

## Social media and education: A sociological study of perceptions, use and impact among youth in Aizawl

R Laldampuii \*

*Department of Sociology, Government Aizawl College, Aizawl, Mizoram, India.*

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### Abstract

This study explores the intersection of social media and education among youth in Aizawl, Mizoram, offering a sociological perspective on its usage, perceptions, and impacts. With platforms such as WhatsApp, YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram increasingly integrated into academic routines, the research investigates how these tools are reshaping educational engagement and information exchange. Based on quantitative data collected through structured surveys of individuals aged 18 to 30 from diverse academic and professional backgrounds, the study highlights both the benefits and challenges of digital engagement in learning environments.

Theoretical grounding is provided by Technological Determinism and the Social Construction of Technology (SCOT), enabling a balanced analysis of how technology shapes, and is shaped by, social context. Findings indicate that social media enhances accessibility to knowledge, fosters collaborative learning, and supports real-time academic communication. However, drawbacks such as distraction, procrastination, addiction, misinformation, and concerns about data privacy were also reported.

This research underscores the dual nature of social media's educational role simultaneously enabling and impeding academic development. The study recommends targeted digital literacy initiatives, institutional policies, and teacher preparedness to optimize its educational potential. It contributes to broader discussions on digital education in India, emphasizing the importance of context-specific sociological inquiry

**Keywords:** Social media; Education; Youth; Sociology; Aizawl; Digital learning; Student perception; Technology in education

### 1. Introduction

The rapid integration of digital technologies into everyday life has profoundly transformed educational systems worldwide. In particular; the emergence of social media platforms has redefined how knowledge is produced; shared; and consumed; catalysing significant shifts in pedagogical practices and learner engagement. In the context of the Global South; and specifically in semi-peripheral regions like Northeast India; these transformations are embedded within complex socio-cultural and infrastructural matrices that merit critical scholarly inquiry (Selwyn; 2022; Dutta; 2020).

Social media platforms initially conceptualized for informal networking and recreational engagement have evolved into hybrid digital spaces that serve multifaceted roles in communication; knowledge dissemination; and collaborative learning. Research indicates that platforms such as WhatsApp; Facebook; and YouTube are increasingly integrated into formal and informal educational settings; functioning as both repositories of information and interactive pedagogical tools (Greenhow & Lewin; 2016; Kumar; 2021). However; the adoption of these technologies in educational contexts is not without contradiction. On one hand; they offer unprecedented opportunities for personalized learning and global

\* Corresponding author: R.Laldampuii

connectivity; on the other hand; they introduce challenges related to digital distractions; information overload; and inequalities in access (Carr; 2011; Boyd; 2014).

The present study seeks to unpack the dualistic nature of social media in education; focusing on youth in Aizawl a rapidly urbanizing city in Mizoram. Despite infrastructural constraints and cultural specificity; the youth in this region are increasingly immersed in digital ecosystems. This phenomenon raises pressing questions about how global technologies are appropriated; negotiated; and recontextualized within local educational practices (Castells; 2010; Appadurai; 1996).

The rationale for this study lies in the limited availability of region-specific data on the educational use of social media in Northeast India. While national surveys and metropolitan-centric studies dominate the discourse; there exists a critical gap in understanding how marginalized or less represented communities engage with digital technologies for academic purposes.

### **1.1. This study aims to bridge that gap by asking the following research questions**

- How do youth in Aizawl utilize social media for educational purposes?
- What are the perceived benefits and disadvantages of using social media in educational contexts?
- How do socio-cultural factors mediate the use of social media in learning processes?

Framing the inquiry within the theoretical paradigms of Technological Determinism and the Social Construction of Technology (SCOT); the study interrogates the tension between structural affordances of digital media and the agency of users in co-constructing educational practices. The objective is not merely to document usage patterns; but to critically engage with the sociological implications of these practices within a culturally unique and digitally emergent setting.

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## **2. Literature Review**

The educational utility of social media has become a focal point of interdisciplinary scholarly inquiry; particularly as digital platforms increasingly permeate learning environments. While proponents celebrate the democratizing potential of these technologies; critics warn of their unintended consequences. This section synthesizes key debates in the literature; identifies gaps in the existing knowledge base; and contextualizes the significance of the current study within broader academic discourse.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0; allowing the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (p. 61). From this standpoint; social media platforms are seen not merely as communication tools but as participatory environments that enable collaborative learning; peer interaction; and multimodal content creation. Boyd and Ellison (2007) further argue that social networking sites; such as Facebook; provide spaces for academic collaboration and community-building; fostering both cognitive engagement and socio-emotional development.

Numerous studies underscore the educational affordances of social media in enhancing learner autonomy; promoting student engagement; and enabling access to global knowledge networks (Greenhow & Robelia; 2009; Junco; 2012). Platforms like YouTube and Instagram are increasingly used for educational tutorials; peer reviews; and blended learning approaches; reflecting a paradigm shift from teacher-centric to learner-centric education models (Manca & Ranieri; 2016). In particular; WhatsApp has emerged as a tool for real-time academic support; enabling students to communicate with peers and instructors beyond the confines of formal classroom settings (Bouhnik & Deshen; 2014).

However; this optimistic narrative is counterbalanced by a growing body of critical scholarship. Carr (2010) posits that digital media contribute to "cognitive fragmentation;" whereby users experience diminished attention spans; shallow information processing; and reduced intellectual depth. Similarly; Selwyn (2012) cautions that social media may reproduce and amplify existing social inequalities; particularly in contexts where digital literacy and access are unevenly distributed. These critiques suggest that the integration of social media into education is not inherently emancipatory but is contingent upon broader socio-economic and institutional conditions.

In the Indian context; the literature reflects a dual narrative. On one hand; studies such as Kumar (2021) and Sharma (2022) acknowledge that digital technologies have expanded educational access; especially during the COVID-19 pandemic when online platforms became essential for continuity in learning. On the other hand; they highlight concerns

around digital addiction; cyberbullying; and unequal access to devices and stable internet factors that disproportionately affect students from marginalized communities.

Notably; there is a significant lacuna in region-specific empirical research on this topic; especially concerning Northeast India. This region; characterized by linguistic diversity; infrastructural challenges; and socio-political marginality; remains underrepresented in national educational and technological discourses (Dutta; 2020). Studies that do exist often treat the region as a monolith; overlooking intra-regional variations in technology use; pedagogical culture; and social media appropriation.

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### 3. Theoretical Framework

To examine the multifaceted role of social media in educational contexts; this study adopts a dual-theoretical framework rooted in Technological Determinism and the Social Construction of Technology (SCOT). These paradigms; though seemingly antithetical; offer a dialectical lens through which the interplay between digital technologies and sociocultural processes can be meaningfully analyzed.

#### 3.1. Technological Determinism

Technological Determinism is a theoretical perspective that asserts technology as the principal agent of social transformation. Originating from the works of Thorstein Veblen and further developed by scholars such as Marshall McLuhan and Jacques Ellul; the theory posits that technological innovations unfold autonomously and exert a unilateral influence on human behaviour; institutional configurations; and cultural practices (Chandler; 2000). From this standpoint; technologies are seen not merely as tools but as independent forces with the capacity to restructure societal norms and values.

In the context of education; Technological Determinism suggests that the advent of social media platforms has irrevocably altered pedagogical paradigms. It implies a shift from traditional hierarchical models of knowledge transmission to more decentralized; interactive; and user-driven modalities. This perspective aligns with the observable transition in learning environments where students increasingly rely on YouTube tutorials; WhatsApp study groups; and Instagram infographics for academic purposes. According to McLuhan (1964); “the medium is the message;” emphasizing that the form of media itself; rather than the content it carries; shapes the ways individuals think; learn; and relate to one another.

While useful in highlighting the macro-level impact of digital innovation; Technological Determinism is often critiqued for its reductionism and lack of attention to the social contexts in which technologies are embedded (Williams & Edge; 1996). It assumes a one-directional causality where technology acts upon society; thereby neglecting the complex; reciprocal interactions between users and tools.

#### 3.2. Social Construction of Technology (SCOT)

To counterbalance the deterministic overtones of the former theory; this study integrates the SCOT framework developed by Bijker; Hughes; and Pinch (1987). SCOT posits that technologies are not inherently imbued with meaning or purpose; rather; their significance is contingent upon the interpretive flexibility of different social groups. Technologies are thus “socially constructed” through user interactions; institutional negotiations; and cultural discourses.

From a SCOT perspective; the use of social media in education is not predetermined by the platforms themselves but is shaped by how students; teachers; and educational institutions interpret and repurpose these tools. This framework allows for a more nuanced understanding of how the same technology (e.g.; Facebook) may serve disparate functions across different educational settings; ranging from collaborative learning spaces to sources of distraction.

Moreover; SCOT underscores the importance of “relevant social groups” in the stabilization and legitimization of technology. In this case; educational stakeholders—students; educators; administrators—actively construct the meaning and utility of social media through situated practices. This approach challenges the notion of technological neutrality and opens up possibilities for agency; resistance; and innovation within digital learning ecosystems.

#### 3.3. Integrative Perspective

Together; Technological Determinism and SCOT offer a complementary framework that captures the ambivalent nature of social media in education. While Technological Determinism helps explain broad structural shifts engendered by

digital tools; SCOT illuminates the micro-level processes through which these tools are contested; adapted; or resisted in everyday life. Employing both perspectives enables a more holistic analysis of how social media is not only transforming education but is also being transformed by it in contextually specific ways.

In doing so; this framework facilitates a critical interrogation of the educational potentials and perils of social media in Mizoram a region where global technologies interface with local cultural; infrastructural; and pedagogical realities.

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## 4. Methodology

This research adopts a quantitative research design framed within the principles of empirical sociological inquiry. The choice of methodology is predicated on the need to statistically capture the scope; pattern; and perceived impact of social media use among youth in a specific socio-cultural setting. Grounded in the epistemological stance that objective measurements can inform broader theoretical interpretations; this section elaborates on the study's sampling strategy; data collection tools; analytical techniques; ethical safeguards; and inherent limitations.

### 4.1. Research Design

A cross-sectional survey design was employed to assess the educational role of social media among youth in Aizawl. This approach allows for the analysis of data collected at a single point in time; facilitating the identification of correlations between variables such as age; frequency of social media use; and educational outcomes. Although cross-sectional studies cannot establish causality; they offer valuable snapshots of emerging social phenomena; particularly in rapidly digitizing regions such as Northeast India.

### 4.2. Sampling and Setting

The study was conducted in Aizawl characterized by socio-economic diversity; educational expansion; and increasing digital penetration. The sampling method used was purposive sampling; appropriate for exploratory research in specific socio-geographic locales. A total of 100 participants aged between 18 and 30 years were selected. This cohort comprised college students and early-career professionals; reflecting the demographic most active on social media and likely to integrate it into educational routines.

While non-probability sampling limits the generalizability of findings; the purposive selection enhances contextual depth and aligns with the SCOT framework; which emphasizes local interpretations of technological use. The demographic mix was intentionally curated to ensure gender representation; educational background variation; and socio-economic diversity within the youth population of Aizawl.

### 4.3. Instrumentation

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed following a pilot test with 15 respondents to ensure clarity and relevance. The questionnaire consisted of three sections:

- **Demographic Information** (e.g.; age; education level; occupation)
- **Quantitative Items:** Close-ended questions using Likert scales and multiple-choice formats to capture the frequency; nature; and context of social media use.
- **Qualitative Items:** Open-ended prompts to elicit participant reflections on perceived benefits; challenges; and the broader impact of social media on their academic pursuits.

This mixed-question format allowed for both statistical measurement and thematic exploration; enhancing the robustness of data.

### 4.4. Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (percentages; mean scores; and frequency distributions) via Microsoft Excel and SPSS software. This enabled a clear representation of usage trends and perceptions. The qualitative responses were coded thematically using manual inductive coding; following Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to thematic analysis. These insights were used to contextualize and triangulate statistical findings; in keeping with the sociological emphasis on meaning-making in empirical data.

#### 4.5. Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical standards in social research. Informed consent was obtained from all participants after explaining the study's purpose; their rights; and data usage. Participation was entirely voluntary; and respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. No personally identifiable information was collected; and all data were stored securely. Given the relatively young demographic and the sensitive issue of digital surveillance and academic pressure; particular care was taken to ensure that no question was coercive; intrusive; or emotionally distressing.

#### *Limitations*

Despite its empirical contributions; the study is constrained by several methodological limitations:

- **Localised Sample:** The findings are specific to Aizawl and cannot be extrapolated to the entire Mizo youth population or other regions of India.
- **Self-reported Data:** The reliance on self-reporting introduces potential response bias; particularly in items related to distraction or misuse of social media.
- **Cross-sectional Nature:** Temporal dynamics of social media usage (e.g.; long-term academic impacts) cannot be captured by a single time-point design.

### 5. Findings

#### 5.1. Demographics of Respondents

The survey sample predominantly consisted of students; representing 60% of the total respondents; while young professionals accounted for the remaining 40%. The age range of participants was between 18 and 35 years; with a gender distribution that was relatively balanced. This demographic profile is reflective of the growing trend of social media use among younger; academically engaged individuals. The participants were primarily from diverse academic disciplines; which allowed for a broad exploration of social media's impact across different fields of study. Gender-wise; the distribution was almost equal; with slight variations between male and female participation; ensuring that the findings were representative of both genders.

#### 5.2. Platform Usage for Academic Purposes

In terms of social media usage; all respondents reported engaging with at least one platform; underscoring the ubiquity of social media in the daily lives of students and young professionals. Among the platforms; WhatsApp emerged as the most frequently used; with 90% of respondents indicating that they utilized it for academic communication. WhatsApp's popularity can be attributed to its ability to facilitate real-time; instant communication; both in group settings and one-on-one exchanges with educators and peers. This finding is consistent with previous research suggesting that messaging platforms are becoming vital tools for informal academic collaboration.

YouTube (80%) and Facebook (75%) were the next most widely used platforms; primarily for accessing educational content; such as tutorials; lectures; and peer-shared academic resources. YouTube's role in disseminating educational videos and facilitating visual learning was highlighted by several participants; particularly in fields that require visual aids; such as the arts and sciences. Facebook; despite its age as a platform; was still favored for group discussions; academic events; and networking among professional communities.

These findings reflect the dynamic nature of social media usage; where students and professionals are leveraging platforms in diverse ways to complement formal educational structures.

#### 5.3. Educational Utility of Social Media

A significant 85% of respondents reported that social media had positively influenced their learning processes. The advantages identified were consistent with global trends in digital education. Key benefits included:

#### 5.4. Real-Time access to Educational Content:

Social media platforms enable immediate access to a vast array of learning materials; including academic articles; video tutorials; lectures; and interactive content. This immediacy has been particularly beneficial in keeping up with fast-paced academic environments; where timely information can enhance students' understanding of subject matter.

### **5.5. Increased Communication with Educators and Peers**

Social media platforms; especially WhatsApp and Facebook; were cited as tools that fostered increased interaction with both educators and fellow students. This facilitated peer-to-peer learning; collaborative discussions; and mentorship opportunities outside the traditional classroom setting. These enhanced communication channels helped bridge the gap between formal instruction and informal learning environments.

### **5.6. Exposure to Global Academic Discourse**

Social media provides a platform for students to engage with academic content and perspectives from around the world. The ability to follow international academic institutions; thought leaders; and global conferences has broadened students' exposure to a variety of viewpoints; theories; and research methodologies. This global access has contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of academic topics; particularly in fields like the humanities and social sciences.

These findings underline the growing role of social media as an educational tool; promoting both access to resources and global engagement; which are key drivers of academic success in the 21st century.

### **5.7. Challenges and Risks Identified by Respondents**

Despite the positive aspects; a number of challenges associated with social media use were identified by the respondents. Approximately 70% of participants acknowledged spending excessive time on social media; which often came at the cost of focused academic work. This addiction-like behaviour has been a significant concern; as prolonged use of social media can result in distraction; procrastination; and reduced academic performance. Previous studies have pointed to similar trends; where the overuse of social media interferes with cognitive focus and academic achievement.

In addition to time management issues; respondents raised several concerns:

#### **5.7.1. Misinformation**

Many participants expressed concerns about the prevalence of misinformation on social media; especially in the form of unverified academic content; false claims; and misleading information. The inability to easily distinguish credible sources from unreliable ones has contributed to doubts about the overall reliability of social media as a source of academic information.

#### **5.7.2. Privacy Risks**

Participants also highlighted significant privacy risks associated with using social media for educational purposes. Sharing personal information and academic work on public platforms raised concerns about data security; particularly when it came to educational content that could be misused or exploited.

#### **5.7.3. Online Harassment**

Another critical issue was the occurrence of online harassment; particularly within academic-related group discussions and forums. Participants reported instances of cyberbullying; harassment; and negative online interactions; which created an environment of discomfort and disengagement for some students.

### **5.8. Institutional Regulation and Digital Literacy Training**

In light of the challenges identified; many respondents called for institutional intervention in the form of regulations and digital literacy programs. Specifically; 65% of participants advocated for the integration of digital literacy into academic curricula. They argued that students and educators alike need to be equipped with the skills to navigate social media safely and effectively; particularly when it comes to evaluating the credibility of information and understanding the ethical implications of online interactions. Moreover; a significant portion of participants expressed a desire for educational institutions to establish guidelines on the responsible use of social media in academic contexts.

### **5.9. Qualitative Insights: Integration of Social Media in Educational Settings**

In their open-ended responses; respondents indicated a strong demand for the structured integration of social media into the formal classroom environment. There was a general consensus that social media could serve as a supplementary tool for enhancing learning; but it needed to be integrated in a more organized and purpose-driven manner. Several respondents emphasized the importance of setting clear boundaries to prevent the potential addictive nature of social media from undermining academic efforts.

Participants also acknowledged the potential of social media to foster a sense of community and belonging; particularly for students in remote or isolated learning environments. This aspect of social media use was particularly noted in relation to online courses and hybrid learning models; where digital tools can bridge the physical distance between students and instructors.

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## 6. Discussion

The findings from this study offer a nuanced perspective on the relationship between youth and social media in educational settings. On one hand; platforms such as WhatsApp and YouTube are being harnessed effectively for academic collaboration and self-directed learning. These platforms provide students with unprecedented access to educational resources; enable peer-to-peer communication; and foster global academic exchanges. WhatsApp; for instance; facilitates immediate communication between students and teachers; while YouTube serves as a repository for educational videos and tutorials. These uses underscore the potential of social media as a valuable educational tool.

However; the findings also highlight significant risks associated with social media use; particularly in the educational context. While social media platforms offer benefits; they also present challenges related to distraction; time management; and data misuse. The tendency for students to spend excessive time on social media at the expense of focused academic work was a common theme in the study; reinforcing concerns about the addictive potential of these platforms. Moreover; the risks related to misinformation; privacy violations; and online harassment underscore the ethical challenges of integrating social media into education. The study found that students are aware of these issues; and many expressed the need for institutional regulation and enhanced digital literacy.

The findings validate the theoretical perspectives of Technological Determinism and Social Construction of Technology (SCOT). According to Technological Determinism; technology drives societal change; and in this case; social media has undeniably altered how students engage with education. However; the effects of social media are not uniform; they are deeply influenced by the socio-cultural context in which they are embedded. In Aizawl; the local cultural values surrounding community learning and peer collaboration appear to shape the way social media is utilized. For instance; WhatsApp is not just a platform for academic communication but also for maintaining local social bonds and reinforcing traditional forms of collaborative learning. This cultural influence highlights the importance of considering regional contexts when evaluating the impact of digital tools in education.

In light of these insights; this study underscores the importance of regional studies that resist the temptation to generalize the digital education experience. The effects of social media in educational settings are not one-size-fits-all; and cultural; socio-economic; and infrastructural factors all play significant roles in determining the outcomes of digital education initiatives.

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## 7. Conclusion

This study contributes to the growing body of digital sociology by critically assessing the role of social media in education; specifically in the context of Aizawl. It illustrates that while social media offers significant potential for innovation in education; it also presents new pedagogical and ethical challenges that must be addressed. These challenges include the potential for distraction; the spread of misinformation; privacy concerns; and the negative impacts on students' mental health.

### *Recommendations*

To fully harness the benefits of social media while minimizing its drawbacks; the following recommendations are proposed:

#### 7.1. Institutional Digital Literacy Programs

Educational institutions must integrate digital literacy into the curriculum. This includes training students to critically engage with digital content; evaluate the credibility of sources; and manage their digital presence responsibly. Digital literacy programs should not only focus on the technical aspects of using social media but also address the ethical implications of digital engagement; including issues of privacy; security; and the risks of misinformation.

#### 7.2. Educator Training

Teachers must be trained in both the technical use of digital tools and in the pedagogical skills required to teach effectively in digital environments. This includes fostering critical thinking skills; promoting digital citizenship; and

using social media platforms in ways that support active learning and collaboration. Training in critical pedagogy for digital contexts is essential to ensure that educators can guide students in using social media for educational purposes in a responsible and balanced way.

### 7.3. Policy Frameworks

Educational institutions should develop comprehensive guidelines on the appropriate use of social media for academic purposes. These guidelines should address issues such as screen time management; acceptable online behaviour and the ethical use of social media for academic collaboration. Clear institutional policies can help mitigate the risks of misuse and ensure that social media serves as a productive educational tool rather than a source of distraction or harm.

### 7.4. Student Counselling

Given the potential negative impacts of social media on students' mental health; it is important that educational institutions integrate mental health support and screen-time management into student services. Counselling programs should include resources for students to manage the emotional and psychological challenges associated with social media use; such as feelings of isolation; anxiety; or low self-esteem stemming from online interactions. Providing students with strategies for healthy social media engagement is crucial for maintaining their well-being.

### 7.5. Future Research Directions

Future research should adopt longitudinal and comparative methodologies to assess the evolving impact of social media on academic performance and well-being. Longitudinal studies can provide insights into how students' social media habits change over time and their long-term effects on learning outcomes. Comparative studies across different cultural; regional; and socio-economic contexts can further illuminate how various factors shape the use and impact of social media in education. In particular; it is important to examine the intersection of social media with non-traditional and remote learning environments; which have become increasingly prevalent. Research in this area could lead to more nuanced recommendations for integrating social media in diverse educational contexts.

### 7.6. Final Thoughts

The rapid evolution of social media presents both opportunities and challenges for education. As this study demonstrates; social media has the potential to enhance learning and foster communication; but it also introduces new risks that need to be addressed. By adopting a holistic approach that includes digital literacy; educator training; clear policies; and mental health support; educational institutions can better navigate the complexities of social media use. Ultimately; the goal should be to create a balanced environment where social media can be a tool for academic success rather than a source of distraction or harm

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## Compliance with ethical standards

### *Statement of informed consent*

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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