

The Relationship Between Social Media Fatigue and Academic Burnout Among Generation Z Students in Dai Nam University

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ABSTRACT: The rapid expansion of social media has significantly transformed the daily lives of university students, particularly those belonging to Generation Z, who have grown up in digitally connected environments. While social media platforms provide opportunities for communication, information sharing, and academic support, excessive engagement may also contribute to psychological challenges such as social media fatigue. At the same time, academic burnout has become an increasingly prevalent concern in higher education, affecting students' motivation, well-being, and academic performance. Although previous studies have examined social media fatigue and academic burnout separately, limited research has explored how university students perceive the relationship between these two phenomena, particularly within the Vietnamese higher education context.

This study aims to explore the relationship between social media fatigue and academic burnout among Generation Z students at Dai Nam University. The study adopts a qualitative cross-sectional research design. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with approximately 20 undergraduate students who regularly use social media. Data will be analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes related to students' experiences of digital fatigue, academic stress, and emotional exhaustion.

The study is expected to contribute to the growing body of literature on digital well-being and higher education by providing contextualized insights into how students experience and interpret the relationship between social media fatigue and academic burnout. The findings may also offer practical implications for universities seeking to support student well-being in increasingly digital learning environments.

KEYWORDS: Social media fatigue, academic burnout, Generation Z, higher education, digital well-being, university students, Vietnam

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, social media has become an indispensable part of everyday life, particularly among Generation Z individuals who have grown up with digital technologies. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Messenger are now deeply embedded in students' social, academic, and professional activities. While these platforms provide opportunities for communication and learning, increasing concerns have emerged regarding their psychological consequences. Studies have shown that excessive social media use may contribute to social media fatigue, characterized by emotional exhaustion, information overload, and reduced engagement with online platforms (Malik et al., 2020).

At the same time, academic burnout has become an increasingly important issue among university students. Academic burnout is associated with emotional exhaustion, decreased academic motivation, and reduced academic effectiveness. Recent systematic reviews suggest that contemporary social and cultural pressures experienced by Generation Z students may contribute to burnout and psychological strain (Ali et al., 2025).

Existing studies have extensively investigated social media fatigue, digital stress, information overload, and academic burnout as separate research areas. However, relatively limited attention has been paid to understanding how university students themselves perceive the relationship between social media fatigue and academic burnout. Furthermore, most existing studies have relied on quantitative approaches and have been conducted in Western or technologically advanced contexts.

Within Vietnam, research on digital well-being among university students remains relatively limited. Given the rapid growth of social media usage among Vietnamese youth, there is a need for context-specific research that explores students' lived experiences and perceptions regarding digital fatigue and academic well-being.

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The present study aims to explore the relationship between social media fatigue and academic burnout among Generation Z students at Dai Nam University. The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How do Generation Z students at Dai Nam University experience social media fatigue?

RQ2: How do Generation Z students at Dai Nam University describe their experiences of academic burnout?

RQ3: How do students perceive the relationship between social media fatigue and academic burnout?

This study contributes to both theory and practice. Theoretically, it bridges two relatively separate areas of research: social media fatigue and academic burnout. It also extends existing knowledge regarding the psychological impacts of digital technologies in higher education contexts. Practically, the findings may assist universities in developing interventions, counseling services, and digital well-being programs aimed at reducing burnout and promoting healthier technology use among students.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media Fatigue

Social media fatigue has emerged as a growing area of interest within communication, psychology, and information systems research. Although definitions vary across studies, social media fatigue generally refers to a state of mental, emotional, or cognitive exhaustion resulting from prolonged engagement with social networking platforms.

Social media fatigue refers to a state of psychological exhaustion resulting from prolonged social media engagement. Previous research has found that social comparison, self-disclosure, fear of missing out (FoMO), and intensive social media use are significant predictors of social media fatigue (Malik et al., 2020).

Furthermore, social media fatigue has been linked to decreased academic performance among young adults. For Generation Z students, social media fatigue may be particularly relevant because social networking platforms play a central role in both their personal and academic lives. However, the relationship between academic performance with social fatigue remains inconclusive (Dharmawan et al., 2024).

Academic Burnout

Academic burnout is commonly conceptualized as a multidimensional construct involving emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced academic efficacy. A recent systematic review focusing on Generation Z university students found that social pressure, perfectionism, and hustle culture contribute to burnout, while self-compassion and social support may mitigate its effects (Safitri et al., 2025).

Academic burnout has been associated with numerous negative outcomes, including decreased academic engagement, lower academic achievement, reduced motivation, increased stress, and poorer psychological well-being. University students may experience burnout when they perceive academic demands as exceeding their available resources (time, energy, etc.).

The increasing complexity of modern university life, combined with technological demands and social expectations, has intensified concerns regarding student burnout. Consequently, understanding factors that may contribute to academic burnout has become an important area of educational research (Safitri et al., 2025).

Generation Z Students and Digital Well-Being

Generation Z is commonly described as the first generation of true digital natives. Individuals belonging to this generation have grown up with widespread access to smartphones, social media platforms, and internet-based technologies (Pang et al., 2025). As a result, digital engagement forms a central component of their educational and social experiences.

While digital technologies offer numerous benefits, scholars have increasingly raised concerns regarding their potential impact on mental health and well-being. Concepts such as technostress, digital fatigue, online dependency, and information overload have emerged as important topics within contemporary educational research (Pang et al., 2025).

Given their extensive use of social media, Generation Z students may be particularly vulnerable to experiences of social media fatigue and its potential consequences for academic well-being.

Previous Research and Research Gap

Previous studies have demonstrated that excessive social media use may contribute to stress, emotional exhaustion, and reduced well-being. Similarly, research on academic burnout has identified psychological stressors, workload pressures, and emotional exhaustion as important cause of burnout (Islam et al., 2021).

Despite these advances, several limitations remain evident. First, many studies have examined social media fatigue and academic burnout separately rather than exploring their potential relationship. Second, existing research has largely relied on quantitative methodologies, providing limited insight into students' subjective experiences. Third, relatively little evidence exists within Vietnamese higher education contexts.

The present study addresses these limitations by adopting a qualitative approach to explore how Generation Z students perceive and experience the relationship between social media fatigue and academic burnout.

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III. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative exploratory research design using a cross-sectional approach. A qualitative methodology was selected because the study seeks to understand students' lived experiences and perceptions regarding social media fatigue and academic burnout.

Research Context

The study is conducted at Dai Nam University, Vietnam. The university provides an appropriate setting due to its diverse student population and the widespread use of digital technologies among students.

Participants and Sampling

Purposive sampling will be employed to recruit participants who meet the following criteria:

- Belong to Generation Z.
- Are currently enrolled at Dai Nam University.
- Regularly use social media platforms.
- Are willing to participate voluntarily.

20 students from different academic years and faculties will be interviewed to ensure diversity of perspectives.

Data Collection

Data will be collected through semi-structured interviews. Each interview is expected to last between 30 and 45 minutes and will be conducted either face-to-face or online.

Interview questions will focus on:

- social media usage patterns;
- experiences of social media fatigue;
- experiences of academic burnout;
- perceived relationships between these phenomena;
- coping strategies.

Data Analysis

Interview recordings will be transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis. The analysis will involve familiarization with the data, initial coding, theme development, theme refinement, and interpretation.

IV. RESULT

Social fatigue

The findings indicated that 80% of the participants spent considerable amounts of time on social media, with a substantial proportion reporting usage exceeding three hours per day. Individuals classified as heavy users were more likely to engage in purposeless scrolling and experience frequent interruptions while performing other activities. Extensive nighttime social media use was associated with disrupted sleep patterns and heightened levels of fatigue. In addition, 66% of the participants who reported high levels of purposeless social media use experienced emotional exhaustion, while 56% of those who relied on social media for validation reported to have frequent mood fluctuations.

Academic burnout

Participants identified several factors that contributed to their experiences of academic burnout. The most frequently reported factor was academic pressure arising from assignments, examinations, and extracurricular activities, mentioned by 56% of participants. In addition, 48% reported experiencing pressure related to choosing the field of study as they did not feel interested in the fields they pursue. Time management difficulties also emerged as a significant challenge. Approximately 35% of participants indicated that balancing part-time employment with academic responsibilities increased their stress levels, while 30% reported that excessive smartphone use negatively affected their ability to manage time effectively. Furthermore, 42% of participants highlighted the excessive use of social media on their learning outcomes. They reported that frequent social media use contributed to distraction, reduced concentration, psychological strain, fatigue, anxiety, and stress, which in turn adversely affected their academic engagement and well-being.

Overall, the findings suggest that academic burnout among Generation Z students is shaped by a combination of academic demands, career-related concerns, time management challenges, and digital-related stressors, particularly those associated with social media use.

V. DISCUSSION

The present study sought to explore how Generation Z students at Dai Nam University experience social media fatigue and academic burnout, as well as how they perceive the relationship between these two phenomena. The findings suggest that academic burnout is influenced by multiple interconnected factors, including academic pressure, uncertainty regarding academic and career pathways, time management difficulties, and social media-related stressors.

The first discovery of the findings indicate that participants who frequently engaged in social comparison reported higher levels of psychological distress. Increased screen time was positively associated with feelings of restlessness, anxiety, and reduced concentration. Moreover, students with prolonged digital exposure demonstrated high levels of sleep disturbance. It is identified that screen time, sleep quality, restlessness, and reliance on social network contribute to social media fatigue. Similarly, Islam et al. (2021) suggested that behavioral patterns and emotional dependence on social media play a critical role in shaping digital well-being. Usage intensity and emotional reliance emerged as key causes of social media fatigue among Generation Z users.

Secondly, regarding the factors leading to academic burnout, the most frequently reported contributor to academic burnout was academic pressure arising from assignments, examinations, and extracurricular activities. More than three-quarters of participants identified these demands as a major source of stress. This finding is consistent with existing literature suggesting that excessive academic workload is a primary antecedent of burnout among university students (Ali et al., 2025). Students may experience burnout when academic demands exceed their available psychological, emotional, and cognitive resources. When students perceive that they are unable to effectively manage coursework, deadlines, and extracurricular commitments, emotional exhaustion and reduced academic motivation may emerge.

Another significant finding concerns the pressure associated with selecting a field of study and planning future academic or career pathways. More than half of participants reported experiencing stress related to educational and career decision-making. This result may reflect the unique challenges faced by Generation Z students, who often encounter increasing societal expectations regarding academic achievement and career success. Such pressures may contribute to uncertainty, self-doubt, and psychological strain, thereby increasing vulnerability to academic burnout (Mi et al., 2025).

Time management difficulties also emerged as an important factor. Participants reported that balancing academic responsibilities with part-time employment created additional stress and reduced their capacity to focus on academic tasks. Furthermore, smartphone use was identified as another source of time management challenges. These findings suggest that students face competing demands on their time and attention, which may increase cognitive overload and reduce opportunities for rest and recovery. Malik et al., (2021) provided an explanation for this phenomenon, as excessive demands on students' cognitive resources may impair concentration, learning efficiency, and academic performance.

Most notably, the findings highlight the role of social media as a contributing factor to academic burnout. Nearly half of the participants perceived social media as a source of distraction, psychological strain, fatigue, anxiety, and stress. Students reported that excessive engagement with social networking platforms often interfered with studying, reduced concentration, and increased feelings of emotional exhaustion. These findings support previous research indicating that prolonged social media use may contribute to digital fatigue and diminished psychological well-being (Malik et al., 2021). Academic burnout should not be viewed solely as a consequence of academic workload. Instead, the experiences of Generation Z students appear to be shaped by a broader digital ecosystem in which academic pressures interact with technology-related stressors (Khairati et al., 2025). The increasing integration of social media into students' daily lives means that digital experiences may have important consequences for academic well-being.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that universities should adopt a more holistic approach to student well-being. In addition to providing academic support, institutions may benefit from implementing digital well-being initiatives that help students develop healthier social media habits, improve time management skills, and strengthen coping strategies for managing stress. Workshops on digital literacy, mindfulness, self-regulation, and balanced technology use may help reduce the negative effects of social media fatigue and contribute to improved academic outcomes.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study explored the experiences of social media fatigue and academic burnout among Generation Z students at Dai Nam University and examined how students perceived the relationship between these two phenomena. Through qualitative interviews, the findings revealed that students experienced academic burnout as a result of multiple interacting factors, including academic workload, pressure related to educational and career decisions, time management difficulties, and digital-related stressors.

Academic pressure associated with assignments, examinations, and extracurricular activities emerged as the most prominent contributor to burnout. In addition, concerns regarding future academic and career pathways generated considerable psychological strain among participants. Time management challenges, particularly those related to balancing academic responsibilities, part-time employment, and technology use, further intensified students' experiences of stress and exhaustion.

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Importantly, the findings suggest that social media plays a significant role in shaping students' academic well-being. Participants reported that excessive social media use often contributed to distraction, reduced concentration, emotional exhaustion, anxiety, and stress. Many students perceived a connection between social media fatigue and academic burnout, describing how prolonged digital engagement depleted their cognitive and emotional resources and made it more difficult to cope with academic demands.

The study contributes to the literature by providing qualitative evidence from a Vietnamese higher education context, an area that remains underrepresented in existing research. It also extends current understanding of the relationship between digital well-being and academic well-being by highlighting how social media fatigue may interact with academic pressures in the lives of Generation Z students.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study was conducted at a single university, which may limit the transferability of the findings to other contexts. Second, the cross-sectional design captured participants' experiences at only one point in time. Third, the study relied on self-reported perceptions, which may be influenced by individual interpretation and recall bias.

Future research may adopt mixed-methods or longitudinal approaches to further investigate the relationship between social media fatigue and academic burnout. Comparative studies involving students from different universities, disciplines, or cultural contexts may also provide a broader understanding of these issues.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed for students, universities, educators, and future researchers.

Students should develop greater awareness of their social media habits and their potential effects on academic performance and psychological well-being. Establishing healthy boundaries for social media use, particularly during study periods and before bedtime, may help reduce digital fatigue and improve concentration. Students may also benefit from adopting effective time management strategies and engaging in activities that promote mental well-being, such as physical exercise, mindfulness practices, and regular rest periods (Kong et al., 2025).

Universities should recognize that student well-being is influenced not only by academic factors but also by digital-related experiences. Institutions may consider incorporating digital well-being education into student support programs and orientation activities. Workshops focusing on responsible social media use, stress management, time management, and self-regulation skills could help students better manage both academic and digital demands.

Universities should also strengthen counseling and psychological support services to assist students experiencing academic burnout or technology-related stress. Early intervention programs may help prevent more severe mental health challenges and improve students' overall academic experiences.

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future studies should examine the relationship between social media fatigue and academic burnout using larger and more diverse samples. Researchers may also investigate potential mediating or moderating factors, such as resilience, self-regulation, social support, academic motivation, and coping strategies. Longitudinal research designs would be particularly valuable for understanding how social media fatigue and academic burnout develop and interact over time.

In addition, future studies could explore whether different social media platforms generate distinct forms of fatigue and whether these experiences vary across academic disciplines, year levels, or cultural contexts.

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