaps. Only 20% sought professional help, indicating underutilization of formal mental health resources, often due to stigma, lack of awareness, or the perception that digital habits are not a legitimate counseling concern (Andreassen et al., 2016). Most critically, 15% of students reported having no support whatsoever, placing them at heightened risk for the negative cycles of distraction, poor sleep, and social comparison. The almost non-existent use of technical tools (e.g., app limiters) and the absence of institutional digital literacy programs at the university level point to a systemic lack of structured strategies to build students' internal capacity for self-regulation (Tiruneh et al., 2020).

Table 7 Primary Support Systems for Managing Social Media Use

Type of Support	Percentage of Students
Family / Friends	65%
Professional Help	20%
No Support	15%
Source: Primary Survey Data (2024)	

4.4.4 Synthesis: An Integrated SCT Perspective on Perceived Impact

From an SCT perspective, the perceived impact is not random but is shaped by the interaction of personal, behavioural, and environmental factors. Students with higher self-regulatory efficacy are more likely to use social media as a targeted tool (positive impact), navigating the environment with agency. Those with lower self-efficacy are more likely to be controlled by the platform's design and the vicarious reinforcements of social feedback, leading to compulsive use, time displacement, and negative outcomes. The availability and quality of support systems act as a crucial environmental buffer, but cannot replace the development of internal self-regulatory skills. The findings underscore that the net impact on a student's academic performance and well-being is ultimately determined by their ability to exercise cognitive control within a highly engineered

digital environment, a challenge for which many first-year students are demonstrably underprepared.

4.5 Gender as a Moderating Factor in Social Media Engagement and Impact

This analysis examines gender differences in social media use and its outcomes, addressing patterns relevant to the study's broader objectives. The sample comprised 175 males (51.9%) and 162 females (48.1%).

4.5.1 Platform Preferences and Gendered Behavioral Models

Clear gendered patterns emerged in platform preference, suggesting different avenues for observational learning. While Telegram was universally high (87% overall), gender diverged on other platforms. Male students reported significantly higher engagement with YouTube (66% vs. 48% for females), a platform centered on informational and tutorial content. Female students showed stronger preference for visually oriented platforms like TikTok (78% vs. 64% for males) and Instagram (48% vs. 32% for males). These preferences align with global research indicating males often gravitate toward information-seeking and females toward relationship-maintenance and visual self-presentation on social media (Vannucci, Ohannessian & Gagnon, 2019). This suggests that the behavioural models to which each gender is most exposed may differ, potentially influencing learned habits around content creation, consumption, and social comparison.

4.5.2 Usage Time, Academic Impact, and Self-Regulatory Challenges

The mean daily usage time was high across genders ($M=3.4$ hours), with no statistically significant difference in total duration. However, the academic impact pathway showed nuanced differences. Both genders who were heavy users (4+ hours) reported high negative academic impacts (approx. 80%). Yet, qualitative data suggested differing triggers for poor self-regulation. Male students more frequently described losing track of time in YouTube “deep dives” or following informational threads, while female students more often described prolonged sessions on TikTok or Instagram driven by social browsing and comparison. This indicates that while the outcome displaced academic time is similar, the reinforcing content that challenges self-regulatory efficacy may be gender-linked.

4.5.3 Mental Health Impacts and Social Comparison

Gender differences were more pronounced in the nature of mental health correlates. Female students who engaged in frequent social comparison reported notably higher rates of low self-esteem (65% vs. 55% for males), particularly relating to appearance and social success, consistent with findings on the pressure of visual platforms (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016). Male students, while also experiencing anxiety from comparison, more frequently reported stress related to academic and career benchmarks seen online. Furthermore, females were more likely to report using social media for emotional support (70% vs. 60% for males) and to seek external help from friends/family to manage use, aligning with patterns of greater help-seeking behavior among women (Radovic et al., 2017).

4.5.4 Synthesis: Gender as a Contextual Factor in SCT Processes

In summary, gender does not determine social media influence but appears to shape the environmental models accessed and the specific outcome expectations sought. The resulting challenges—to self-regulation and mental well-being—manifest in gendered ways. Interventions aimed at boosting digital self-efficacy and critical consumption may therefore benefit from gender-sensitive examples and content.

4.6 Age, Developmental Stage, and Social Media Dependency

The sample was predominantly young, with 92% (n=310) aged 18-20 and 8% (n=27) aged 21-23. This homogeneity limits broad age comparisons but allows for analysis of this critical developmental cohort.

4.6.1 First-Year Transition and Vulnerability to Social Reinforcement

The concentration of students in the 18-20 age range places them in a distinct life stage characterized by the transition to university. This period involves identity exploration, social reorientation, and increased autonomy, which can heighten dependency on social media for social connection and self-presentation (Twenge, 2017). The data shows this cohort is highly engaged, with 70% spending over two hours daily online. From an SCT perspective, this life stage may

involve heightened sensitivity to social reinforcement (likes, shares) and vicarious learning from peer models online as students navigate new social and academic norms.

4.6.2 Self-Regulatory Capacity and Academic Consequences

Developmental research suggests the prefrontal cortex, responsible for executive functions like self-regulation, continues to mature into the mid-20s. This may help explain the high rates of reported self-regulatory failure in this sample: 60% staying online longer than intended and 55% prioritizing social media over academic tasks. This developmental gap in self-regulatory efficacy makes the compelling design of social platforms particularly potent, leading to the strong correlation between use and negative academic perceptions. As one 19-year-old interviewee stated, *“I know I should stop, but my willpower is gone by the end of the day. It’s just easier to keep scrolling.”*

4.6.3 Mental Health Risks and the Quest for Identity

The age group 18-20 is also a period of significant vulnerability for mental health challenges. The study found that frequent social comparison a common behavior in this cohort was linked to anxiety (70%) and low self-esteem (60%). This can be understood through SCT as individuals in this stage actively constructing their identities, using online peers as salient comparative models. The discrepancy between their own experiences and the idealized lives viewed online can negatively impact self-evaluative outcome expectations, fueling distress (Vogel & Rose, 2016). The reported loneliness when offline (40%) further indicates that for some, social media becomes a primary, yet insufficient, source of belonging.

4.6.4 Implications for Targeted Support

The convergence of high usage, developing self-regulation, and identity vulnerability in this age group underscores the necessity of targeting first-year students with proactive support. The fact that only 20% sought professional help, while most relied on informal networks, suggests that institutional resources are not being accessed effectively. Developmentally appropriate interventions that frame digital wellness as a skill of adulthood and that strengthen self-regulatory efficacy through practice and peer modelling could be particularly impactful for this population (Hadar et al., 2017).

4.7 The Dual Role of Social Media: An SCT Analysis of Competing Behavioral Models

This section synthesizes findings to elucidate the contradictory influences of social media, interpreting them through the Social Cognitive Theory framework of competing environmental models and reinforcements.

4.7.1 Academic Utility Versus Environmental Distraction

Social media serves as a dual-purpose environment, presenting students with conflicting behavioural models. On one hand, platforms function as sources of observational learning for academic skills. Specifically, 30% of students reported positive academic impacts, primarily through using YouTube for tutorials and Telegram for accessing class materials and peer discussions. This represents an adaptive use where students selectively model expert or peer strategies to enhance understanding and performance (Greenhow & Lewin, 2016).

On the other hand, the same platforms are engineered to promote sustained, often non-academic, engagement. The data shows that 55% of students frequently check social media before academic tasks, and 60% stay online longer than intended. From an SCT perspective, this represents a failure of self-regulatory efficacy in the face of environmental stimuli (notifications, infinite scroll) that provide immediate, low-effort reinforcement. The net academic impact for an individual student, therefore, depends on which set of behavioural models they attend to and emulate, and their capacity to regulate engagement with distracting elements (Turel, 2020).

4.7.2 Social Connection Versus Social Comparison and Displacement

The social function of these platforms is similarly dualistic. They provide a readily accessible venue for maintaining connections, which can fulfill social outcome expectations and support a sense of belonging, especially for students transitioning away from home. However, the data reveals a counterproductive psychological process: frequent use for social purposes is strongly correlated with upward social comparison. As previously established, 70% of frequent comparers reported anxiety, and 60% reported low self-esteem (Vogel et al., 2014).

This creates a paradox where the platform used to *seek* social connection can simultaneously *erode* social well-being through comparative self-evaluation. Furthermore,

qualitative data suggested that for some students, readily available online interaction displaced the practice of offline social skills, potentially weakening real-world social self-efficacy. This aligns with the SCT concept that behaviours which are more easily initiated and reinforced (online chatting) can atrophy more effortful ones (complex face-to-face interaction) if the latter are not practiced (Shakya & Christakis, 2017).

4.7.3 Synthesis: The Clash of Reinforcements and Outcome Expectations

The tension between academic and social uses culminates in behaviours that undermine both domains. The most salient example is late-night use, reported by 60% of students. This behaviour signifies a prioritization of short-term social or entertainment reinforcements over the long-term outcome expectations of being well-rested and academically prepared. The resulting sleep disruption impairs cognitive function and emotional regulation, harming academic performance and exacerbating mental health vulnerabilities like anxiety (Exelmans & Van den Bulck, 2017).

Thus, the "dual role" is not merely descriptive but explanatory of a core conflict. Students are navigating a digital environment filled with both productive and counterproductive behavioral models. Their ultimate behavioral output—and its impact on their academic and social lives is dictated by the interplay between the strength of these environmental cues and their personal self-regulatory efficacy to navigate them towards chosen goals.

4.8 Time Management and Self-Regulatory Efficacy: The Core Behavioral Challenge

The data on time management is best understood not merely as a skill deficit but as a direct manifestation of low self-regulatory efficacy within the specific context of social media use, a core concern of SCT.

4.8.1 Time Displacement as a Failure of Self-Regulation

The finding that 70% of students use social media for over two hours daily, with 30% exceeding five hours, establishes the scale of potential time displacement. Crucially, this is not just passive time loss but active self-regulatory failure. The fact that 55% consistently prioritize checking social media *before* academic tasks (Table 7) indicates a habitual response where environmental digital cues override intended academic goals. This behavior aligns with SCT research showing

that when individuals doubt their capability to control media use (low self-efficacy), they are more likely to succumb to impulsive checking and prolonged sessions (LaRose, 2015).

4.8.2 The Vicious Cycle of Procrastination and Compounded Stress

This failure to regulate time initiates a vicious cycle. Task initiation is delayed, leading to procrastination. As deadlines approach, students experience increased stress. Rather than employing effective coping strategies, stressed students often report returning to social media as an avoidant behaviour, further reducing available study time and creating a cycle of panic, rushed work, and poor performance. This cycle reflects poor self-regulatory efficacy across multiple domains: controlling media use, managing emotions, and executing planned study behaviors (Tice & Bratslavsky, 2000).

4.8.3 Sleep Disruption: The Ultimate Time Management Failure

The most critical time management failure is the intrusion of social media into sleep time, reported by 60% of students. Late-night use represents a profound breakdown in self-regulation at a time of diminished cognitive resources. The consequence is not just lost study hours but impaired neurocognitive function. Sleep deprivation directly undermines the prefrontal cortex's executive functions, including the very self-control, focus, and emotional regulation needed to manage social media use effectively the next day (Huang et al., 2020). Thus, poor time management related to social media creates a physiological state that guarantees further self-regulatory failure, entrenching the negative cycle.

4.8.4 External Supports and the Gap in Internal Skill Development

In facing these challenges, students primarily relied on external supports (65% depended on family/friends). While valuable for accountability, this reliance on external regulation does not necessarily build internal self-regulatory efficacy. The minimal use of self-imposed technical tools (e.g., app limiters) and the lack of institutional training in digital self-regulation strategies point to a gap. Students are trying to manage a potent behavioral environment with underdeveloped personal skills, explaining why well-intentioned but vague "time management" advice often fails. Effective intervention must therefore focus on building specific self-efficacy beliefs and skills for controlling attention and technology use within academic contexts.

4.9 An Integrated SCT Model: Synthesizing Mental Health, Self-Expectations, and Academic Priorities

The preceding data can be coherently integrated through the Social Cognitive Theory framework, which posits that behavior is a product of the continuous interaction between personal, behavioral, and environmental factors. The following synthesis organizes these findings not as isolated themes, but as interconnected components of this triadic model, directly addressing the study's explanatory objectives.

4.9.1 The Personal Factor: Eroded Self-Efficacy and Unrealistic Expectations

A core personal factor elucidated by the data is the development of unrealistic self-expectations and diminished self-evaluative efficacy. The widespread tendency for frequent social comparison (70% of students) is not a passive occurrence but an active cognitive process where students use curated online personas as benchmarks for success. This observational learning from idealized models leads to internalized standards that feel unattainable, resulting in negative self-evaluation. The consequence is a significant erosion of self-esteem (60% of frequent comparers) and increased anxiety (70%), as students perceived self-efficacy to meet these artificial standards plummets (Vogel & Rose, 2016). This personal cognitive state characterized by negative self-appraisal and low emotional self-efficacy directly undermines motivation and resilience.

4.9.2 The Behavioural Factor: Maladaptive Cycles of Use and Displacement

These negative personal states fuel and are fuelled by maladaptive behaviours. Low self-regulatory efficacy manifests as an inability to control usage time (60% stay online longer than intended) and a shift in behavioural priorities, where 55% consistently prioritize social media checking over academic tasks. This represents a behavioural choice reinforced by the immediate gratification of online interaction, displacing more effortful academic behaviours. Crucially, this cycle includes sleep-disruptive behaviours (60%), a critical failure in self-regulation that has a bidirectional relationship with mental health; poor sleep worsens emotional control and cognitive function, which in turn makes self-regulation more difficult the following day (Huang et al., 2020). This creates a closed loop of negative behaviours.

4.9.3 The Environmental Factor: Platform Design and Social Reinforcements

These personal and behavioural factors operate within a powerful digital environment engineered to promote sustained engagement. Platforms like TikTok and Instagram provide constant, salient models for social comparison and deliver intermittent vicarious reinforcements (likes, shares) that shape user behaviours. The environmental design encourages passive, endless scrolling, which research links more strongly to negative outcomes than active use (Verduyn et al., 2017). Furthermore, the environment is often lacking in protective structures; while 65% of students lean on informal social support, the institutional environment offers little formal scaffolding (e.g., digital literacy training, accessible counselling on tech-wellness) to help students build counter-skills, leaving 15% with no support system at all (Tiruneh et al., 2020).

4.9.4 Triadic Interaction: The Resulting Impact on Academic Performance

The interaction of these three factors explains the documented impact on academic performance. The personal (low self-esteem, high anxiety) and behavioural (procrastination, sleep loss) outcomes directly impair cognitive capacity, focus, and study quality. The environmental pull of social media continues to compete for attention. Consequently, students reporting high usage (4+ hours daily) perceive an 80% negative academic impact. Even the potential positive environmental resource educational content on YouTube or Telegram—is often nullified for these users, as their low self-regulatory efficacy prevents them from using these tools strategically without succumbing to distraction. Thus, academic decline is not simply a matter of lost time, but the end result of a complex SCT process where personal vulnerabilities are exacerbated by a compelling environment, leading to self-defeating behaviours. This integrated model provides a theory-driven explanation for the "complex relationship" and "shift in priorities" observed in the data, moving beyond description to a mechanistic understanding.

5.SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter deals with summary of the major findings, the conclusion drawn from the findings and recommendations of the study. In the first section, brief summary, on the study and the major findings were presented. Then, conclusions drawn from the findings were made. Finally, possible recommendations were given based on the major findings of the study.

5.2.Summary of the Study

This research employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, anchored in Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), to investigate the influence of social media on the academic and social behaviours of first-year students at Haramaya University, Ethiopia. The primary aim was to transcend descriptive correlations and uncover the specific behavioural and cognitive mechanisms observational learning, outcome expectations, and self-regulatory efficacy through which social media exerts its influence. Data were collected in two phases: a quantitative survey administered to a stratified random sample of 337 students, followed by in-depth qualitative interviews with a purposively selected subset of 15 participants to explain the initial findings.

The integrated results revealed a landscape of intensive digital engagement. Students predominantly used Telegram (87%), TikTok (71%), and YouTube (66%), spending an average of 3.4 hours daily on these platforms. The analysis identified a clear, dose-response relationship: 80% of students using social media for four or more hours daily reported negative academic impacts, linking prolonged use to procrastination and displaced study time. More significantly, the study illuminated the psychosocial pathways behind these correlations. It found that upward social comparison on visually oriented platforms was a primary driver of adverse mental health outcomes, with frequent comparers reporting high rates of anxiety (70%) and low self-esteem (60%). The core explanatory variable was self-regulatory efficacy. Data consistently showed that students recognized the negative consequences of overuse but reported a low perceived capability to control their engagement, as evidenced by 60% frequently staying online longer than intended and 55% prioritizing social media checks over academic tasks. This efficacy gap, central to SCT, explains the chasm between intention and behaviours. While a minority (30%) leveraged platforms for academic gain through observational learning from educational content, for most, the distracting design and social reinforcement of these environments overshadowed potential

benefits, leading to a net negative perception of impact, especially when compounded by sleep disruption (60%).

5.2. Conclusions

Drawing on the triangulated data, the study arrives at the following conclusions regarding the role of social media in the lives of first-year students at Haramaya University:

1. Social media is not merely a tool but a potent behavioural environment that facilitates extensive observational learning. Within this digital ecosystem, students unconsciously acquire and model a wide range of behaviours, from collaborative academic strategies on Telegram to norms of procrastination and social comparison on TikTok and Instagram.
2. The significant association between social media use and diminished academic performance is not a simple matter of lost time. It is fundamentally a problem of self-regulation. The correlation is strongest where students perceived self-efficacy to manage their digital consumption is lowest, indicating that the behavioural impact is critically moderated by this personal cognitive factor.
3. The negative implications for psychological well-being are largely driven by theory-specific mechanisms. The pervasive practice of upward social comparison—evaluating oneself against curated, idealized online personas serves as a continuous source of negative self-evaluation, eroding self-esteem and fuelling anxiety. This creates a vicious cycle where negative emotions may drive further online engagement in a counterproductive search for validation.
4. The dual role of social media as both a reservoir of academic resources and a source of endless distraction creates a persistent tension for students. Their ability to harness the former while mitigating the latter is almost entirely dependent on their self-regulatory capacity, a skill found to be underdeveloped in a significant portion of the cohort.
5. Current coping mechanisms are largely informal and insufficient. While reliance on family and friends provides a basic support layer, the near-absence of structured, institutional initiatives focused on building digital self-regulation skills represents a critical gap in student support services, leaving students to navigate a challenging behavioural environment with inadequate guidance.

5.3.Recommendations

To address the challenges identified and leverage the explanatory power of SCT, the following evidence-based recommendations are proposed for targeted stakeholders:

A. For Haramaya University Administration and Policy Makers:

1. Curriculum Integration: Mandate the inclusion of a theory-driven Digital Literacy and Self-Regulation module in the compulsory first-year orientation curriculum. This module should be explicitly based on SCT principles, teaching students not only about risks but practical skills to enhance their self-efficacy. Content should include techniques for managing digital temptations (e.g., "attention planning," notification curation), critical analysis of online self-presentation to disarm social comparison, and goal-setting for productive technology use.
2. Environmental Nudges: Develop supportive policies and infrastructure that facilitate better self-regulation. This includes creating designated "screen-free" study zones in the library, partnering with internet service providers to offer optional "focus mode" filters on campus Wi-Fi during peak study hours, and promoting awareness campaigns about the link between late-night screen use and academic performance.

B. For University Counselling and Student Wellness Services:

3. Specialized Skill-Building Workshops: Move beyond general counselling to offer workshops specifically titled "Building Your Digital Self-Efficacy." These sessions should provide a safe space for students to explore their digital habits, identify triggers for compulsive use, and learn cognitive-behavioural strategies to challenge the fear of missing out (FoMO) and the impulse for social comparison.
4. Peer-Led Intervention Models: Establish a peer mentor program where trained upper-year students facilitate discussion groups for first-years on balancing digital life. This leverages the power of peer modelling a key SCT concept making healthy digital habits more observable and relatable than advice from authority figures alone.

C. For Academic Faculty and Departmental Leadership:

5. Modelling and Meta-Communication: Faculty should transparently model focused technology use. When employing platforms like Telegram for coursework, they should establish and communicate clear boundaries (e.g., "I will respond to course-related messages between 9 AM and 5 PM only"). This meta-communication teaches students to compartmentalize academic and social digital spaces, reducing the cognitive load of constant availability.

D. For Future Research:

6. Longitudinal and Intervention Research: Subsequent studies should adopt longitudinal designs to assess how self-regulatory efficacy and its relationship with social media use evolve throughout a student's degree. Furthermore, intervention research is crucial. Researchers should design and rigorously evaluate the impact of implementing the SCT-based modules and workshops recommended above, providing empirical evidence for their effectiveness in the specific context of Ethiopian higher education.

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APPENDICES
HARAMAYA UNIVERSITY
POSTGRADUATE PROGRAM DIRECTORATE
DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

Questionnaire to be filled by Students

Dear Respondents,

I am a postgraduate student at Haramaya University, College of Education and Behavioral Studies, School of Psychology. I am conducting a master's thesis titled "The Influence of Using Social Media on the Behavior of Haramaya University first Year students ." This research is being undertaken for the fulfillment of the Master of Arts in Social Psychology at Haramaya University. Your genuine responses to this questionnaire are crucial for the success of this research. Rest assured that your responses will be kept confidential.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation!

SECTION A: RESPONDENT'S SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

DIRECTION: Please provide the requested information by marking the appropriate options.

1. Gender:

Male []

Female []

Nonbinary []

Prefer not to say []

2. Age:

3. What is your level of study?

First Year []

Second Year []

Third Year []

Fourth Year []

Graduate []

4. Field of Study:

5. Please rank the possible reasons for using social media (1 being the most important):

A. To have entertainment. _____

B. To maintain relationships with family and friends. _____

C. To share and view images and videos. _____

D. To gain academic knowledge and new information. _____

E. To spend time. _____

F. To alleviate boredom. _____

G. To share personal beliefs and ideas. _____

H. To engage in discussions or communities of interest. _____

SECTION B: ENGAGEMENT AND RISK OF USING SOCIAL MEDIA

DIRECTION: Please indicate how often you experience the following behaviors or feelings related to social media use.

No.	Engagement on Social Media and Associated Risks	Never	Rarely	Often	Always
1	How often do you find that you stay on social media longer than you intended?	[]	[]	[]	[]
2	How often do you prefer the excitement of social media over intimacy with your partners?	[]	[]	[]	[]
3	How often do others in your life complain about the amount of time you spend on social media?	[]	[]	[]	[]
4	How often does your academic performance suffer because of social media?	[]	[]	[]	[]
5	How often do you check social media before attending to other responsibilities?	[]	[]	[]	[]
6	How often do you become defensive when asked about your social media activities?	[]	[]	[]	[]
7	How often do you use social media to avoid dealing with real-life problems?	[]	[]	[]	[]
8	How often do you find yourself anticipating when you can next go online?	[]	[]	[]	[]

9	How often do you fear that life without social media would be boring or unfulfilling?	☐	☐	☐	☐
10	How often do you snap, yell, or feel annoyed when interrupted during social media use?	☐	☐	☐	☐
11	How often do you lose sleep due to late-night social media usage?	☐	☐	☐	☐
12	How often do you feel preoccupied with social media when offline?	☐	☐	☐	☐
13	How often do you say "just a few more minutes" when using social media?	☐	☐	☐	☐
14	How often do you attempt to cut down your social media time but fail?	☐	☐	☐	☐
15	How often do you feel down or anxious when offline, which improves once you are back online?	☐	☐	☐	☐

SECTION C: MENTAL HEALTH AND SOCIAL MEDIA

DIRECTION: Please indicate how often you experience the following feelings related to your mental health in the context of social media use.

No.	Feeling	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	I feel lonely when not using social media.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2	I experience anxiety when away from social media.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3	I feel my self-esteem is affected by social media interactions.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4	I find myself comparing my life to others on social media.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5	I feel relaxed and happy when using social media.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6	I often think about social media while engaging in offline activities.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7	Social media use positively affects my mood.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

SECTION D: SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE PATTERNS

DIRECTION: Please provide details about your social media usage habits.

No.	Question	Response
1	Which social media platforms do you use regularly? (Select all that apply)	☐ Facebook ☐ Instagram ☐ Twitter ☐ TikTok ☐ ☐ YouTube ☐ WhatsApp ☐ Other (please specify):

2	On average, how much time do you spend on social media daily?	☐ Less than 1 hour ☐ 1-2 hours ☐ 3-4 hours ☐ 5 or more hours
3	At what time of day do you primarily use social media?	☐ Morning ☐ Afternoon ☐ Evening ☐ Night
4	What type of content do you engage with the most?	☐ Educational ☐ Entertainment ☐ News ☐ Personal updates ☐ Other (please specify): _____
5	How do you typically access social media?	☐ Smartphone ☐ Computer ☐ Tablet ☐ Other (please specify): _____

SECTION E: PERCEIVED IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA

DIRECTION: Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about the impact of social media on your life.

No.	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	Social media enhances my academic performance.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2	I feel more connected to my friends and family because of social media.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3	Social media has negatively affected my sleep patterns.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4	Social media usage has improved my mental well-being.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5	I believe social media influences my decisions and opinions.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

SECTION F: SUPPORT AND RESOURCES

DIRECTION: This section seeks to understand the support you have in managing social media usage.

No.	Question	Yes	No	Sometimes
1	Do you feel you have the support of friends/family in managing your social media usage?	☐	☐	☐
2	Have you sought professional help (e.g., counseling) for issues related to social media?	☐	☐	☐
3	Do you use any tools or apps to monitor or limit your social media usage?	☐	☐	☐

SECTION G: OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

DIRECTION: Please provide your thoughts on the following questions.

1. In your opinion, how has social media positively impacted your life?

2. What challenges or negative effects have you experienced due to social media?
