

وبگاه‌های شبکه‌های اجتماعی؛ موهبت یا تهدید برای دانشجویان آموزش عالی بنگلادش

ابوسعید ام‌دی نظم‌الحیدر*

گروه مدیریت عمومی، دانشگاه راجشاهی، راجشاهی، بنگلادش.

مشخصات مقاله	چکیده
مقاله پژوهشی موضوع: فرهنگ و رسانه حوزه موضوعی: بنگلادش	امروزه، وبگاه‌های شبکه‌های اجتماعی (SNSs: Social networking sites) به بخشی جداناپذیر از حیات دانشگاهی، اجتماعی و حرفه‌ای دانشجویان آموزش عالی در بنگلادش تبدیل شده است. در پژوهش پیش‌رو تلاش شده است این موضوع بررسی شود که آیا وبگاه‌های شبکه‌های اجتماعی برای دانشجویان برخی مؤسسات آموزش عالی شهر راجشاهی در بنگلادش بیشتر موهبت است تا تهدید. در این مطالعه از طرح پژوهشی توصیفی مقطعی با رویکرد روش‌های ترکیبی استفاده شد. داده‌های اولیه از طریق پرسشنامه بر ساخته گردآوری شد. این پرسشنامه میان ۵۰ دانشجوی آموزش عالی در پنج مؤسسه توزیع شد: دانشگاه راجشاهی، دانشگاه مهندسی و فناوری راجشاهی، کالج پزشکی راجشاهی، کالج راجشاهی، و کالج تربیت مدرس. نمونه‌ها به‌طور هدفمند انتخاب شدند. همچنین، مصاحبه غیررسمی و بدون ساختار با دانشجویان و مدیران منتخب انجام شد. داده‌های ثانویه نیز از متون علمی متأخر، گزارش‌های رقوم ملی و بین‌المللی، و منابع سیاستی مرتبط استخراج شد. داده‌های کمی با استفاده از آمار توصیفی (فراوانی و درصد) و یادداشت‌های حاصل از مصاحبه‌ها از طریق تحلیل محتوا بررسی شد. نتایج نشان داد میزان مشارکت پاسخ‌دهندگان در استفاده از شبکه‌های اجتماعی بالاست؛ به‌طوری که ۳۵/۹ درصد از آنان روزانه دو تا سه ساعت، ۲۰/۵ درصد روزانه سه تا چهار ساعت، و ۳۰/۸ درصد روزانه بیش از چهار ساعت از این شبکه‌ها استفاده می‌کنند. فیس‌بوک بیشترین میزان استفاده را داشت (۷۴/۵ درصد)، اما یوتیوب از دید دانشجویان بهترین پلتفرم ارزیابی شد (۵۸/۸ درصد). مهم‌ترین اهداف استفاده از این شبکه‌ها عبارت بود از سرگرمی (۳۵/۳ درصد)، ارتباط (۲۹/۴ درصد) و مطالعه علمی و آموزشی (۱۱/۸ درصد). بیشتر پاسخ‌دهندگان از فرصت‌های کسب درآمد از طریق شبکه‌های اجتماعی (۸۰/۴ درصد) و تأثیر این شبکه‌ها بر سلامت روان (۸۸/۲ درصد) آگاهی داشتند. همچنین، بیشتر آنان معتقد بودند که شبکه‌های اجتماعی مستعد انتشار شایعات و اخبار جعلی (۱۰۰ درصد) و مخاطرات مرتبط با جرایم سایبری (۸۷/۲ درصد) است. در مجموع، ۶۲ درصد از پاسخ‌دهندگان شبکه‌های اجتماعی را موهبت، ۲۰ درصد آن را تهدید و ۱۶ درصد نیز آن را نه موهبت و نه تهدید تلقی کردند. برای نتیجه‌گیری جلید گفت شبکه‌های اجتماعی فناوری‌هایی مشروط هستند؛ به این معنا که ارزش و پیامدهای آن‌ها به عواملی همچون هدف استفاده، مدت زمان استفاده، سطح سواد دیجیتال، حمایت‌های نهادی و رعایت اصول ایمنی در فضای برخط بستگی دارد.

ارجاع به این مقاله: نظم‌الحیدر ا. (۱۴۰۶). «وبگاه‌های شبکه‌های اجتماعی؛ موهبت یا تهدید برای دانشجویان آموزش عالی بنگلادش». مطالعات کشورها. ۵(۲): ۲۶۳-۲۸۵. doi: <https://doi.org/10.22059/jcountst.2026.412675.1470>



وبگاه: <https://jcountst.ut.ac.ir> | رایانامه: jcountst@ut.ac.ir
شاپای الکترونیکی: ۹۱۹۳-۲۹۸۰ | ناشر: دانشگاه تهران

Social Networking Sites (SNSs): A blessing or a curse for tertiary-level students in Bangladesh

Abu Sayed Md. Nazmul Haider*

Department of Public Administration, University of Rajshahi, Rajshahi, Bangladesh.

Article Info	Abstract
Original Article Main Object: Culture and Media Scope: Bangladesh Received: 13 April 2026 Revised: 19 May 2026 Accepted: 23 May 2026 Published online: 23 June 2026 Keywords: digital literacy, mental health, social networking sites, tertiary-level students, cybercrime.	Social Networking Sites (SNSs) have become an integral part of the academic, social and professional lives of tertiary level students in Bangladesh today. This research is an attempt to see whether SNSs are more blessing or curse for the students of selected higher education institutions of Rajshahi city in Bangladesh. The cross sectional descriptive mixed method design was used. Primary data were gathered by structured survey questionnaire, which was administered to 50 tertiary level students from five institutions, namely, University of Rajshahi, Rajshahi University of Engineering and Technology, Rajshahi Medical College, Rajshahi College and Teachers Training College in which students were selected purposively. Informal, non-structured discussions were held with selected students and administrators. Secondary data were sourced from recent academics literature, national and international digital reports and relevant policy sources. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) for quantitative data and thematic analysis for the interview notes. Results indicate that the engagement rate of the respondents with SNS is also high, with 35.9% of the respondents reporting that they use SNS for two to three hours daily, 20.5% for three to four hours, and 30.8% for more than four hours. Facebook was used the most (74.5%) but YouTube was believed to be the best platform for students (58.8%). The major uses were for entertainment (35.3%), communication (29.4%), and academic study (11.8%) alone. The majority of the respondents knew of earning opportunities from SNS use (80.4%) and of how SNSs affect mental health (88.2%); the majority respondents noticed that SNSs are prone to rumours and fake news (100%) and cybercrime risks (87.2%). In total, 62% of them perceived SNSs as a blessing, 20% as a curse, and 16% neither a blessing nor a curse. The study concludes that SNSs are conditional technologies, as their value is based on the purpose of use, length of use, digital literacy, institutional support and online safety practices, purpose, duration of use, digital literacy, institutional support and online safety practices.

Cite this article: Haider ASMN. (2027). "Social Networking Sites (SNSs): A blessing or a curse for tertiary-level students in Bangladesh". *Countries Studies*. 5(2): 263-285. doi: <https://doi.org/10.22059/jcountst.2026.412675.1470>.



Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License
 Website: <https://jcountst.ut.ac.ir/> | Email: jcountst@ut.ac.ir |
 EISSN: 2980-9193
 Publisher: University of Tehran

1. Introduction

Social networking sites (SNSs) are online services that enable users to create profiles, establish social network, share information and communicate using text, images, audio and video. Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, X and other apps have transformed the way young people communicate, learn, express identity and engage in public life. SNSs are no longer just leisure spaces for tertiary-level students. They are also places where they can be able to share class materials, watch educational videos, receive notices from the institution, establish a professional network, get information about scholarships, engage in civic discourse, and learn about income-generating activities. These websites also pose a risk of distraction, time wasters, misinformation, cyber bullying, account hacking, and psychological pressures on students.

Whether or not SNSs are a good thing or a bad thing then is not a straightforward moral issue. It is a question of fact and of place. A student can learn a software skill via a YouTube tutorial, and on the same day they can be taken off studying via entertainment material posted on the same platform. It can provide a way to link students to teachers, but can also lead to exposure to rumours, comparison, online harassment or unsafe links. The academic value of SNSs relies on the frequency of use, the purpose of using, and the kind of contents, the digitally literate level of the user and whether institutions give guidance on the responsible use of SNSs.

The context of this study is Bangladesh, as the country has been a booming digital nation in the past decade. According to the latest digital reports of 2025, the Internet penetration rate in Bangladesh was 47.0% with 82.8 million users last year. According to the same source, at the end of 2024 and 2025, the number of social media user identities in Bangladesh was estimated at 64.0 million users, which is 36.3% of the population, and increased by 8.5 million active identities or 15.3% (DataReportal, 2026). Platform-level data also suggest high numbers of users: There were 64.0 million Facebook users, 49.8 million YouTube users, 56.2 million adult ad-reachable users of TikTok, 9.15 million users on Instagram, and 12.0 million registered members on LinkedIn in Bangladesh in late 2025 (ibid). Furthermore, as per the figures provided by BTRC reported in national media, Bangladesh's internet subscriber base would be 129.62 million and the mobile subscriber base would be 186.06 million of people by March 2026 (BSS, 2026). The statistics indicate the importance of SNSs for education, youth development and public communication in Bangladesh.

It is at the tertiary level where students are crucial in this debate. While they are experienced enough to use SNSs independently and intensively, they are still in their developmental phase of academic identity, career planning and social development. Their online activity can impact on their concentration at school, social interactions, career

exposure, and emotional health. While the negative side of SNSs is often discussed in public in Bangladesh, such as fake news, cybercrime and moral concern. In addition to this, students engage in academic group work, peer support, online courses, self-learning and entrepreneurship using SNSs. A balanced study cannot, therefore, be an examination of SNSs as either entirely positive or entirely negative.

The objective of the study is to explore the tertiary level students' attitudes towards using SNS in selected tertiary educational institutions in Rajshahi city of Bangladesh. Rajshahi is an educational city as it has general, engineering, medical, and college level and teacher education institutions. The study of this setting is relevant since most of the digital research conducted in Bangladesh focuses on nationally representative samples of the country, or on a city-based setting, but the institutionally diverse settings outside Dhaka have not been studied thoroughly. The present study hence adds context-specific evidence regarding the use of SNSs by the students, their sense of benefits and risks associated with them and the conditions when they may be a blessing or a curse.

1.1. Research objectives

The aim of this research is to explore how social networking sites are influencing tertiary students' academic, social and personal life in selected institutions in Rajshahi city of Bangladesh. The specific objectives are as follows:

- To describe the concept of social networking site with regard to tertiary level student;
- To know the most popular SNS platforms used by the selected students;
- To explain the present situation of SNS in Bangladesh and relate with the students' life in Rajshahi;
- To analyze the positive and negative consequences of SNSs as perceived by students in terms of their academic, social, economic and psychological life;
- To make suggestions to students, higher education institutions and policymakers to maximize the benefits and minimize the risks of SNSs.

1.2. Research questions

The research questions for the study are as follows:

- What is the understanding and application of the tertiary students of social networking sites?
- Which SNS are adopted the most by the students and which SNS are perceived as most useful?
- What are the principal motives of SNS use among the tertiary level students in Rajshahi?
- What are the positive values that students see of SNSs in terms

of learning, communication, networking and income opportunities?

- What are the negative effects of SNSs as students perceive them in the context of mental health, misinformation, cybercrime and focus on studies?

Overall, what are students' perceptions of SNSs: blessing or curse; or conditional tool that depends on how it is used?

2. Theoretical framework: Uses and Gratifications Theory

The theoretical approach used in this study is mainly the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT). Theories have been developed around this concept of the user being an active rather than passive recipient of media messages, and that people select and use media for specific needs including information, social interaction, entertainment, identity formation, status, learning and escape (Katz et al., 1973; Ruggiero, 2000). This theory is relevant to SNSs as the students do not use one platform for one purpose. One student can use Facebook to communicate with groups, YouTube to get tutorials, Instagram to express himself, LinkedIn to connect professionally, TikTok and reels just to entertain. UGT thus accounts for the ability of the same technology to have good or bad consequences, depending on the gratification sought.

There are three uses of UGT in the present study. First, it categorizes each student's SNS use based on their gratifications: academic information, social connection, entertainment, professional networking, income generation and crisis communication. Second, it identifies risks as the result of an imbalance in attempts to be satisfied. For instance, an excessive use of entertainment can replace studying time, or information-seeking can lead to fake news if the user is not digitally literate. Third, it may assist in explaining why YouTube might be seen as more effective by students despite the fact that Facebook is being used more often. Educational and self-learning gratifications are more easily met through YouTube, while communication and social gratifications may be better met through Facebook.

This framework helps to shed light on the analysis beyond just a blessing/ curse dichotomy. The question posed in the paper is not "what is good or bad about the SNSs?" but "how do the SNSs get used by students and how much are they used and under what circumstances at the institutional and student levels do outcomes occur?". This is consistent with recent studies which indicate that the effects of social media are conditional and not automatic.

Social media impacts are more of a function of study habits, sleep, relationships, digital literacy, psychological vulnerability, and the nature of social media interactions, rather than the amount of screen time (Al Mosharrafa et al., 2024; Sarker et al., 2026).

3. Literature review

3.1. Concept and educational role of SNSs

Early literature referred to SNSs as web-based services that facilitate users to create a profile, express relationships and access and navigate through a list of relationships in a “bounded” system (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Subsequent research developed this by demonstrating how SNS were transformed into a multi-purpose digital ecosystem, where people communicate, consume news, indulge in leisure, construct professional networks, produce content and join learning communities. At the higher education level, SNSs are being used more and more to discuss, coordinate, support, announce, create online communities and for informal learning. Their benefit in the educational area is particularly apparent when students use them to gain access to open educational sources, recorded lectures, and tutorials and peer explanations which might not be offered in a formal classroom environment.

Recent studies have demonstrated that SNSs have the potential to enhance learning with their intentional use. However, in a cross-sectional study of Bangladeshi university students, Al Mosharrafa et al. (2024) discovered that social media use is not necessarily a negative factor, as there are positive relationships between social media use, psychological wellbeing, and academic performance. The results suggest that SNSs can be used as an academic and career tool for students who can critically manage time, purpose and content.

3.2. SNSs, academic performance and time management

One of the major concerns in the literature is that there may be a decrease in concentration on academic work because of greater use of SNS. The findings indicate that there is a negative relationship between social networking addiction and academic achievement from the global findings. In a 2025 systematic review and meta-analysis, Salari et al. (2025) determined that there was an overall negative relationship between social network addiction and students' academic performance. However, literatures are not one-directional. Moderate and purposeful use can be beneficial for students in learning skills, finding resources and maintaining study groups; excessive and unregulated use can replace study time. It is this distinction that is crucial for the understanding of SNSs as conditional technologies.

Recent research also indicates that the relationship between social media and academic performance may not be as direct as one may think. Gong et al. (2025) identified that the use of social media might impact academic results by means of social anxiety and fear of missing out. Sarker et al. (2026) conducted a study in Bangladesh and discovered that while social media usage was not directly linked to depression, anxiety, and stress, it indirectly influenced mental well-being by increasing depression, anxiety, stress, and decreasing study time, resulting in friendship disruption and relationship crises. The results

indicate a need to investigate social media in relation to the context of students' academic and social experiences as a whole, not just screen time.

3.3. SNSs and mental health

Mental health is another major theme that is prevalent in literature. SNSs can be used to support students in maintaining some social support, emotional experience, and mental health information. However, overuse can make the comparison, insecurity, sleep disturbance, stress and anxiety worse. In a study conducted by Ahmed et al. (2022), among Bangladeshi university students, 8.7% of the social media users were termed problematic social media users and personality traits and high use were found to be associated with problematic use. Sarker et al. (2026) also revealed that there are indirect links between social media and mental health problems among college students in Bangladesh through study path, relationship path, and career path. The findings from these studies provide some insight into the dangers of social media, not only in the technical aspects, but also in the academic, personal relations and coping strategies of students.

Literature on mental health is particularly relevant to Bangladesh as tertiary level students are often under pressure due to competition in the academic world, lack of employment security, family expectations and financial stress. SNSs can build support networks, but can also increase the pressure due to constant comparison, idealized lifestyles and the nature of online communication. So, it is important that digital wellbeing education be recognized as a student welfare issue, not just a technology issue.

3.4. Misinformation, cybercrime and digital literacy

The second significant collection of literature is on misinformation and cyber risk. While SNSs have the ability to communicate information quickly, they also have the ability to communicate rumours, fake news, manipulated images and unverified claims in the same manner. Social media was a major source of health information during the Covid-19 pandemic, but also misinformation. Chowdhury et al. (2023) examined how social media influences COVID-19 pandemic awareness among Bangladeshi university students, and how it can both positively and negatively impact public-health knowledge, and the need to pay attention to information quality and verification.

The cybercrime threat is also significant. Students can be the victim of hacking, phishing links, identity theft, cyber bullying, impersonation, viewing inappropriate content or misuse of personal photos or data. Having cyber laws and platform reporting tools in place does not automatically mean that students are protected, if they don't know how to access privacy settings, how to browse safely or how to verify their habits. Thus, a crucial part of digital literacy should encompass

technical safety, critical information evaluation, and ethical online behavior.

3.5. Contexts in South Asia and developing countries

The reviewer's comments were correct in that recent work from the South Asian and developing world contexts needs to be engaged in a more critical way. From the examples of Bangladesh and the like, evidence shows that SNSs serve a dual purpose. While they open up access to information, there is also flexible learning and digital entrepreneurship, they also mirror and show inequalities in access, digital skills, language, gendered safety and institutional support. Certain digital platforms have enabled education and communication to persist during the COVID-19 pandemic; however, this has also highlighted disparities in access to the internet, access to devices and digital competences among students.

There is also some evidence from developing countries that students can use SNSs to make up for deficiencies in formal institutions. Improved access to libraries, counseling, career centers, and/or learning support systems are rare, and students often resort to using YouTube tutorials, Facebook groups, alumni networks, and informal online communities. While this can be empowering, it can also lead them to low quality information and unregulated advice. Thus, the policy question is not whether SNSs should be permitted in student life, but how institutions can help to guide their meaningful and safe and productive use for academic purposes.

3.6. Research gap

The literature reviewed has three significant gaps. First, many studies focus on the impact of social media at a general or national level and fewer studies focus on institutionally varied city-based tertiary settings, which are outside of capital-centered samples. Second, many studies examine outcomes of benefits or harms, and fewer studies combine academic, social, economic, psychological and cyber-safety outcomes in any one empirical analysis. Third, while the relationship between social media and mental health is studied recently in Bangladesh, there remains a gap for small scale in-context studies which relate to the students' perceptions with ongoing digital growth and interpretation in Bangladesh. The present study tries to fill out such gaps by examining selected tertiary level students of Rajshahi with the application of mixed method descriptive study and using Uses and Gratifications Theory to explain the possible operation of SNSs as both a blessing and a curse.

4. Background

4.1. Rise of social networking sites in Bangladesh

Adoption of SNSs is strongly related with the diffusion of smart phones, mobile Internet and low-cost digital communication in Bangladesh.

What started out as a personal way of connecting has turned into the daily routine of students, professionals, entrepreneurs, institutions and civil society who are technologically literate? Students' use of smartphones to access SNSs, in particular, is of paramount importance in mobile-first internet use. This implies that SNSs are available in classrooms, hostels, public transport and households, thus providing more opportunity and distraction.

Students' expectations have also evolved due to digital expansion. There is increasing expectation that students will have access to academic notices, group notices, tutorials, job circulars and scholarship information online. Even though SNSs are not officially related to the school curriculum, they have become informal schools. Facebook groups can be used for notice boards, Messenger groups for coordination, and YouTube channels as additional classrooms. Simultaneously, these spaces are informal, and the quality of the content, privacy and moderation are diverse.

4.2. Types of SNSs prevailing in Bangladesh

SNSs in Bangladesh include social networking services like Facebook, LinkedIn, video sharing like YouTube, short video sharing like TikTok, photo-sharing and video-sharing like Instagram, messaging like Messenger and WhatsApp, microblogging like X and community services like Reddit. These are platforms for tertiary students. Facebook is frequently a place for conversation, group discussion, event sharing and informal notices. Tutorials, lectures, language learning, technical skills, exam preparation is done using YouTube. Instagram and TikTok are more connected with self-expression, entertainment, creative content and influencer culture, but can also have educational content. LinkedIn is primarily known for career networking, professional identity and job searching.

Platform diversity is significant because the frequency of a platform is not necessarily the same as the value of the education. A student may end up spending more time on Facebook, but find YouTube more useful in their own learning. But LinkedIn could be less popular, but more important for career purposes. The current study thus distinguishes the most-used platform from the most-effective platform.

4.3. Current scenario of SNS users in Bangladesh

The current results revealed that the use of SNS in Bangladesh is in the mainstream. According to DataReportal (2026), the internet user base in Bangladesh increased to 82.8 million in late 2025, up 5.3 million (or 6.9%) from the previous year. The number of social media users jumped 15.3% from late 2024 to late 2025, to 64.0 million, representing 36.3% of all people. Facebook continued to be one of the biggest platforms (64.0 million users), with YouTube reaching 49.8 million users, TikTok

reaching 56.2 million adult ad-reachable users and LinkedIn having 12.0 million members (DataReportal, 2026).

The extent of digital connectivity is also reflected in subscriber data. According to Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha's BTRC (Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission) reported statistics, as of March 2026, there were 129.62 million internet subscribers in Bangladesh, comprising of 114.85 million mobile internet subscribers and 14.75 million fixed-line internet subscribers. In the same month, there were 186.06 million mobile subscribers (BSS, 2026). While user identities and advertising reach is not synonymous with unique individual users, combined these demonstrate that SNSs are functioning in a vast and dynamic digital landscape. To university and college students, this means online platforms are not separate from learning, but are already embedded in daily university and college activities.

4.4. Impact of SNSs on tertiary-level students

SNSs have a positive impact on tertiary-level students in the following ways: They share academic resources, discuss assignments, organize group work, communicate with teachers and seniors, follow pages of education and access video tutorials. They also help put into practice self-learning and skill building using platforms like YouTube, Coursera, Khan Academy, 10 Minute School, etc. to build learning communities. SNSs can improve communication skills, provide student exposure to scholarship and job information, and provide students with networking opportunities. In the time of COVID-19, social media and Internet platforms allowed people to stay in touch, to learn and to continue with economic activities when movement was limited.

Simultaneously, SNSs raise severe issues. Overuse may cause loss of concentration, may not be conducive to study time, and may contribute to emotional stress. Pupils can feel compelled to keep up with images they see online of others on their mobile phone or anxiously await their updates, or they can compare themselves with those that they see curating. Students should be aware that misinformation can rapidly travel, particularly if they forward posts without checking their authenticity. Hacking, phishing, fake accounts, harassment, and identity misuse and privacy violations are all types of cybercrime risks. Thus, it is important to look beyond the simple availability of or popularity of SNSs. It needs to be evaluated based on how it is being used in practice, students' digital literacy, and the protection offered to students.

4.5. Ethical considerations in SNS Use and research

Ethical concerns about privacy, consent, data protection, digital footprints, and misinformation and respectful communication are raised with SNS use. Students frequently post personal information, photos, location and opinions without realizing how long the information will

stay on the Internet or how it can be used. Ethical SNS use includes being cautious about sharing personal information, treating others with dignity, not being a cyber-bully, confirming information before sharing, and being responsible about using academic content.

Ethics are also important factors when studying SNS usage. The present study was based on the principle of voluntary participation and information on the purpose of the study and the confidentiality of the responses. In the analysis of the survey, no information was asked that would identify an individual. The results are presented in summary rather than identified by individual respondents or institutions to prevent the identification of individual respondents or institutions. Care has been taken to ensure results of the study are reported in a non-stigmatizing way, due to the nature of the topic– mental health, cybercrime and online behaviour.

5. Methodology

5.1. Design

The study employed descriptive cross sectional mixed-method design. It is cross-sectional as data were gathered at one point in time to reflect students' current SNS use and perceptions. It is descriptive in that the intended purpose was to describe the usage patterns, perceived benefits, perceived risks and overall evaluations rather than to test causal hypotheses. It is mixed method as it incorporated insights from the qualitative interview to complement the quantitative survey data. This design can be used in an exploratory study in which one wishes to understand measurable patterns, as well as explanations in the context.

5.2. Study area and target population

This study was carried out in the selected tertiary level institutions of Rajshahi District in Bangladesh. The respondents for the study were tertiary level students who are studying in higher education institutes of the city of Rajshahi and actively using at least one of the social networking sites. Selected institutions were University of Rajshahi, Rajshahi University of Engineering and Technology (RUET), Rajshahi Medical College, Rajshahi College, Teacher Training College. These institutions were chosen since they covered various streams of tertiary education, such as, General education, Engineering education, Medical education, College education and Teacher education.

5.3. Sample size and sampling technique

A quantitative sample of 50 tertiary level students was used. The study employed a non-probability purposive sampling method because only active users that were available for the period of study were needed. The practical nature of the study, academic examinations and the exploratory character of the study were other factors that made purposive sampling practically possible. The sample does not claim to

be representative of all Bangladesh tertiary level students. It, instead, offers evidence based on selected institutions in a context-specific manner.

5.4. Data collection instruments

A structured questionnaire and non-structured interviews were used to gather the primary data. The questionnaire comprised sections on demographic profile, daily time spent on SNSs, most used SNSs, the use of SNSs for certain purposes, their effectiveness and awareness of income generating opportunities, mental health perceived impacts, perceived role during the COVID-19 pandemic, awareness of cybercrime and government action, perceived impacts of fake news, and overall evaluation of the SNSs as a blessing or a curse. The majority of the items on the questionnaires were categorical or dichotomous, e.g. yes/no, platform choice or purpose category. The Likert means and composite scale scores for the original field material were not preserved, so those are not reported.

Selected students and administrative staff were interviewed using non-structured interviews to get contextual explanations. The questions in the interview guide included academic, communication, learning support, misuse, cyber safety and institutional concerns regarding SNSs. The interviews conducted were informal and explanatory, so they are not used to derive numerical results but to give additional information to support the themes.

5.5. Variables and measurement

The main variables that were included were: daily usage of SNSs, preferred platform, intention to use them, perceived educational usefulness, awareness of opportunities to earn, perceived mental health effect, awareness of cybercrime and overall assessment of SNSs. Time categories were used to determine daily use. Platform preference was determined by the “most used” platform. The purposes of use were divided into entertainment, communication, academic study and combination of purposes. Three categories were used to measure overall evaluation (blessing, curse or neither). Academic support, communication, self-learning, income opportunities, mental health and cyber risks and misinformation were the key themes identified as qualitative.

5.6. Data analysis

The statistical analysis of quantitative data was descriptive which consisted of frequencies, percentages and tabulation. Since the research objective was a descriptive rather than a hypothesis-testing one, and the sampling was non-probability and the sample size was small, the following inferential tests were not applied: Chi-Square tests, t-tests, correlations, or regressions. Percentages are presented as they were in

the field values. Percentages are reported rather than reconstructed counts, as there is some variability in the number of valid responses for some items. Qualitative interview narratives were interpreted thematically and interpreted to give meaning to the quantitative patterns.

5.7. Reliability, validity and triangulation

The trustworthiness of findings was enhanced in several ways. The questions on the questionnaire were framed around the study objectives and research questions thereby enhancing content validity. The use of both survey data and interviews allowed methodological triangulation. Secondary literature and recent digital statistics were used as a means of contextualizing the findings. The study has some flaws, though. The sample size is very low and purpose and hence generalization is limited. The data presented are self-reported, which could lead respondents to under-report excessive use or over-report knowledge of cyber risks. Means or reliability coefficients cannot be calculated because the preserved data are not on a Likert scale. The limits are recognized and taken into account in the interpretation of the results.

5.8. Ethics and limitations

All participants were volunteers. The respondents were told the purpose of the academic investigation conducted by the researchers and were not asked to give any identifying details for the purposes of publication. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained in reporting the results. The major constraints are small sample size, purposive sampling, limited geographical area, self-reported data and constraint of time during the data collection. These constraints restrict the results from being seen as a national estimate and as rather exploratory evidence from selected institutions in the Rajshahi area.

6. Results

Only the quantitative and qualitative results are presented in this section. The quantitative results are descriptive and indicate the students' reported use patterns, perceived benefits and perceived risks. The qualitative table (Table 1) is a summary of the dominant themes that came out from the informal interviews and open discussion with the respondents.

6.1. Demographic profile of respondents

The original field results show that the majority of the respondents were in the age group 23-25. This indicates that intensive use of SNS emerges in the later stages of tertiary education, where students have greater academic demands and are more involved in career planning and social networking among their peers. The available draft data did not provide exact age-wise frequencies; hence, the age-wise profile of the respondents is reported with caution.

Table 1. Study profile

Item	Description
Research approach	Descriptive cross-sectional mixed-method study
Study area	Selected tertiary-level institutions in Rajshahi District, Bangladesh
Target population	Tertiary-level students who actively use SNSs
Sample size	50 students
Sampling technique	Non-probability purposive sampling
Institutions	University of Rajshahi, RUET, Rajshahi Medical College, Rajshahi College, Teachers Training College
Main instruments	Structured questionnaire and non-structured interviews
Analysis method	Descriptive statistics and thematic interpretation

Table 2. Age profile of respondents

Age group	Observation
23-25 years	Majority of respondents
Other age groups	Minority of respondents

Note: The field draft available reported the dominant age group without the exact age-wise frequencies.

6.2. Daily time spent on SNSs

High engagement with SNSs across the day was reported by students. A high proportion reported using SNSs for more than four hours per day and the largest reported using SNSs for 2-3 hours per day. This pattern suggests that SNSs are part of students' everyday life and might affect their time allocation, both in and outside school.

Table 3. Daily time spent on SNSs

Time spent per day	Percentage (%)
1-2 hours	12.8
2-3 hours	35.9
3-4 hours	20.5
More than 4 hours	30.8

Note: Percentages are reported from valid survey responses as preserved in the original results.

6.3. Most frequently used platforms

Respondents most commonly used Facebook of all the SNS, followed by YouTube and Instagram. This is in line with the overall landscape in Bangladesh where Facebook is one of the biggest social platforms. The domination of Facebook also indicates that it plays a multi-purpose role in communication, group discussion, entertainment and informal academic coordination.

Table 4. Most frequently used SNS platforms

Platform	Percentage (%)
Facebook	74.5
YouTube	21.6
Instagram	5.1

6.4. Purpose of SNS use

The most frequent reason for using the SNS was “entertainment” and the second was “communication”. A smaller proportion reported that they used SNSs for academic study alone, although a significant proportion used the SNSs for a mix of purposes. This indicates that SNSs have education potential, but it does not mean that this will be the dominant way students use SNSs unless they actively choose to use them for education.

Table 5. Purpose of SNS use

Purpose	Percentage (%)
Entertainment	35.3
Communication	29.4
Academic study	11.8
Combination of all purposes	23.5

6.5. Perceived most effective SNS for students

Facebook was found to be the most commonly used platform, but YouTube was more effective for students. This distinction is significant. While Facebook might be the preferred mode of social interaction, YouTube seems to offer greater educational satisfaction in the form of tutorials, lecture videos, problem-solving videos, and the ability to learn at one's own pace.

Table 6. Perceived most effective SNS for students

Platform	Percentage (%)
YouTube	58.8
Facebook	41.2

6.6. Awareness of income-generating opportunities

A very high proportion of the respondents knew about the role of SNSs in developing income generation opportunities. That means freelancing information, content creation, online business, product promotion, marketing online, tutoring and creative work. The results indicate that SNSs are perceived by the students not only as a social environment but also as an economic and career environment.

Table 7. Awareness of earning opportunities through SNSs

Response	Percentage (%)
Aware	80.4
Not aware	19.6

6.7. Perceived mental health impact

The majority of the respondents thought that SNS use has an impact on mental health. Discussion of this concern during the interviews was associated with increased screen time, comparison, sleep disruption, anxiety, and distraction and pressure to stay socially connected. This is

not a cause and effect relationship, but it does show that students are well aware of the psychological risks of not managing their SNS.

Table 8. Perceived mental health impact of SNS use

Response	Percentage (%)
Affects mental health	88.2
Does not affect mental health	11.8

6.8. Role of SNSs during the COVID-19 pandemic

The effectiveness of the SNSs was generally recognized during the COVID-19 pandemic. Respondents linked SNSs to communication, information dissemination, online classes, awareness messages, telecommuting, online shopping, and small business. This finding corroborates the notion that SNSs could be used as a social and educational infrastructure during times of crisis.

Table 9. Effectiveness of SNSs during the COVID-19 pandemic

Response	Percentage (%)
Highly effective	70.6
Not effective	7.8
Neutral	21.6

6.9. Awareness of cybercrime and government action

The majority of the respondents knew about cybercrime and government measures to combat it. But knowledge is not enough to ensure safe practices. Interview themes indicated that students might be aware of the general concept of hacking, cyber bullying, fake accounts, but may not necessarily exercise good password management, privacy protection or link verification practices.

Table 10. Awareness of cybercrime and government measures

Response	Percentage (%)
Aware	87.2
Not aware	12.8

6.10. Perception of rumors and fake news

100% of the respondents reported that SNSs can quickly spread rumors and fake news. The consensus of this perception indicates that misinformation is a non-abstract phenomenon in students' digital communication life. The result also strengthens the importance of critical digital literacy and verification skills in higher education.

Table 11. Perception of fake news spread through SNSs

Response	Percentage (%)
Agree	100
Disagree	0

6.11. Overall assessment: Blessing or curse

Most respondents considered SNSs as a blessing in general. But there was a significant minority who regarded them as a curse or as neither blessing nor curse. This distribution is included to reinforce the positive/ negative nature of the main argument of the paper: SNSs are not necessarily positive or negative. Their impact hinges on the way the students use them and the kinds of support, literacy and safeguarding, that is available.

Table 12. Overall perception of SNSs

Perception	Percentage (%)
Blessing	62
Curse	20
Neither blessing nor curse	16

Note: Percentages reflect the original result table; minor differences from 100% may be due to rounding or missing responses.

6.12. Qualitative themes from interviews and open discussion

The qualitative findings help explain the numerical results. Rather than presenting fabricated direct quotations, Table 13 reports summarized themes based on interview notes and open discussion. These themes show why students perceive SNSs as both useful and risky.

Table 13. Qualitative thematic findings

Theme	Evidence from participant discussion	Interpretation
Academic support	Students described using Facebook groups, Messenger groups and YouTube tutorials to share notes, discuss assignments and follow academic content.	SNSs support informal learning and peer collaboration, especially when formal resources are limited.
Communication and networking	Respondents reported that SNSs help them communicate with classmates, seniors, teachers, alumni and professionals.	SNSs satisfy social and professional gratifications by expanding students' networks.
Entertainment and time loss	Students acknowledged that entertainment content often consumes more time than intended.	Entertainment gratification can become a source of academic distraction when self-regulation is weak.
Income and career opportunity	Many respondents were aware of earning opportunities through online business, freelancing, content creation and digital marketing.	SNSs are increasingly viewed as economic and professional spaces, not only social platforms.
Mental health concern	Respondents associated excessive use with stress, comparison, insecurity, sleep disturbance and reduced focus.	The psychological impact of SNSs is linked to intensity of use, content type and academic pressure.
Misinformation and cyber risk	Students identified rumours, fake news, hacking, phishing links and fake accounts as common concerns.	Digital literacy and cyber safety training are necessary for responsible SNS use.

7. Discussion

7.1. SNSs as multi-purpose gratification spaces

The results have a strong correlation with the Uses and Gratifications Theory. Students employ SNSs because they meet several needs such as entertaining, communication, academic information, networking, crisis communication and income awareness. The lack of academic value of SNSs does not imply that the results are dominated by entertainment and communication. Instead, it demonstrates that other rewards that are emotional and more immediate are at odds with academic value. This is why students can acknowledge the educational value of SNSs whilst spending a lot of time on non-academic material.

The data also indicate that there is a relation between the platform utilized and the type of gratification desired. Facebook is the most used as it offers communication, social visibility, groups, entertainment and informal information flow. YouTube is seen as most effective since it directly addresses learning and self-learning purposes. This separation gives weight to the idea that it is not appropriate to consider all SNSs as the same for research on SNSs. Patterns of attention, learning and risk vary by platform.

7.2. Academic value and the YouTube-Facebook distinction

One of the most significant results of the study is that YouTube is perceived as more effective than Facebook. It implies that the students are able to differentiate between the most frequently used platform and the most useful learning platform. Video-based learning, step-by-step explanations and repetitions, and self-paced access are supported by YouTube. These are especially significant if students may need additional assistance outside of class, such as lectures. Facebook is more engaging and social however it can likewise contain scholarly info, as well as amusing and irrelevant material.

The implications of this discovery for teachers and institutions. Instead of being discarded as not worth the effort or as distractions, teachers can guide students in a systematic use of the SNSs for academic activities. Teachers can suggest reliable learning resources, start moderated study groups, distribute reliable learning content and teach learning evaluation of online learning resources. This can be helpful guidance to make SNS use a more purposeful learning experience instead of a passive consumption.

7.3. Entertainment, time displacement and self-regulation

Results indicated that the SNS was used on a high frequency with more than half of the respondents indicating that they use the SNS for more than three hours per day (categories three to four hours and more than four hours per day). This shows the entertainment/social connection gratifications, which is strong from a UGT point of view. But, too much engagement can cause issues if it takes the place of study, sleep,

physical interaction or reflective learning. Recent research in the same vein indicates that the impact of social media on students is often indirect, manifesting through study hours, sleep, relationships, and anxiety, and not simply as a direct result of exposure to social media (Sarker et al., 2026).

In practice, however, the challenge is to do without SNSs completely. An approach like this would be unrealistic, as these platforms are already a part of students' communication and learning environment. But the more realistic is self-regulation. Students need a strategy for setting time limits, figuring out how to not use a platform for academic and entertainment purposes, turning off unnecessary notifications, and checking the source before using and engaging in a platform on purpose. The knowledge on the income generation opportunities is high, indicating critical change of perception among students.

7.4. Digital entrepreneurship and professional gratification

The high awareness of the income generation opportunities shows a critical change of perceptions among students. SNSs are no longer viewed just as a medium for chatting or for fun. They are becoming more aware of them as places where they can be digitally entrepreneurial, freelance, be creative, develop a personal brand, tutor, promote a small business, and network with professionals. This is particularly applicable with reference to the situation of Bangladesh where youth unemployment and the underemployment of the educated youth is a major concern. SNSs can assist students to investigate possibilities outside of typical job avenues.

But there is risk in economic opportunity, as well. They might fall victim to scams, fake job offers, unverified training providers, exploitative freelance arrangements or misleading success stories. Hence, Digital entrepreneurship training should encompass ethics, rules of platform, financial safety, awareness of contract, data protection and realistic career planning. Universities have a part to play in providing links to credible training and mentors and career services.

7.5. Mental health and digital wellbeing

88.2% of respondents reported seeing mental health effects; this is an important finding. Although not a clinical measure of mental health outcomes, the results show that students are aware of association between SNS use and emotional wellbeing. They are worried about things that have been picked up in recent literature, they are anxious, stressed, distracted, compare themselves, sleep is disturbed, and there is pressure on their relationships. In Bangladesh, being under pressure to perform well in exam and secure a job or to meet the expectations of family, can add to emotional stressors by the use of SNSs.

Digital wellbeing will thus need to be part of student support.

Awareness sessions can be conducted around healthy media consumption, sleep hygiene, online comparison and the response to cyber bullying and help-seeking by the universities. During counseling services, questions can be asked relating to screen time and stress online. Clubs in school are another good way to promote responsible online behavior. These would be measures that would allow the use of SNS to become a normal part of student life, and ways to address the psychological impacts.

7.6. Misinformation, cybercrime and trust

The fact that the SNSs spread rumors and fake news is agreed upon by all. It proposes that pupils know how to recognise misinformation but that knowledge does not always result in verification behaviours. Students can share information that is emotionally charged, very emotional, accepted by friends and/or may sound like a crisis. For that, digital literacy is required to do more than just skills. It should contain source assessment, fact-checking, comprehending algorithms, identifying manipulated content and pausing to think before sharing.

The high level of awareness was also true with cybercrime, although practical safety is still an issue. Students should have access to two-factor authentication, strong password, privacy settings, reporting tools and safe browsing practices. Clear reporting avenues for cyber bullying and harassment/account compromise should be provided at the institution. Policy measures should be student friendly, accessible and rights based so that those impacted by bullying feel safe in reaching out for help instead of keeping quiet.

7.7. SNSs: Blessing or curse?

The overall result illustrates that majority of the respondents consider SNSs as a blessing; however, there are negative and neutral responses that do not allow a one-sided conclusion. SNSs are blessing when they help in learning, communication, networking, skill development, and income and crisis response. They turn into curses when they hinder study time, because unsafe exposure to cybercrime, lead to misinformation, negatively affect mental wellbeing, and promote excessive usage. The blessing or curse is contingent upon the relationship between user intention, platform design, and digital literacy and institutional support.

Based on the study results, the study then proposes a conditional conclusion that SNSs have neither good nor bad nature. They are socio-digital spaces, whose effects are shaped by their uses and management. SNSs offer tremendous scope to aid the academic and professional growth of tertiary-level students in Bangladesh, yet their activities will be uneven unless guided and structured in digital literacy, online safety, and time-management and ethical involvement.

8. Practical recommendations

8.1. Recommendations for higher education institutions

First, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) need to embed digital literacy and digital wellbeing into the support programs of their students. These programs should include topics such as source verification, privacy protection, cyber safety, online etiquette, time management, healthy screen habits and responsible academic use of online materials. Digital literacy should not be viewed in the context of a single ICT class, but rather as part of orientation, academic advising and career development.

Secondly, teachers need to facilitate productive use of SNS. Departments can establish moderated academic groups to provide notices, resources and peer discussion. Teachers can suggest reputable educational pages, open educational resources and YouTube channels. Institutions can also advise students to create a LinkedIn accounts or other professional platforms for portfolio development, for the search of internships and to connect with alumni.

Thirdly, universities need to establish a clear cyber safety mechanism. Pupils should be aware of how to make a complaint about cyber bullying or impersonation, hacking or harassment. A reporting desk or digital safety focal point that is friendly to the student can enable students to get guidance without the fear of being blamed or stigmatized. Counseling units should also be able to respond to issues of stress online and anxiety about social media.

8.2. Policy and regulatory recommendations

Protection, education and accountability should be the focus of policy, not just restriction. Regulatory bodies to increase efforts to raise awareness of the public about cybercrime, privacy, misinformation and safe reporting. Cyber laws should be enforced in a way that respects freedom of expression, student rights and shields victims. The Government of the People's Republic of the Bangladesh, universities and civil society organizations can collaborate to produce digital safety materials in the Bengali language for the youth.

Policymakers should also ensure digital inclusion. Without affordable access to internet, reliable devices and digital skills, students are unable to learn equally, access online learning, or networking professionally. Investing in quality internet connectivity and ensuring connectivity on campus and the elimination of digital divide between urban and rural learners is still relevant in the name of fair educational opportunity.

8.3. Recommendations for platforms and technology providers

SNS platforms should simplify the understanding of privacy settings and enhance reporting capabilities and prevent spreading harmful misinformation, provide better protection against fake accounts,

phishing and harassment. There should be more safety prompts on widely used platforms in local languages. There is also a role for technology providers and telecom operators to get involved in raising awareness on safe account usage, two factor authentication and responsible sharing.

8.4. Recommendations for students and families

Students should practice intentional SNS use. This includes time limits, study vs. fun, and verifying sources before sharing, avoiding suspicious links, using strong passwords and enabling two factor authentications and keeping personal information safe. Students should also not equate online popularity as a measure of personal worth. Families can help with responsible use by fostering open dialogue instead of just punishment or limitation, particularly when children are victims of cyber bullying or online harassment.

8.5. Recommendations for future research

Larger and more representative samples of public and private universities in the different regions of Bangladesh should be used in future research. Validated scales for social media addiction, digital literacy, academic performance and mental health can be used for studies thus enabling inferential analysis. Future research could also examine differences between platforms, gender, rural/urban differences, discipline-specific differences, and the influence of AI algorithms for social media platforms. Longitudinal studies would be particularly helpful in understanding the impact of SNS use over time on academic outcomes and wellbeing.

9. Conclusion

The study was conducted to find out whether SNSs are a blessing or a curse to the tertiary-level students of Bangladesh as per the findings of selected tertiary-level institutions of Rajshahi. The results indicate that SNSs are well integrated in the students' lives. They are used by students for entertainment, information, communication, self-learning, networking, awareness of income and communication in crisis situations. Facebook has been used most often, and YouTube is seen as the most effective platform for students. The majorities of the respondents consider SNSs as a blessing but also identify several mental health, misinformation, cybercrime, and excessive use risks.

The key finding of this study is that, SNSs are conditional technologies. Its impact is contingent on its intent, length of time, type of platform, level of self-regulation, and digital literacy and institutional direction. SNSs can be used responsibly to aid academic learning, career development, communication and social participation. They can distract and stress in their overuse or if used without critical awareness, can be sources of misinformation and vulnerability. So, the aim should

never be to discourage and disallow the use of SNSs, but to facilitate and encourage their safe and ethical use for the benefit of students.

SNSs will continue to influence education and youth culture of Bangladesh tertiary level students. The challenge for universities, policy makers, families and students is to shift from unregulated to guided, critical and purposeful use. Through digital literacy, cyber safety, and support for student wellbeing, as well as responsible governance of the platform, SNSs can become a blessing rather than a curse for students' academic and social wellbeing.

Conflict of interest

The author declared no conflicts of interest.

Ethical considerations

The author has completely considered ethical issues, including informed consent, plagiarism, data fabrication, misconduct, and/or falsification, double publication and/or redundancy, submission, etc. This article was not authored by artificial intelligence.

Data availability

The dataset generated and analyzed during the current study is available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

References

- Ahmed O, Sultana T, Alam N, Griffiths MD, Hiramoni FA. (2022). "Problematic social media use, personality traits, and mental health among Bangladeshi university students". *Journal of Technology in Behavioral Science*. 7: 183-191. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41347-021-00235-1>.
- Al Mosharrafa R, Akther T, Siddique FK. (2024). "Impact of social media usage on academic performance of university students: Mediating role of mental health under a cross-sectional study in Bangladesh". *Health Science Reports*. 7(1): e1788. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hsr2.1788>.
- BSS: Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha. (2026). "Mobile, internet subscribers rebound". May 9. <https://www.bssnews.net/news-flash/385567>.
- Boyd DM, Ellison NB. (2007). "Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship". *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*. 13(1): 210-230. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00393.x>.
- Chowdhury S, Rahman M, Doddanavar IA, Zayed NM, Nitsenko V, Melnykovich O, Holik O. (2023). "Impact of social media on knowledge of the COVID-19 pandemic on Bangladeshi university students". *Computation*. 11(2): 38. <https://doi.org/10.3390/computation11020038>.
- DataReportal. (2026). "Digital 2026: Bangladesh. Kepios / We Are Social". <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2026-bangladesh>.
- Gong Z, Guo Y, Tan J. (2025). "Social media use and academic performance among college students: The chain mediating roles of social anxiety and fear of missing out and the moderating effect of teacher-student relationship". *Frontiers in Psychology*. 16: 1649890. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1649890>.
- Katz E, Blumler JG, Gurevitch M. (1973). "Uses and gratifications research". *Public Opinion Quarterly*. 37(4): 509-523. <https://doi.org/10.1086/268109>.
- Ruggiero TE. (2000). "Uses and gratifications theory in the 21st century". *Mass*

- Communication and Society*. 3(1): 3-37.
https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327825MCS0301_02.
- Salari N, Zarei H, Rasoulpoor S, Ghasemi H, Hosseinian-Far A, Mohammadi M. (2025). "The impact of social networking addiction on the academic achievement of university students globally: A meta-analysis". *Public Health in Practice*. 9: 100584. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.puhip.2025.100584>.
- Sarker MJA, Maranto R, Haque A, Sagar MSU. (2026). "Social media impacts on Bangladeshi college students". *Discover Psychology*. 6(93). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s44202-026-00609-7>.