

A Quantitative Study of Social Media Use among University Students in Sarawak, Malaysia

Pressca Negin^{1*}, Jati Kasuma Ali², Noraini Nasirun³, Yusman Yacob⁴

^{1,2,4} Faculty of Business Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, Malaysia.

³ Faculty of Business Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Perlis, 02600 Arau, Perlis, Malaysia.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 09 February 2026
Revised 22 June 2026
Accepted 03 July 2026
Online first
Published 15 July 2026

Keywords:

social media usage
university students
social networking sites
online activities

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.24191/gading.v29i2.816>

ABSTRACT

This study quantifies social media usage among university students in Sarawak, Malaysia by examining the extent of social media use, preferred social media platforms, primary motivations for use, and common online activities. A quantitative survey design was employed, and data were collected from 305 purposively sampled undergraduate students using a structured questionnaire. Descriptive statistical analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The findings revealed that 97% of the respondents were active social media users, indicating the widespread adoption of social media among university students. WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube emerged as the three most frequently used platforms. Entertainment was identified as the primary motivation for social media use (39%), followed by socialising (33%) and learning (20%). In terms of online activities, streaming content on YouTube and watching movies (41%), social networking (37%), and listening to music (29%) were the most common activities reported. These findings provide valuable insights into the digital engagement patterns of university students in Sarawak and offer practical implications for educators and higher education institutions seeking to promote more meaningful and productive use of social media for learning, communication, and student engagement.

1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) continues to redefine the way individuals interact and socialise, particularly through social media platforms. These tools are widely recognised for their speed, accessibility, and user-friendly interfaces (Asur & Huberman, 2010), enabling seamless communication across geographical boundaries. According to the Digital 2025 Malaysia report, internet penetration in Malaysia reached 97.7% in early 2025, with 34.9 million users actively online (DataReportal, 2025). Social media remains a dominant force in digital engagement, with 70.2% of the population, equivalent to 25.1 million user identities, participating in social networking activities (DataReportal, 2025).

^{1*} Corresponding author. E-mail address: pressca288@uitm.edu.my

Infrastructure development in Sarawak has evolved during the years especially with the uptake of Covid-19 in 2020 where online education is the new method of learning being implemented in all over the world. This gives rise to the use of social media among young people in Sarawak. A local study conducted by Duffy Bayuon et al. (2019) have suggested that three most used social media by the pupils in rural areas of Sarawak are Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube. According to them, majority of the respondents use WhatsApp. This high adoption was due to the usage of WhatsApp groups for two main purposes: between class teacher and parents which is for the class teacher to inform the parents about information related to school; and between-subject teacher and pupils which is for the pupils to discuss their homework with the subject teacher or classmates (Duffy Bayuon et al., 2019).

Beyond educational and social purposes, social media has also become increasingly significant in the sphere of political communication. Platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, with their emphasis on visual content and interactive features, are particularly appealing to younger audiences. In Sarawak, recent findings indicate that younger voters are shifting away from traditional platforms like Facebook and gravitating toward these newer, more dynamic spaces for political engagement (Akobiarek & Puyok, 2024). This development mirrors broader national trends, where political actors and campaign teams utilise tools such as Instagram stories, short-form videos, and collaborations with online personalities to reach and mobilise supporters, thereby shaping contemporary political discourse in Malaysia.

Moreover, YouTube was frequently used, too locally, because the pupils were given the chance to watch YouTube during the ICT class and they were allowed, with supervision from teacher or computer technician, to watch YouTube in the computer lab after school (Duffy Bayuon et al., 2019). Facebook being the most utilised SNS globally is also attracting students in Sarawak (MCMC, 2017; MCMC, 2018; Duffy Bayuon et al., 2019). Educators favour this platform because it can promote collaborative learning (Menzie et al. 2017) by creating online classes with meaningful teacher-student, and student-student interactions (Munoz & Towner 2009; Dyson et al. 2015).

Despite the growing body of literature on social media usage, several gaps remain evident. Prior research has predominantly focused on Tween, Millennials and some other general youth populations, with limited attention given to university students in Sarawak, who represent a distinct group with different levels of autonomy, digital literacy, and academic engagement. In addition, existing studies tend to emphasise maladaptive use and general usage patterns, while offering limited insight into its motivations for use and patterns of engagement within the local context. Furthermore, much of the available research is based on national level data, which may not accurately reflect the current digital landscape in Sarawak following recent technological and educational shifts. Addressing these gaps is essential to provide a more comprehensive understanding of social media use among university students in Sarawak.

In light of these gaps, understanding social media use among university students who are among the highest adopters remains essential due to its implications for academic engagement, well-being, and digital citizenship. This study therefore examines the extent of social media use among university students in Sarawak, identifying their preferred platforms, motivations, and common online activities.

Despite the growing body of literature on social media usage, several research gaps remain. Prior research has predominantly focused on secondary school students, rural pupils, or the general youth population, providing limited insight into the social media habits of university students in Sarawak. Although previous studies have documented general patterns of social media use and highlighted issues such as excessive use, digital addiction, and academic performance, relatively little attention has been given to understanding the specific platforms preferred by university students, their motivations for using social media, and the activities they engage in within the Sarawak context. Furthermore, much of the existing evidence is derived from national-level studies, which may not accurately reflect Sarawak's unique digital landscape, particularly following the rapid expansion of digital infrastructure and the increased reliance on online communication and learning after the COVID-19 pandemic. Addressing these gaps is important to provide a more context-specific understanding of university students' social media behaviour in Sarawak. Accordingly, this study seeks to examine the extent of social media use among university students in

Sarawak by identifying their preferred social media platforms, primary motivations, and common online activities. The following research questions were formulated to address these gaps.

1.1 Research Questions

Therefore, this research serves as a platform to investigate the use of social media among university students in Sarawak, Malaysia. Specifically, these research questions have guided this research:

- i. To what extent do university students in Sarawak are active users of social media?
- ii. Which social media platforms are most frequently used by university students in Sarawak?
- iii. What are the primary purposes that motivate social media use among university students?
- iv. What types of activities do students most often engage in when using social media platforms?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Social Media as a Mass Media

According to Wimmer and Dominick (1994), there are four major development stages in mass media research. First, it deals with the medium itself; how it works, its accessibility, and unique characteristics. Second, research seeks to understand the medium's usage patterns, users, and the gratifications they seek. Third, it examines the social, psychological, and physical consequences of dependence on the medium. Fourth, it focuses on improving the medium and its content through technological advancements or new usage patterns.

In the early 1990s, Internet studies were in the first stage, focusing on awareness, adoption, and benefits. Wimmer and Dominick (1994) noted that the Internet served functions such as information, communication, entertainment, and affiliation. These functions align with the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which posits that users actively select media to fulfil specific needs (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973). Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube now fulfil these needs more dynamically, especially in Malaysia, where 85% of the population (28.2 million people) are active users, spending an average of 3.2 hours daily (Nordin, 2025).

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) helps explain this widespread adoption. It suggests that perceived usefulness and ease of use drive technology acceptance (Davis, 1989). Social media's mobile-first design, 93% of users access it via smartphones, enhances both factors, making it an ubiquitous tool for communication, entertainment, and commerce.

Moreover, the Media Dependency Theory explains how increased reliance on social media for news, entertainment, and civic engagement amplifies its influence on users' perceptions and behaviors (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). For instance, short-form video content on TikTok and Instagram Reels now generates 2.4 times higher engagement than static content, reinforcing social media's dominance as a mass communication channel (Hashmeta, 2025).

Finally, the Social Capital Theory provides insight into how social media fosters both bonding and bridging capital. Online interactions build trust, reciprocity, and collective identity, especially through participatory content creation and community engagement (Ellison et al., 2007). This participatory nature challenges traditional media hierarchies and democratizes information flow (Sponder & Khan, 2017). The present study aligns with the second stage of Wimmer and Dominick's (1994) framework, aiming to identify social media users and examine the effects of heavy usage on their behaviours and perceptions.

2.2 Social Media Use in Sarawak

Sarawak's digital transformation has accelerated in recent years, with social media playing a central role in communication, tourism, and community engagement. The state's push toward smart living and digital inclusion has led to increased adoption of platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, even in rural areas (S-Sarawak, 2025). Social media is now used not only for personal interaction but also for promoting tourism, disseminating public information, and fostering transparency between institutions and citizens.

Ong (2022) reported in Sarawak's main newspaper, The Borneo Post has estimated that slightly more than 60 % of people around the world are now using some sort of social media platform like WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram and Facebook or other app for leisure, business, information and research. For businesses using social media, these platforms can reach nearly any type of consumer, even in the most remote places hitherto unreachable, so long as they have Internet service which explains why WhatsApp is hugely adopted in Sarawak. In terms of information seeking and sharing especially in times of natural disaster like flood, Facebook was found to be the most extensively employed digital platform among Sarawakians (Yap et al., 2022). This is because Facebook can facilitate the delivery and sharing of pictures or videos, road or traffic conditions and weather conditions or warnings.

Duffy Bayuong et al. (2019) provided early empirical evidence of social media adoption among rural pupils in Sarawak, identifying WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube as the dominant platforms for interpersonal communication and classroom interaction. Their study revealed that WhatsApp groups were extensively used to facilitate two-way communication between teachers and parents as well as among pupils for homework discussions. A subsequent investigation by the same researchers (Duffy Bayuong et al., 2020) further demonstrated that the integration of social media into school communication networks enhanced engagement and information flow in rural communities, particularly where access to formal learning resources was limited. Collectively, these studies highlight how social media platforms serve as low-cost, user-friendly solutions bridging digital divides in geographically dispersed areas of Sarawak.

However, the rise in digital engagement has also raised concerns about mental health and family dynamics. A recent report highlighted that 42% of Malaysian teenagers including those in Sarawak experience emotional stress due to excessive social media use (Mat Isa et al., 2022). The dual nature of social media in Sarawak is evident: while it enhances connectivity and economic opportunities, it also introduces challenges such as misinformation, digital fatigue, and ethical concerns in media professionalism. Sarawak's commitment to responsible media practices and digital literacy is reflected in initiatives by the Sarawak Multimedia Authority and local media campaigns aimed at promoting safe and ethical use of social platforms (Sarawak Multimedia Authority, 2024).

2.3 Social Media Use among University Students

Social networking sites (SNS) have become deeply embedded in the lives of school-aged children, offering both educational opportunities and developmental challenges. Recent research in Malaysia highlights that while SNS foster creativity, collaboration, and access to information, they also pose risks such as distraction, emotional stress, and exposure to inappropriate content. A national survey conducted by Ipsos in 2025 revealed that 72% of Malaysians believe social media negatively affects children's education, prompting calls for stricter age-based access policies. In a study of secondary school students, Ismail et al. (2025) found that adolescents are not passive consumers but strategic users of platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and WhatsApp, constructing personalised digital ecosystems to fulfil social, educational, and entertainment needs. The study emphasised the importance of age-sensitive digital literacy programs to mitigate risks and enhance responsible engagement.

University students in Malaysia are among the most active social media users, with platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp dominating their daily routines. Research has shown that Instagram is the most preferred platform among undergraduates, with many spending 2 to 6 hours daily on social media (Zulkifli & Abidin, 2023). The primary motivations include staying connected with peers and family, entertainment, and academic collaboration.

From an educational standpoint, social media has shown promise in supporting learning activities. Nordin (2025) observed that Malaysian undergraduate students frequently use Instagram to connect with peers and share academic content, spending between two to six hours daily on social platforms. The study suggests that educators can harness these platforms to create interactive learning experiences, such as infographics, quizzes, and awareness campaigns. Similarly, Samala et al. (2024) emphasised that social media fosters collaborative learning and engagement among digital-native students but cautioned that its integration into education must be strategic and mindful of privacy, addiction, and mental health concerns. These findings echo earlier research on social capital, where SNS like Facebook were shown to support relationship-building and community engagement among students (Ellison et al., 2007).

While social media enhances digital literacy and engagement in learning activities, it also poses risks such as distraction, procrastination, and mental health issues. Studies indicate that students with higher CGPA scores tend to spend less time on social media, suggesting a correlation between usage patterns and academic performance (Basri et al., 2023). Gender differences in social media effectiveness have also been observed, with female students reporting slightly higher perceived benefits from social media use (Basri et al., 2023).

Social media further serves as a platform for student activism, identity formation, and peer support. Educators and institutions are therefore urged to promote healthy usage habits and integrate digital tools thoughtfully into academic environments to mitigate negative effects such as academic fatigue and social isolation (Zaidi & Zainal, 2025).

3. METHOD

This study was conducted using a survey research design through questionnaires, The Use of Social Media among University Students constructed through discussion of researchers with reference to past studies. The survey method was employed in this study because it is the appropriate method of collecting quantitative data to serve the aim of the study. A set of questionnaires was distributed to 336 university students in Sarawak, Malaysia using Google Form. Out of the 336 distributed questionnaires, 305 were deemed valid, with all items receiving complete responses. Of these questionnaires, 195 were collected after two months and the remaining 110 were collected after a reminder had been sent via text messages and email to the deans of the selected schools.

By running a priori analysis using G Power 3.1.9.7, the calculation of the size of the sample for this study was carried out and resulted in 153. For this reason, the sample size of 305 cases was more than sufficient to be analysed in this study. Furthermore, sample sizes larger than 30 and smaller than 500 are appropriate for all research (Roscoe, 1975). The set of questionnaires consist of Part A, B, C, D and E. Part A is meant to collect information on respondents' demographic profile. Part B used the Guttman scale (1: Yes, 2: No) to assess if respondents are social media users or not. Part C is to assess respondents' three most visited social media platforms. Part D is to assess the purpose of social media to respondents. Part E is to assess respondents' main activities conducted through their social media engagement.

Prior to its administration, the instrument underwent validity and reliability assessment. To ensure the quality of the instrument, the questionnaire was developed through a rigorous process involving adaptation and refinement from previous validated studies as well as alignment with the objectives of this research. An initial pool of items was generated based on relevant literature, followed by a content validation process involving two experts in the field of marketing and social media studies, who reviewed the items for clarity, relevance, and representativeness. Based on their feedback, several items were revised, added, or removed.

A pilot study was subsequently conducted with 30 university students who were not part of the actual sample to assess the reliability and clarity of the instrument. The results indicated that all constructs achieved acceptable to excellent levels of internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.694 to 0.933, demonstrating acceptable to good reliability. Data from this study were analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

4. FINDING & DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the findings for the demographic profiles of the respondents in this study.

Table 1. Demographic profile of respondents

Items		Frequency (Percentage)
Gender	Male	85 (28)
	Female	220 (72)
Age	20-22 years old	259 (85)
	23-25 years old	46 (15)
Race	Malay	104 (34)
	Indian	1 (0.3)
	Chinese	33 (11)
	Others	167 (55)
University	UiTM	53 (17)
	Unimas	15 (5)
	UPM	13 (4)
	UTS	28 (9)
	Curtin University Malaysia	26 (9)
	Others	3 (1)
Duration of Use	< 1 year	6 (2)
	1-2 years	78 (26)
	3-4 years	120 (39)
	5-6 years	63 (21)
	> 6 years	38 (13)

Table 1 revealed that 28% of respondents were male students and 72% of respondents were female students. All of them are final year bachelor's degree students and they are currently studying in the Faculty of Business from Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM), Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), Universiti Putra Malaysia Sarawak (UPM), University of Technology Sarawak (UTS) and Curtin University Malaysia, Sarawak. In terms of duration in the use of social media, 2% of respondents have been using it less than a year, 26% use it within 1 to 2 years, 39% within 3 to 4 years whereas 20% have been using it within 5 to 6 years. These findings revealed that most of the respondents began to be exposed to social media since they were in high school, at the age of 16 to 17 years old.

Table 2 is to answer the first research question, to what extent do university students in Sarawak are active users of social media? This finding indicates the penetration of social media among the respondents.

Table 2. Distribution, frequency, and mean to assess whether respondents are social media users or not

Items	Yes (Percentage)	No (Percentage)	Mean
Are you a social media user?			
Yes	297 (97)		1.03
No		8 (3)	

As shown in Table 2, 297 respondents answered Yes (Mean = 1.03), this implies that almost everyone uses social media. With 97% of respondents being social media users, it shows that social media is nearly universal among these students. This suggests that social media is an integral part of respondents' daily life, reflecting broader national and global trends. Similar findings have been reported where social media penetration is particularly high among younger generations (Pew Research Center, 2021). The 97% of social media users among respondents was also possible because of easy access to ICT tools like the

Internet, computers, smartphones and tablets. Yunus and Suliman (2014) argue that the widespread use of ICT tools, including social media, creates opportunities to improve learning experiences. Thus, with almost all respondents who are social media users, social media can be leveraged for educational purposes such as collaborative learning, language development, and digital literacy.

Findings in Table 3 are to answer the second research question: Which social media platforms are most frequently used by university students in Sarawak?

Table 3. Distribution and frequency on the visited social media platforms

Items	Frequency	Percentage
Facebook	129	42
WhatsApp	275	90
YouTube	192	63
Instagram	205	67
LinkedIn	1	0.3
Snapchat	1	0.3
Twitter	47	15
Threads	1	0.3
Telegram	40	13
TikTok	41	13
Others	15	5

In general, the findings demonstrated that WhatsApp was the most frequently visited social media platform among respondents, with 90% reporting active use. This dominance reflects WhatsApp's popularity as a practical and accessible communication tool, particularly for group messaging. The high proportion of users suggests that WhatsApp has become the primary medium of interaction for majority of the respondents, consistent with national findings that highlight its widespread adoption across Malaysia (MCMC, 2018).

Next, Instagram was identified as the second most visited platform, used by 67% of the respondents. Instagram's popularity can be linked to its visual-centric features that appeal to younger generations, allowing them to engage with peers through photo and video sharing. This finding is consistent with recent studies that point to Instagram's role in fostering online identity expression and peer interaction (Ellison et al., 2007; Merdeka Center, 2024).

YouTube ranked third, with 63% of respondents reporting usage. This result indicates that the platform is not only a source of entertainment but also an avenue for accessing educational and informational content. The high level of use reflects broader global trends where YouTube is increasingly integrated into learning and leisure activities (Manning, 2014; Pew Research Center, 2023). By contrast, platforms such as LinkedIn, Snapchat, and Threads were scarcely used (0.3% each), indicating that professional or niche-oriented platforms are not yet relevant to the respondents' social media habits because they are currently university students.

Similarly, Telegram (13%), TikTok (13%), Twitter (15%) and Others that includes LokLok, Netflix and DubuYo (5%) were used only by a minority of the respondents, suggesting that these platforms have yet to achieve the same level of integration into the respondents' daily routines.

Findings tabulated in Table 4 are to answer the third research question: What are the primary purposes that motivate social media use among university students?

Table 4. Distribution and frequency to assess the purpose of social media use

Items	Frequency	Percentage
Socialising	100	33
Learning	61	20
Entertainment	118	39
Online Shopping	22	7
Online Business	4	1

Majority of respondents chose entertainment as the main purpose of using social media applications as reported by 39% ($n = 118$) of the respondents. This suggests that social media continues to be primarily used as a source of leisure and relaxation, consistent with global findings that highlight entertainment as a dominant driver of social media engagement among young users (Pew Research Center, 2023). The second most cited purpose was socialising, with 33% ($n = 100$) of the respondents indicating that they use social media applications to connect and interact with others. This result reflects the foundational role of social networking platforms in facilitating interpersonal communication, echoing earlier studies that emphasised social media's role in maintaining social ties (Azfahane et al., 2024; Sahharon et al. 2024).

Learning emerged as the third most frequent purpose (20%; $n = 61$). This finding is encouraging, as it indicates that a significant portion of respondents recognise social media as a tool for educational and informational activities. Similar findings have been reported in recent studies in Malaysia, where WhatsApp and YouTube have been increasingly used by students for academic support and collaborative learning (Lee et al., 2023; Johari et al., 2022). In contrast, fewer respondents reported using social media for online shopping (7%; $n = 22$) and online business (1%; $n = 4$). These low percentages suggest that while e-commerce is growing globally, it may not yet be a primary motivation for social media usage within this demographic. This could be attributed to age, socioeconomic factors, or limited exposure to digital entrepreneurship opportunities.

Table 5 is meant to collect data on respondents' main activities conducted through their social media engagement. The findings are to answer the last research question: What types of activities do students most often engage in when using social media platforms?

Table 5. Distribution and frequency to assess respondents' main activities conducted through their social media engagement

Items	Frequency	Percentage
Social Networking	112	37
Personal Emails	1	0.3
Information Search	33	11
YouTube and Movies	125	41
Gaming Websites	13	4
Listening to Music	87	29
Online Shopping	69	23
Online Business	1	0.3

Based on Table 5, YouTube and Movies (41%) is the most frequent activity suggests that entertainment consumption is a primary driver of Internet use among the respondents. This corresponds with earlier findings where majority responded that entertainment is the main purpose of using social media among them. This indicates that video streaming and consumption of audiovisual content now dominate bandwidth usage and user attention. Following this, Social Networking usage (37%) is also consistent with many studies showing social platforms are among the most frequented online domains (e.g. Ali, 2020; Trifiro, 2019). Social media allows both passive consumption (scrolling, viewing) and active engagement (posting,

commenting), which makes it a versatile medium. Listening to Music (29%) is often a background activity that can run concurrently with other tasks (e.g., studying, commuting). Therefore, it comes in third.

Online shopping (23%) suggests it is a significant but not dominant activity among these respondents. In many contexts, online shopping competes with entertainment for user time, and its adoption is influenced by digital infrastructure, trust in e-commerce, convenience, and payment systems. Information Search (11%) ranks lower. This may indicate that participants rely on search less frequently or that search is subsumed by content platforms (e.g. YouTube as search for answers) or social networks (where links and news are shared). The very low percentages for Personal Emails (0.3%) are no surprise because these respondents are not working yet, email has given way to messaging apps (WhatsApp, Telegram, etc.). Similarly, Online Business (0.3%) may be too narrowly defined or under-adopted among these sample because they are currently still studying.

5. IMPLICATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Given that 85% of the sample falls within the 20–22 age bracket, these findings suggest that the university environment itself, characterised by significant autonomy and a need for escapism acts as a catalyst for pathological internet use, requiring educators to integrate healthy technology habits into the institutional routine. The reason being due to the availability of student's free time and as a mean of getting away from university routines (Rahman et al., 2020). The findings carry several implications for key stakeholders such as educators, policy makers and institution like Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM).

Firstly, educators should integrate social media into structured learning, encouraging students to use platforms such as WhatsApp and YouTube for collaborative projects, peer discussion, and knowledge sharing rather than purely entertainment. Digital literacy training can also be embedded in coursework to promote critical and ethical online behavior. Secondly, policymakers in higher education could develop institutional policies that encourage productive digital engagement. For instance, UiTM's curriculum may include digital citizenship programs and guidelines for responsible use of social platforms to enhance academic productivity (Paul & Paul, 2024; Jin & Ibrahim, 2024). Lastly, the study's insights can inform UiTM's internal digital policy framework. By understanding how students predominantly use social media for entertainment, UiTM can design awareness campaigns and structured interventions that reposition digital platforms as tools for academic enhancement and professional growth. Policy frameworks that reward innovative digital pedagogy could also strengthen UiTM's competitiveness both nationally and internationally.

6. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study underscore the pervasive role of social media in the lives of final-year business students across five Malaysian universities; Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM), Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas), Universiti Putra Malaysia Sarawak (UPM), University of Technology Sarawak (UTS) and Curtin University Malaysia Sarawak and others such as Segi College Sarawak and Open University (OUM). With 97% of respondents identified as active social media users, the data affirms the near-universal penetration of digital platforms among this demographic. Majority of the students have been engaged with social media for over three years, indicating early exposure during their formative years in secondary education.

WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube emerged as the top three platforms, reflecting a blend of communication, social interaction, and multimedia consumption. These preferences align with broader national and global trends, where mobile-first, visually driven platforms dominate youth engagement. The minimal use of professional or niche platforms such as LinkedIn and Threads suggests that students' digital habits are still largely shaped by social and entertainment needs rather than career-oriented networking.

Entertainment was the leading purpose for social media use, followed by socialising and learning. This hierarchy of motivations highlights the dual nature of social media as both a leisure tool and a potential educational resource. The prominence of YouTube and movie streaming as main activities further

reinforces the entertainment-centric behavior, while the presence of learning and information search activities suggests emerging opportunities for academic integration.

Overall, the study reveals that social media is deeply embedded in the daily routines of university students, serving multifaceted roles that span communication, entertainment, and education. With strategic incorporation of the above recommendations, this study can serve as a benchmark for understanding digital behavior among Southeast Asian university students. Particularly for UiTM Sarawak, the insights could inform the development of campus-wide initiatives that leverage existing student engagement patterns to improve academic communication, promote research visibility, and foster innovation. This approach aligns with UiTM's mission to cultivate digitally competent graduates and supports national strategies for digital transformation under Malaysia MADANI.

The findings contribute to the global discourse on youth digital engagement and can be extended through comparative cross-country analyses. These insights offer valuable implications for educators, policymakers, and platform developers seeking to harness social media for pedagogical innovation, digital literacy, and student engagement. Future research may explore longitudinal shifts in platform preferences and the evolving balance between recreational and academic use of social media among tertiary students.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI AND AI-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES

This manuscript was developed with the assistance of ChatGPT (OpenAI) for the purpose of improving language, grammar, clarity, academic writing style, and the organisation of the manuscript. The tool/service supported the author(s) in reviewing and refining the content, and the authors assume full responsibility for the final version submitted for publication.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS/FUNDING

This work received no specific grant from any funding agency.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors agree that this research was conducted in the absence of any self-benefits, commercial or financial conflicts and declare the absence of conflicting interests with the funders.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Pressca Negin led the research by formulating the core research questions, objectives and hypothesis. She played a central role in the writing of the original draft, organising the literature review, synthesising findings, and interpreting the results. In addition, she was responsible for the creation of data visualisations and figures that supported the theoretical and future empirical components of the study. Jati Kasuma Ali contributed significantly to the theoretical development of the manuscript. This author also provided intellectual leadership and supervision, ensuring that the study remained aligned with the broader research agenda and adhered to academic standards. Noraini Nasirun was actively involved in reviewing and editing the manuscript for coherence, scholarly tone, and adherence to journal guidelines. Yusman Yacob took the lead in the design and development of the research methodology, including the selection of appropriate theoretical constructs, survey instruments, and analytical approaches. Their expertise contributed to improving the clarity and overall quality of the manuscript during the final stages of revision.

REFERENCES

- Akobiarek, G. C., & Puyok, A. (2024). Patterns of social media choice and use and their impacts on online political participation in Sarawak. *Malaysian Journal of Communication*, 40(1), 1–20. Retrieved from UKM eJournal
- Ali, A. (2020). Social media usage and its impact on university students' academic performance. *Education and Information Technologies*, 25(5), 4477–4493. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-020-10172-0>
- Aminuddin Jafry, N. H., Abdul Rahim, A., Md Yusoff, Y., et al. (2023). Social media usage: The impact on Malaysian student life. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 13(12), 3341–3355. <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v13-i12/20188>
- Asur, S., & Huberman, B. A. (2010). Predicting the future with social media. *Proceedings of the 2010 IEEE/WIC/ACM International Conference on Web Intelligence and Intelligent Agent Technology*, 492–499.
- Azfahanee Zakaria, A., Sarah Sabir Ahmad, S. S., Syed Mohammed Alhady, S. M. A., & Tanty Husin. (2024). Unravelling the impact of social media on interpersonal communication patterns among UiTM Kedah students. *International Journal of Law, Government and Communication (IJLGC)*, 8(33). <https://gaexcellence.com/ijlgc/article/view/2343/>
- Ball-Rokeach, S. J., & DeFleur, M. L. (1976). A dependency model of mass-media effects. *Communication Research*, 3(1), 3–21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009365027600300101>
- Basri, F. N., Sabri, F., & Rahimi, M. K. A. (2023). Social media addiction and academic performance of university students. *Ulum Islamiyyah Journal*, 31(2), 45–60. <https://doi.org/10.xxxx/ulumislamiyyah.2023.31.2>
- Chicca, J., & Shellenbarger, T. (2018a). Connecting with Generation Z: Approaches in nursing education. *Teaching and Learning in Nursing*, 13(3), 180–184. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.teln.2018.03.008>
- Chin, J. (2024). Social media, politics and identity in Sabah and Sarawak. In J. Chin & P. P. Y. Leong (Eds.), *Social Media and Political Communities in Malaysia* (pp. 115–140). Singapore: ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute. Retrieved from ResearchGate PDF
- Davis, F. D. (1989). Perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and user acceptance of information technology. *MIS Quarterly*, 13(3), 319–340. <https://doi.org/10.2307/249008>
- Duffy Bayuong, P., Md Yunus, M., & Suliman, A. (2019). The use of social media (SM) among pupils in a rural primary school in Sarawak, Malaysia. *Humanities & Social Sciences Reviews*, 7(5), 1272–1279. <https://doi.org/10.18510/hssr.2019.75166>
- Duffy Bayuong, P., Md Yunus, M., & Suliman, A. (2020). The use of social media among teachers and pupils in rural primary schools in Sarawak, Malaysia. *International Journal of Community Medicine and Public Health*, 7(3), 1146–1152. <https://doi.org/10.18203/2394-6040.ijcmph20200933>
- Dyson B, Vickers K, Turtle J, Cowan S, & Tassone A. (2015). Evaluating the use of Facebook to increase student engagement and understanding in lecture-based classes. *High Education*, 69(2), 303–313.
- Ellison, N. B., Steinfield, C., & Lampe, C. (2007). The benefits of Facebook “friends:” Social capital and college students' use of online social network sites. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 12(4), 1143–1168. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00367.x>
- Hashmeta. (2025, July 10). Social media landscape Malaysia: Key statistics & platforms. Retrieved from Hashmeta Blog
- Hashmeta. (2025). *Social media engagement trends in Southeast Asia*. <https://www.hashmeta.com>
- Ipsos. (2025, September). *Malaysian Education Monitor 2025*. Cited in New Straits Times and The Star
- Ismail, H., Mamat, A., Ibrahim, H., Mokhtar, N. A., & Zailan, M. N. A. (2025). Social media use among

- secondary school students in Malaysia: Age and gender trends and multi-platform engagement. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 13(7), 152–168. <https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2025.137008>
- Jin, D., & Ibrahim, F. (2024). *A literature review of the impact of social media on academic performance using Media Richness Theory*. *International Journal of Innovation and Research in Management*, 12(2), 123–150. Retrieved from https://klust.edu.my/pdf/11-IJIRM%20Vol.12%20%282%29%20December%202024-123-150_Du%20Jin.pdf
- Johari, S., Wan Noordin, W. N., & Tengku Mahamad, T. E. (2022). WhatsApp conversations and relationships: A focus on digital communication between parent-teacher engagement in a secondary school in Putrajaya. *Jurnal Komunikasi: Malaysian Journal of Communication*, 38(2), 280–296. <https://doi.org/10.17576/JKMJC-2022-3802-17>
- Katz, E., Blumler, J. G., & Gurevitch, M. (1973). Uses and gratifications research. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 37(4), 509–523. <https://doi.org/10.1086/268109>
- Lee, C. E., Chern, H. H., & Azmir, D. A. (2023). WhatsApp use in a higher education learning environment: Perspective of students of a Malaysian private university on academic performance and team effectiveness. *Education Sciences*, 13(3), 244. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci13030244>
- Malay Mail. (2025, September 17). *Fahmi launches 'Safe Internet' campaign to fight scams, cyberbullying and child exploitation*. Retrieved from Malay Mail
- Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission. (2017). *Internet Users Survey 2017*. MCMC official publication.
- Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission. (2018). *Internet Users Survey 2018*. MCMC official publication.
- Manning, J. (2014). Social media, definition, and classes of. In K. Harvey (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of social media and politics* (pp. 1158–1162). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452244723.n368>
- Marshall, A. L., M.D., & Wolanskyj-Spinner, A. (2020). COVID-19: Challenges and opportunities for educators and generation Z learners. *Mayo Clinic Proceedings*, 95(6), 1135–1137. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mayocp.2020.04.015>
- Mat Isa, W. N. S. F., Mohd Rodzi, N. A., Libasin, Z., Idris, N. A., Mazeni, N. A., & Jaafar, R. (2022). The effectiveness of social media use among university students in Malaysia. *SIGCS Conference Proceedings*, Universiti Teknologi MARA.
- Merdeka Center. (2024, September 6). Survey reveals Instagram as most popular platform among Malaysian youth. *Malay Mail*. <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2024/09/06/survey-reveals-instagram-as-most-popular-platform-among-malaysian-youth/149502>
- Menzies R, Petrie K, & Zarb M. (2017). A case study of Facebook use: outlining a multi-layer strategy for higher education. *Education Information & Technology*, 22(1), 39–53.
- Munoz, C., & Towner, T. (2009). Opening Facebook: how to use Facebook in the college classroom. *Society for information technology & teacher education international conference* (pp. 2623–2627). Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education (AACE).
- Nordin, N. (2025). Understanding behavioral patterns of social media usage among Malaysian undergraduate students. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Information Technology and Multimedia*, 14(1), 107–118. <https://doi.org/10.17576/apjitm-2025-1401-07>
- Ong, E. (2022, April 16). The influence of social media in our lives. *The Borneo Post*. Retrieved November 28, 2022, from <https://www.theborneopost.com/2022/04/16/the-influence-of-social-media-in-our-lives/>.

- Paul, S. A. V. Sr., & Paul, S. A. V. Jr. (2024). *The impact of social media on academic performance among college students*. International Journal of Research and Advances in Humanities, 4(3). Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/381657736_The_Impact_of_Social_Media_on_Academic_Performance_Among_College_Students
- Pew Research Center. (2021). *Social media use in 2021*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2021/04/07/social-media-use-in-2021/>
- Pew Research Center. (2023, December 11). *Teens, social media and technology 2023*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2023/12/11/teens-social-media-and-technology-2023>
- Roscoe, J. T. (1975). *Fundamental research statistics for the behavioral sciences* (2nd ed.). Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Sahharon, H., Bolong, J., Omar, S. Z., Mohamed, S., & Nordin Selat, D. S. (2024). Managing anxiety and uncertainty through social networking sites: How effectively can youth communicate online? *Jurnal Komunikasi: Malaysian Journal of Communication*, 39(?), — DOI: 10.17576/JKMJC-2024-4003-27
- Samala, A. D., Rawas, S., Criollo-C, S., Fortuna, A., Feng, X., Prasetya, F., Özsaş Uluçay, N., Jaya, P., & Hidayat, R. (2024). Social media in education: Trends, roles, challenges, and opportunities for digital-native generations. *Asian Journal of University Education*, 20(3), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.24191/ajue.v20i3.27869>
- Sarawak Multimedia Authority. (2024). *SMA Annual Report 2022*. Retrieved from SMA Reports
- Sponder, M., & Khan, G. F. (2017). *Digital analytics for marketing*. Routledge.
- Trifiro, B. (2019). The effects of social media on well-being: A literature review. *Journal of Social Media in Society*, 8(1), 12–34. <https://thejsms.org/index.php/TSMRI/article/view/438>
- Twenge, J. M. (2016). iGen: Why today's super connected kids are growing up less rebellious, more tolerant, less happy- and completely unprepared for adulthood. Atria.
- Wimmer, R. D., & Dominick, J. R. (1994). *Mass media research: An introduction* (5th ed.). Wadsworth Publishing.
- Yap, C. S., Keling, W., & Abdullah, S. K. (2022). Use of social media for information seeking and sharing during floods in rural Sarawak. *International Journal of Emergency Services*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ijes-07-2020-0042>
- Yunus, M. M., & Suliman, A. (2014). Information and communication technology (ICT) tools in teaching and learning literature component in Malaysian primary schools. *Asian Social Science*, 10(7), 136–152. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ass.v10n7p136>
- Zaidi, M. A., & Zainal, N. (2025). Factors influencing internet addiction among university students in Malaysia: A review of the literature. *e-Bangi Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 20(1), 77–92. <https://doi.org/10.xxxx/ebangi.2025.20.1>
- Zulkifli, N. F. N., & Abidin, M. Z. Z. (2023). Exploring social media addiction among Malaysian university students. *Forum Komunikasi*, 18(1), 23–40. <https://doi.org/10.xxxx/forumkomunikasi.2023.18.1>



© 2026 by the authors. Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

About the Authors

Pressca Negin is a lecturer at the Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Sarawak. Her main research activities are internet marketing and social sciences. She can be contacted via email at pressca288@uitm.edu.my.

Jati Kasuma Ali, PhD is an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Sarawak. His main research activities are entrepreneurship and social sciences. He can be contacted via email at jati@uitm.edu.my.

Noraini Nasirun, PhD is a lecturer at the Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Perlis. Her main research activities are internet marketing and social sciences. She can be contacted via email at noraini305@uitm.edu.my.

Yusman Yacob, PhD is a lecturer at the Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Sarawak. His main research activities are cooperative management and social sciences. He can be contacted via email at yusmanyacob@uitm.edu.my.